

THE VOTER



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Membership: Wendy Wheeler

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Publicity: Marga Lincoln

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Voter Services: Becky Piske

The Voter Editor: Patti Borneman

Website: Patti Borneman

**League of Women Voters
of the Helena Area**

PO Box 6534

Helena, MT 59604

Message from the Co-Presidents

Dear LWVHA Members,

Since we last published the Voter, summer has pushed right through that snow white April, and frankly, it is a welcome change. Twas' a loooooong, cold 2023 Montana Legislative session. We have come out the other end smarter, a bit worn, and more determined to continue in our mission. Thanks to all who supported the LWV Montana throughout the legislative session.

In late April, we had our Helena LWV annual business meeting with 40+ members, live. Sharon Haugen was elected co-president to serve with Becky Piske for her second year. A special thank you to Sue Hoell for her co-president work and ongoing contributions to our organization. We accomplished a lot and have great things happening this coming year.

On May 6 and 7, we all got a shot of activism adrenaline at the Helena-sponsored Montana LWV State Convention. Attendees described feeling refreshed, energized, hopeful, ready. *See upcoming full report in the Montana LWV State Voter and a wonderful montage of photos on pages 6-7.*

And in the usual LWV fashion, Helena members continue the work tending to our gardens of democracy and helping them to flourish. This Summer 2023 Voter includes information about our summer activities:

- Registering voters all over the Helena Area and at special events, like Clancy Days on June 3. You, too, can be a part of these efforts.
- Our ongoing youth voter education History of Suffrage slide show.
- Our upcoming voter registration for the formerly incarcerated citizens.
- Our newly launched and well received online voter guide, VOTE411.org, is online to cover the upcoming City elections.
- Our brand new Local Government Study Committee will educate first our LWV members and then the citizens of Helena and Lewis and Clark County about our current form of government and about the local government review process that's coming up.

Please make note of the June, July, September, and October meeting dates, times, topics. We look forward to seeing you!

And feel free to drop us a line, give us a call or email. We are interested in your ideas, thoughts and always welcome volunteers to help with our many ongoing projects.

We are glad we have each other during these challenging political times. Thank you for defending democracy wherever and whenever you can. *Enjoy summer!*

Becky Piske and Sharon Haugen

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About The Voter and Other Communications

The Voter of the LWVHA is published quarterly, each season, and is emailed to all Helena Area members in June, September, December, and March. It includes a recap of accomplishments and upcoming meetings and events, and ways to become or stay involved.

The Montana LWV will publish its first State Voter newsletter in June, emailed to all Montana members. Remember, when you joined your local league, you also became a member of the State League and the national League of Women Voters.

Stay informed, stay in touch!

- Read the Monthly Email from our Co-Presidents
- Web: <http://my.lwv.org/montana>
- Visit our social media sites at Facebook and Instagram.
- Email: lwv.helena@gmail.com

CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

Upcoming Monthly Membership Meetings

Tuesday, June 20 - 4:30 to 5:30 pm

Lewis & Clark Library, Large Community Room

Panel and small group discussion on priorities of our members (as indicated on our member survey) that have been impacted by the Montana Legislative session. Among those priorities are health care for women and children, gender affirming care, and access to mental health care.

Monday, July 17 - 4:30 to 5:30 pm

Lewis & Clark Library, Large Community Room

Local Government panel and discussion about this study topic.

August Break: Our league usually takes off the month of August for member meetings, but stay tuned as civic issues may arise requiring attention.

Monday, September 18 - 4:30 to 6:00 pm

Lewis & Clark Library, Large Community Room, in-person

"Here we go, 2023 - 2024" with Montana LWV State President Nancy Leifer as she takes us through LWV 101, orienting to our organization, past and present in 50 minutes. Food and social networking.

Monday, October 16 - 4:30 to 5:30 pm

Lewis & Clark Library, Large Community Room, in-person

Local Government panel and discussion about this study topic.

LWVHA Book Group

The LWVHA Book Group will meet in person this summer and early Fall, every 4th Thursday evening at 6:00 pm. In May we had a good discussion with interesting background information provided by members on Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* at Norma Tirrell's home. We recommend this book as an enlightening read.

