

THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE HELENA AREA



League officers

Co-president: Margaret Bentwood

Co-president: Clare Kearns

Treasurer: Julie Huntington

Secretary: Emily Sedgwick

Board: Tom Cherry – at large

Board: Barb Harris – at large

Board: Rebecca Johnson – at large

Board: Sherry Meador – at large

Board: Sue Hoell – Website Manager

Board: Nancy Perry – The Voter Editor

Meetings

Meetings occur at noon on the 3rd Tuesday of every month. We meet online using Zoom.

The next meeting will be November 16th. Prior to the meeting members receive an email with information needed to connect on Zoom.

Committee Chairs

Membership Committee Chair: Becky Piske

Voter Registration Committee Chair: Rebecca Johnson

Publicity Committee Chair: Marga Lincoln

Nominations Committee Chair: Lynn Hinch

DEI Committee Chair: Barb Harris

Program Committee Chair: Darien Scott

The Voter Editor: Nancy Perry

Facebook Editor: Sherry Meador

LWV-Helena Website Editor: Sue Hoell

Instagram Editor: Emily Sedgwick

Message from the Co-presidents of the League

As we head into the holiday season, we are reminded that COVID is still with us. We may still need to scale back our family holiday festivities. We still hold our League meetings via Zoom. Our voter registration efforts are still limited primarily to outdoor or small indoor venues. Our League social to welcome new members was cancelled due to COVID, and plans for our Christmas party will be affected. However, the past nearly two years have proven what an adaptable and committed organization we are. We can celebrate many achievements.

- The League Candidate Forum, though complicated by Covid, was a success. The planning committee met with some pushback from one candidate but remained steadfast in setting rules that would be fair to all the candidates.
- Many League members and community volunteers blanketed Helena to register voters on National Voter Registration Day (NVRD). Additionally, as part of NVRD Audrey McCue from the Election Office gave an eye-opening presentation on the secure process of counting ballots in Lewis & Clark County.
- As part of the League mission to educate membership and the community on issues related to elections and democracy, we had some great speakers. Both Nancy Leifer and Rebecca Johnson spoke on the topic of redistricting. Mary Craigle spoke on the 2020 Census, and Sheila Krumholz and Greg Schneider from OpenSecrets.org spoke on money in politics. Jim Nelson, Bryce Bennet and others spoke at the League sponsored rally at the Capital on the topics of democracy and authoritarian forms of government.
- Though the League efforts to support redistricting maps 11 or 13 did not result in either of those maps being selected, we made a valiant effort to ensure at least one district would be politically competitive. Now we need to vote and encourage others to vote.
- We continue our resolve to get Congress to pass voter rights bills countering states' efforts to suppress votes. Keep your eyes open for Outreach Circle notices, and keep submitting your letters to the editor.

This is not a complete list of achievements and is only a snapshot of the many good works the Helena League has focused on in recent months. Thank-you to all members who have contributed to our successes. Recognition goes to Nancy Perry, who was reelected to the Neighborhood Council and hoorah to Rebecca Johnson, who was a runner up AARP Andrus Award nominee. The Andrus Award goes to a person with outstanding volunteer work that supports the AARP mission, and Rebecca has indeed been doing outstanding work in voter registration and voter rights.

Submitted by Clare Kearns and Margaret Bentwood

Minutes from the Annual Business Meeting of the Helena League

The League of Women Voters of the Helena Area's annual business meeting was held on April 20, 2021 with 19 members participating. The meeting was conducted via Zoom because of social distancing necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Julie Huntington summarized the minutes of last year's business meeting and presented a treasurer's report. Darien Scott reported that she had reviewed the League's financial records with Julie on April 14, and everything was in order. The business meeting minutes and the treasurer's report were unanimously approved.

The addition of the following treasurer responsibilities to our bylaws was approved by the group: "The Treasurer shall file taxes in accordance with regulations for non-profit organizations and perform other financial duties as needed. The Treasurer shall maintain an up-to-date membership list of all League members."

A slate of officers for the 2021-2022 League year, prepared by Sue Hoell, Marie Bourgeois and Ann Gilkey, was put forward and accepted unanimously. It was decided to split the secretary/treasurer board position into two positions: secretary and treasurer. The slate includes:

Co-president: Margaret Bentwood (2021-2022)

Co-president: Clare Kearns (2021-2022)

Treasurer: Julie Huntington (2021-2023)

Secretary: Emily Sedgwick (2021-2023)

Board members:

Tom Cherry (2021-2022)

Sue Hoell (2021-2022)

Barb Harris (2021-2022)

Sherry Meador (2021-2022)

Rebecca Johnson (2021-2022)

Nancy Perry (2021-2022)

Members decided to have monthly meetings again this year in July and August. They also agreed to hold quarterly educational programs in the evening, open to the public, in addition to our regular monthly meetings. A program committee made up of Mary Johnson, Marga Lincoln and Darien Scott was formed to help with program ideas.