Please mark your calendars for:

Thursday, June 22, 6:00 pm: We'll meet in person for this one (location TBD). Members are asked to bring information on a book, podcast episode or documentary to present to the group. If we can present these in 2-5 minutes, we'll have plenty to discuss and contemplate as well as have some interesting material to review individually this summer.

Thursday, July 27, 6:00 pm: We'll discuss Timothy Egan's new book, *A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them* (2023).

Thursday, August 27, 6:00 pm: Book to be chosen.

To be put on the Book Group mailing list, send an email to Cherri Jones, Book Group Chair, to cherrijones@missouristate.edu.

Summary of Minutes from the Annual Membership Meeting

The Annual Membership meeting of the League of Women Voters of the Helena Area was held at Lewis & Clark Library on April 17, 2023. The following items were discussion and decisions made. *(To read the official minutes from the meeting, download from the Members-Only content page on the website. If you haven't registered for access, follow the info at right to request access to this member resource.)*

- Co-presidents Sue Hoell and Becky Piske welcomed members and highlighted the accomplishments of the league's committees.
- The minutes from the 2022 Annual Meeting were approved.
- A proposed budget of \$7,750 for the next fiscal year (beginning in April) was presented and approved.
- The bylaws were reviewed and suggested amendments were discussed and approved: 1) co-president job descriptions and succession and 2) allowing the League to meet virtually, in-person, or both.
- The positions of the LWVHA were reviewed and approved and will be reviewed again and revised in the coming year, if necessary. (These positions are published on the LWVHA website.)
- Local Government was selected as a study topic for the coming year and a committee will be formed to carry out this work.
- The 2023-24 slate of officers and board members were elected by the members present.

Accompanying documents (budget, bylaws, local government study information) are also posted on the Members-Only webpage on the LWVMT website.

The Helena Area League presented an impressive list of accomplishments to the approximately 40 members who attended the Annual Meeting in April. Mary Johnson and Tracy Donaldson presented highlights from the first-ever online survey of all members. On the next page, check out the impressive accomplishments of our local league!

ABOUT OUR LEAGUE'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY

Every ten years the Montana State Constitution requires each local government (both City and County) to ask its citizens whether a review of the current form of government should be conducted.

The Helena LWV Local Government Review committee has a goal of educating its membership and the public on what this process entails, what is the current form of government, and what would be possible alternatives. The purpose is to have an informed electorate prepared to make a decision on whether a review should occur. If voters choose to have a review, then our goal is to help educate the public on the process and to encourage discussion on what is working, what could be improved by a change in the form of government, and what possible alternative forms of government could be explored.

Warm Welcome to our Newest Members!



**Tana Meeds
Donna Miller
Niki Whearty**

Did you know there is a Members-Only section on the LWVMT website?

The general public is welcome to attend many of our events and webinars, but much of our business is designated for members only, so this online resource is where members will find current and past issues of *The Voter*, upcoming meeting details and Zoom links, action alerts, and other member-related news and important documents.

To access the Members-Only content on the website, you will need to create an account. Once verified, visit the site, log in, and the Members-Only pages will appear in the website's menu.

LOG IN

Register
Forgot password

To create an account, visit <http://my.lwv.org/montana>.

Click on **Register** in the top right corner of the website and follow the prompts. Your access will be pending until it is activated. This is to ensure only current Montana LWV members are accessing these pages.

2022-2023 LWVHA Accomplishments

Member Programs on:

- ✓ Ranked Choice Voting
- ✓ Big Sky Passenger Rail
- ✓ Water Sustainability in Helena
- ✓ City Budget Priorities
- ✓ Affordable Housing Efforts
- ✓ National League Positions (Issues and Answers)
- ✓ Legislative Update

We Co-sponsored:

- ✓ Two MT Constitution events with state League and other non-profit groups
- ✓ Rocking the Vote event at Lewis and Clark Brewery
- ✓ MT Constitution and Privacy webinar
- ✓ Freedom of the Press and the Public's Right to Know webinar

We Showed Up for Rallies and Parades:

- ✓ PRIDE Parade
- ✓ Stampede Parade
- ✓ Support for the Constitution
- ✓ Reproductive Rights

We Produced and Advanced:

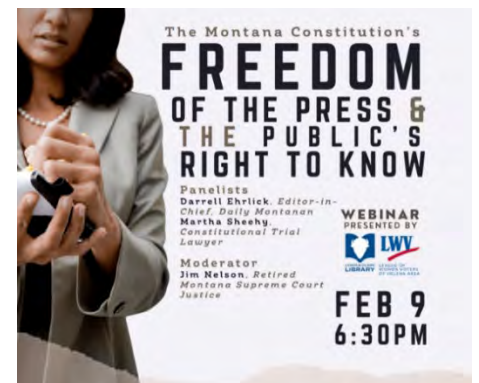
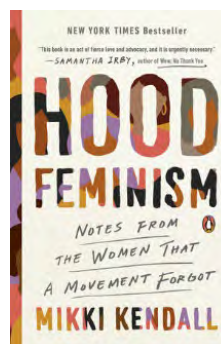
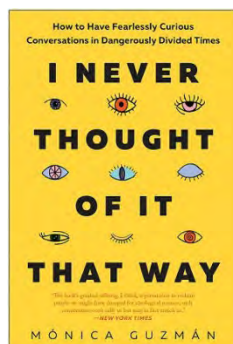
- ✓ Membership survey
- ✓ School essay contest
- ✓ VOTE 411 web presence
- ✓ Our VOTER newsletter
- ✓ Observer Corps
- ✓ Comprehensive publicity of our events: in newsprint, TV, and radio
- ✓ Public Policy Book Discussion Group
- ✓ Candidate Interviews with online videos
- ✓ Constitution Jeopardy Game
- ✓ Three social gatherings
- ✓ A State Convention
- ✓ Kept track of our income and expenses
- ✓ Two grants to advance the Youth Vote and the Formerly Incarcerated Vote
- ✓ VR efforts registering over 700 voters, including out-of-town Naturalization Events

We Maintained Online Platforms:

- ✓ Google Groups
- ✓ LWVHA email account
- ✓ Zoom account
- ✓ Webpage & Members-Only section
- ✓ Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- ✓ We learned to use Google docs

We Participated in:

- ✓ The National and State League Conventions
- ✓ The Redistricting Process
- ✓ Legislative Action Committee
- ✓ Outreach Circle
- ✓ Legislative hearings to support LWVMT positions



News from the League of Women Voters of Montana

By Nancy Leifer, Montana LWV President



Summary of State Convention and Legislative Action Report

The 2023 LWV Montana Convention met in Helena on May 6-7 and received high marks from nearly all those who participated! One of the changes in the Board after the election of officers is the appointment of Natalya DeRobertis-Theye as the state "Voter" editor. Watch for a state Voter in June, with a complete summary of the Convention and the final Legislative Action Report!

LWV Montana Working Groups for 2023-2024

With nearly all of us now comfortable meeting on Zoom, participants at the state convention set up eight state League working groups to help coordinate across local Leagues and work on state-level policy efforts. Below are the groups we will have going forward.

SIGN UP TO JOIN WORKING GROUP! Click [HERE](#) to fill out a short online form or send an email to nancyleifer@gmail.com to join one or more of the groups listed below. The Google form lists the following groups and also asks if you are willing to chair a working group. If you prefer sending an email to Nancy Leifer, include the name of the group(s) you want to join.

- Voter Services/Youth Vote Program and Voter Registration – Helena League's new program to take high school voter education into the classroom, register former felons, etc.
- VOTE411 implementation – gearing up for statewide implementation in 2024.
- Local Government Review – Montana's unique constitutional requirement to ask citizens if they want a local government study commission, with the election coming up in 2024.
- Diversity/Equity/Inclusion – help with programs and education on how the League can better act on these principles.
- Voter Girl Event (in conjunction with Montana/Wyoming Girl Scout Council) – last year's event teaching citizenship and voting to Girl Scouts in Bozeman was great fun – help to host event in Billings in 2023-2024.
- Climate Emergency – Montana is backsliding on its commitment to a clean and healthful environment. Help the state League monitor and respond to environmental policies.
- Education Position – review and propose update current position on financing of education and create potential position on recent attempts to impose state level censorship, etc.
- Mental Health Position – review and update League position on mental health in preparation for the 2025 Legislature.

Remember to watch for a state "Voter" newsletter, coming to you in June, with a comprehensive summary of the state Convention and of the League Actions taken during the 2023 Montana Legislature!