Members expressed interest in holding candidate forums, Tom Cherry reported on our League's involvement in the People Powered Fair Maps national redistricting program, and Cheri Bergeron gave a brief report on the current legislative session and how to contact committees and individual legislators. Becky Piske suggested having a member social this summer or early fall, contingent on any Covid restrictions.

Submitted by Julie Huntington

Rally for Voting Rights



The Helena League, with organizational skills provided by Rebecca Johnson, hosted a very successful Voting Rights Rally on June 21, 2021 at the Capitol in Helena. There were 80–100 attendees.

Speakers were State Senator Bryce Bennett; Robyn Madison with Senator Jon Tester's Office; Jim Nelson, retired Justice for the Supreme Court of Montana (see Justice Nelson's remarks below); Kev Hamm, president of Big Sky Pride; and Nancy Leifer, president of the Montana League of Women Voters (see Nancy Leifer's remarks below). The rally took place to help boost support for federal legislation 'HR1 - For the People Act' to put in protections for people to exercise their right to vote. For the first six months of 2021, there were 361 voter suppression bills proposed in 47 state

legislatures. In Montana this year, our state legislature passed four laws restricting Montanans' right to vote. The bill is now in the Senate and is still being considered in the US Congress but has encountered opposition from the minority party.

Submitted by Rebecca Johnson

New League Members

Patti Borneman, Roberta Coppinger, Tracy Donaldson, Sherry Ehret, Janet Robinson, Margaret Sedgwick, Sally Speer



Margaret and Darien lead the march

Justice Nelson's Speech at Voting Rights Rally

The Despots' Playbook

From the time of Mussolini and Hitler there has been a playbook pursuant to which authoritarians and despots have taken and maintained power—think of the governments and leaders of Russia, China, North Korea, Syria, Iran, the Philippines, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and more than three dozen other countries around the globe.

The rules, if you will, are always the same. Authoritarians and despots:

- Draw up an enemies list—you are either for us or against us; we govern for the party in power, not for all the people; we intimidate, bully, marginalize and crush the opposition.
- Systematically trash the press—a free press is the enemy of the people; the truth is fake news; we delegitimize the press or control and use it as a propaganda tool.
- Lie, lie, lie—the bigger the lie the better, because people believe that the most outrageous and improbable lie must be true, or else no one would say it in the first place. We trash the truth in favor of alternate facts, fiction, or

fantasy; we trash science and substitute religion; we propagandize with false information and conspiracy theories.

- Trash the Courts—we bully, intimidate and politicize the judiciary and control judicial elections and appointments so only those loyal to the party line become judges; we take control of the judicial making process and control the courts to eliminate constitutional checks and balances.
- Trash the Rule of Law—we use laws to reward supporters and punish opponents; we ignore laws not in accord with the party line; we ignore court orders, disrespect civil authority and ignore the Constitution.
- Politicize the civil service, military and domestic security.
- Involve government in surveilling the press, reporters, political opponents and those on the enemies list.
- Fearmonger and demonize racial and religious minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and immigrants; we make them the scapegoats for societies' social and economic ills.
- Trash civil rights and liberties in favor of partisan and religious ideology. We marginalize women and their gender-specific rights and needs. And,
- Trash the right to vote and elections—we promote spurious conspiracy theories and lies claiming election fraud, stolen elections and voting irregularities; we demand recounts and audits of elections held and certified in accordance with governing laws; we sue on false claims without evidentiary support; we suppress the vote and make it harder and more inconvenient to vote; we gerrymander and do everything possible to rig the system so that only the party faithful are elected; we empower the legislature to ignore the popular vote and change the results of elections; we hold on to power at all costs; we lie, lie, lie.

The goal of all authoritarians and despots is to control all branches and functions of government; to conform those and the minds of the people to the party line and ideology. The people do not count, the Constitution does not count; the Rule of Law becomes the Rule of Lie.

It has been said that “when fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross.” And John Maynard Keynes observed that, “Perhaps it is historically true that no order of society ever perishes save by its own hand.” Sadly, history has shown that to be true, time and time again.

The authoritarian playbook ensures that democracy will die from within, not from without.

And, if you think “it can’t happen here,” I am telling you it already is.