2023 Montana State Convention *Defending Democracy and the Montana Constitution*

May 6-7, 2023 Helena, Montana



Members who attended the **2023 Montana LWV Annual Convention** held in Helena in early May. Read all about it in the Montana LWV Voter to be sent to members in June!



League Presidents: Sharon Haugen (Helena co-president), Gerrie Beck (Bozeman president); Becky Piske (Helena co-president), Bonnie Lorenzen (Billings president). Not shown, Mary LaPorte (Missoula president).



Sue Hoell, outgoing Helena LWV co-president.



Top L-R: Robyn Morrison, Bonnie Lorenzen, and Felomina Garvin.

Bottom L-R: Rebecca Johnson, Patti Borneman, Mickey Harlow, and Becky Piske.

Kudos and cheers and big thanks to our Montana LWV Convention Planning Committee: Sue Hoell, Ann Gilkey, Mickey Harlow, Tracy Donaldson, Darien Scott, and Patti Borneman.



Ann Gilkey



Peter Sullivan, Tana Meeds, and Barb Harris



Top and Bottom: Mike Jetty and his daughter Sapphire entertained convention attendees.

Below: Rebecca Johnson



Paul Pacini, Becky Piske, Julie Huntington, Greg and Wendy Wheeler



Donna Aline, Donna Miller, Cherri Jones, and Tracy Donaldson



Janet Young

May 2023 Observer Corps Reports



Dick Thweatt at the Helena City Commission Meeting

- The Helena City Commission confirmed three new police officers.
- Mayor Wilmot Collins made two proclamations:
 - "Don't Fry Day" promoting sunscreen, hats, etc. to prevent skin cancer.
 - National Gun Violence Awareness Day on June 2nd
- Former Community Development Director Sharon Haugen was appointed to the Board of the Helena Housing Authority.
- There was controversy about the pre-zoning of a section of the new West Woods Subdivision southwest of Kessler School. Pre-zoning is done as a condition of annexation to the city. The applicant, Sussex Development, was requesting zoning that would permit more multi-family housing and higher development density than local residents wanted. It was pointed out that the county growth policy designated the tract for high density residential development and the application was approved.

Katherine Anderson at the Helena School Board Meeting

The Helena School District has finished its 2023 School Board Election, and results were approved in the May 9th Board of Trustees meeting. The 2023 school board election was canceled because the number of candidates who filed equaled the number of trustee positions open. Four new board members were sworn in, bringing the board total back to eight. New members include Jeff Hindoien, appointed to fill the seat of trustee Lois Fitzpatrick, Linda Cleatus, Jennifer McKee, and Jennifer Walsh. The Elementary General Fund Levy for \$356,000, Elementary Building Reserve Levy for \$3 million, and High School Building Reserve Levy for \$1.5 million all passed. The board voted unanimously to certify the election results in both the elementary and high school districts.

Critical Developments for the Helena School District include the following:

Mental Health Services: The School District has discussed how to support students' mental and behavioral health. The District is currently working to impose local training, alternative programs, and a support system to provide resources for primary and elementary school-aged students. This has been a particularly pertinent issue in the wake of COVID-19. The District is looking at providing behaviorists, transportation to student health appointments, increased counselors, and in-school clinics focused on mental health. In addition, the district plans to form two advisory committees (a Mental and Physical Health Student Advisory Board and a Partner/District Advisory Board) focused on these issues in the next year.

2024 Helena School District Elections: The Lewis and Clark County Election office will partner with the Helena School District to support and administer next year's local School Board election.

Helena School District Board Re-organization: In the May 16th Special Meeting, the board unanimously voted to approve a board re-organization. The district's business services administrator, Janelle Mickelson, was appointed the district clerk. Siobhan Hathhorn, who has served on the board since 2019, was reappointed chair for the next year, and McKee, who has served on the board since 2020, was appointed vice chair again.

Ongoing issues include the following:

- Student Homelessness and Food Security
- Student Mental Health
- Workforce and Staffing/Retention Issues
- School Safety

Young People's Lawsuit Could Affect Montana's Energy Future

Guest View published in the Helena Independent Record on May 24, 2023

Sixteen Montana young people are making history by suing Montana government for violating their inalienable constitutional rights. *Held v State of Montana*, the first constitutional climate trial in U.S. history, is scheduled to begin June 12, 2023, in the 1st Judicial District Court in Helena.



The suit doesn't challenge a specific law or agency action, rather the plaintiffs argue that "the totality of various government actions contributes to the deprivation of their constitutionally protected rights."

The 16 plaintiffs ranged in age from 2 to 18 years old when they filed their original claim in 2020, and come from large and small communities, including Broadus, Missoula, Bozeman, Polson, Kalispell, Helena, Livingston, and the Flathead Indian Reservation. They are represented by Our Children's Trust, the Western Environmental Law Center, and McGarvey Law. Our Children's Trust is a non-profit law firm that exclusively represents young people securing their right to a safe climate, based on the best available science. The firm has represented youth in all fifty states with cases currently pending in seven states and five countries.

The plaintiffs assert that Montana's government is violating three of their inalienable constitutional rights:

- The right to a clean and healthful environment;
- The right to seek safety, health, and happiness; and
- The right to individual dignity and equal protection of the law.

The plaintiffs also argue that fossil fuels degrade Montana's constitutionally protected public trust resources, including the atmosphere, rivers and lakes, and wildlife. The case argues the state of Montana has been aware of fossil fuels' dangers since at least 1968 and government actions have knowingly caused and made climate change worse.

Montana's Constitution establishes several inalienable rights, including the right to a clean and healthful environment. Inalienable rights are not transferable and can't be taken away or nullified; they flow from our nature as free people. Moreover, Article IX, Section 1.1 states "The state and each person shall maintain and improve a clean and healthful environment in Montana for present and future generations."

It argues that Montana's extensive support for fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas is unconstitutional because the resulting pollution is dangerously heating the planet. Montana is the sixth largest coal producer in the U.S. and ranks 12th in oil production and 20th in natural gas production. Montana government support and even encouragement of these harmful industries has robbed these young people of a healthy environment.

The plaintiffs are seeking "declaratory relief." They want the judge to acknowledge that fossil fuels are causing pollution and warming the planet and declare the state's support for these industries unconstitutional. This would establish an important legal precedent and case law stating that the burning of fossil fuels is dangerously warming the planet. A victory for the Montana youth would help create a foundation for other climate cases. The *Held v State of Montana* court case would put fossil fuels and climate change on trial and could force Montana state government to change energy policies.

The case may be settled out of court. Either way, you can support these courageous youth by going online to the Our Children's Trust website and adding your name to the "wall" of support for the Montana case at <https://www.ourchildrenstrust.org/montana-call-to-action>.

If it goes to trial, you can also attend the trial, assemble outside of the courthouse, or watch a live stream of the trial at the Myrna Loy Theater in Helena.

The League of Women Voters believes that climate is beyond crisis and has reached the point of being a climate emergency. Thank you to these courageous youths who are taking action to challenge Montana's fossil fuel future!

Nancy Leifer, President, LWV of MT

Becky Piske, Co-President, LWV of Helena Area

Sharon Haugen, Co-President, LWV of Helena Area

Youth Voter Project Update

The Voter Services Planning Team continues to make great progress on the youth voter project with a statewide focus of developing voting materials as well as classroom lessons that can be used by teachers, students and volunteers to encourage young people to become lifelong voters.

We are putting the finishing touches on the Suffrage Timeline presentation by adding content focusing on Montana's voting rights history. We presented this lesson to students at PAL High School and Career Technology Institute last month (*see Clare Kearns' article on next page*).

At this time, we are collecting a list of volunteers who want to help present this class lesson. We continue to reach out to schools and organizations to schedule presentations.

Please contact Rebecca Johnson (see below) with your ideas or contacts to get these presentations scheduled throughout Montana.

Be a Voter Registration Volunteer!

If you are interested in helping with voter registration, please contact Rebecca at (406) 223-4300 or rebeccainmt@gmail.com. You will receive a weekly online newsletter with volunteer opportunities as well as one-on-one voter registration training and voting material supplies at no cost to you.



In today's America, it can be easy to want to tune out of politics and government, as it is seemingly nothing but nastiness, lies and discontent. Yes, there is too much of all of the above, but there is also much to be proud of, a lot on the line and a very truly inspirational story behind the increase of suffrage of the course of history. As a US Government teacher, I was very happy to host the Helena chapter of League of Women Voters into my classroom. Their nonpartisan lesson was based purely on the history, importance of and access to voting. It was engaging, interesting and the students left with more interest and knowledge than they possessed before the lesson. I would strongly urge other teachers to host these wonderful and passionate women!

Ryan Cooney, Project for Alternative Learning

Young Voter Project launched with Suffrage Timeline presentation at the Project for Alternative Learning (PAL) in Helena

By Clare Kearns, past president of LWVHA

The Helena LWV had the honor of making a presentation on the history of voter rights for students of Ryan Cooney at the Project for Alternative Learning (PAL) on Monday April 17. This was made possible because Rebecca Johnson applied for and received grant funds to encourage more involvement in elections among students. Fortunately, Rebecca and the Voter Registration Committee didn't have to invent the presentation from scratch. A LWV group in New Jersey created a slideshow addressing the suffrage timeline and gave us access to their slideshow.

Nancy Perry kicked off the presentation by focusing on the expansion of voting rights from the time of the Revolutionary War when voting was limited to white, male, wealthy property owners to 1920 when women finally won the right to vote. Key points in the timeline of expanding voting rights included the westward movement when property ownership was eliminated as a prerequisite to voting, through the Civil War when African American men were given the right to vote, through the 1920s when women were given the right to vote. The students were particularly energized when Nancy spoke about the incredible struggle of the suffragists who endured incarceration and tube feedings when they went on a hunger strike.

While voting rights were expanding, segments of the United States were finding creative ways to keep certain peoples from voting. Clare Kearns spoke on voter suppression efforts all the way from the Jim Crow Era through today. Interestingly, denying citizenship to specific groups was used to deny the right to vote. Citizenship was denied Native Americans until 1924. Before 1924, Native Americans could only become citizens if they first gave up their tribal identities and moved off the reservation. Citizenship was denied Asians until 1943. Even Asians born in America were denied citizenship and consequently the right to vote. Another tactic to suppress the vote before 1975 was the requirement that voters speak and read English. President Gerald Ford amended the Voting Rights Act so that ballots and voter registration forms would be written in many languages.

The more commonly known voter suppression tactics of today piqued the interest of the students who had many questions and showed a real awareness of the topic. They were alerted to voter roll purging, closing polling places, reducing the number of voting machines, requiring difficulty to get IDs, limiting mail-in ballots, ending the Souls to The Polls voting on Sunday, etc.



The LWV gave another suffrage timeline presentation on May 5 at the Career Training Center (CTI) with Becky Piske and Ronnie Whitaker presenting. It is hoped more high schools around Montana will invite the LWV to make this presentation next Fall. PAL was our first effort and the students were asked to provide feedback, so the presentation will be tweaked based on their input.

Voter Registration Opportunities – Summer 2023

- ☐ **June 3 – 8 am to 2 pm. Clancy Days.** Sign up here: <https://x.gldn.io/0ZXrP0Wn7zb>
- ☐ **June 8 – 11:30 am and 1:30 pm. Naturalization Ceremonies** Email kearns.clare@gmail.com if you want to join the fun group carpooling to Great Falls.
- ☐ **Saturdays at the Helena Farmers Market.** One-hour shifts, follow link to sign up:
10:00 am: <https://x.gldn.io/hl8HHSWm7zb> or 11:00 am: <https://x.gldn.io/KAuSJRBI7zb>
- ☐ **Saturdays at noon - Lewis & Clark Library.** Sign up here: <https://x.gldn.io/0oofLA1m7zb>
- ☐ **June 17 - Juneteenth Celebration at Myrna Loy.** <https://x.gldn.io/H7udK9DXdAb>



Visit the **Helping Helena Vote Facebook** page:
<https://www.facebook.com/HelpingHelenaVote>

Contact **Rebecca Johnson** for training, to share ideas, places to register voters, and civic education for youth and adults.

Email: helpinghelenavote@gmail.com
Phone: (406) 223-4300



We appreciate these LWWHA members who registered voters this spring!

**Suzy Holt
Laura Gerlach
Laura Gorman
Rebecca Johnson
Clare Kearns
Niki Whearty**

Voter Registration champions! Niki Whearty, Nancy Perry, Clare Kearns, Laura Gorman, and Suzy Holt