Nancy Leifer's Speech at Voting Rights Rally

Abraham Lincoln said "America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

Our nation stands at a turning point. If we fail to pass the For the People Act, known as S1 in the Senate, in this session of Congress, we may not have the chance again to protect voting rights and elections from the egregious voter suppression and gerrymandering designed to deny voters the opportunity to participate effectively in our elections.

Rarely does history depend upon the actions taken in one moment. This is one of those moments. Some of you have expressed concerns about S1. There is a lot of misinformation circulating about what it would do. It does not eliminate the use of IDs to vote, nor is it a power grab to control elections by one party. The For the People Act contains a number of best practices that have been tried and proven effective in both red and blue states all across the country. It would establish a floor of practices that ensure that voters in all states have the same basic access to the vote, while allowing states to implement their own voting procedures above and beyond this base. If you would like more information about the Act, there is a page on the League of Women Voters of Montana website with links to more information: <https://my.lwv.org/montana/event/revitalizing-democracy-s1-people-act>

A recent poll indicated that 67% of Americans support the For the People Act, of which 56% are Republicans and 77% are Democrats. With 2/3 of the American public favoring this legislation, now is the time for our senators to hear from their constituents.

I urge you to join me in taking action now to manifest a groundswell of support for passage of the For the People Act in the US Senate. Whether you have already contacted Montana's senators or not, now is the time to contact them and pull out all the stops to encourage your family and friends to do the same. The League of Women Voters US is joining with many other non-partisan organizations around the country in an effort called Deadline for Democracy to fill senators' phone lines and email messages with constituent support for S1 before the Senate reconvenes on July 12.

Reinventing our Democracy

*Clare Kearns listened to a webinar titled **Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century**. It can be found online at*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwAK0bu1Sck>

The webinar is based on a cross-partisan study, conducted by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, done a year or so ago that resulted in ideas about combatting divisiveness in today's politics and helping people commit to building a stronger democracy. The study was an outgrowth of listening sessions held all over the country with progressives and conservatives and everyone in between. The ideas presented by the Academy of Arts and Sciences align with the League's mission and policy positions. Below is Clare's summary of the main points presented in the webinar.

America is not stuck with our current system. We can change and improve our system. That change requires both structural and cultural change, and that change starts with a commitment to democracy.

Recommendations for structural change include the following:

- The size of the House of Representatives should be increased. If House members represent fewer people, they will be more in sync with those people and will have more opportunity to actually meet and hear from those people. This would result in people feeling they actually have a voice and that their representative hears them. Currently, people living in rural areas, in the middle part of the country, are more likely to know their representatives than people living on either the west or east coast. Prior to 1913 the House increased in size at intervals. In 1913 the House stopped growing. Interestingly, that growth stopped to limit representation of new mostly Catholic immigrants.
- Encourage states to use ranked choice voting. Ranked choice voting could reverse the trend of extreme candidates winning since people would vote for more than one candidate and politicians would have to try to appeal to more than their base. Ranked choice voting would allow other parties to run candidates without being a threat to either of the main parties. Ranked choice voting is likely to result in more moderate winners. This change in voting would require much public education about the process and the expectation that election results would take time.

Recommendations for cultural change include the following:

- Civics education should be intentional. The Academy of Arts and Sciences found a lack of civics education in our country. There is a growing groundswell to strengthen civics education and to recognize that "citizens are made, not born". The Academy recommends that instruction be more intentional and that it includes information

about alternative forms of government such as oligarchies, dictatorships, monarchies, theocracies, etc. The goal is to help students understand the benefits of a democracy.

- Civics education should take place in schools and the community. Americans should understand democracy and commit to improving our democracy. With that commitment it is hoped Americans will demand expanded voter rights, higher voter turn-out, and will oppose any group from overturning election results. The Academy hopes that with a commitment to democracy people will demand political party reform. Both parties should do a reassessment.
- Combat disinformation. Disinformation is not fought by providing more and more conflicting information. Disinformation is combated by encouraging discussions.

Submitted by Clare Kearns

Big Sky Pride Parade

If it is a fun event in Helena, the Helena League is probably there with our banner, clipboards, and voter registration forms. The Big Sky Pride parade was no exception. The League is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Supporting the LGBTQ community makes the League stronger and may result in a more diverse membership. With that in mind, on July 17, the Helena League took part in the Big Sky Pride parade, both to show support to the LGBTQ community and to register voters. League members walking the parade met on Front Street at Neill and marched the length of the parade carrying the League banner. Those who own them were wearing their "I Can Help You Register to Vote" t-shirts. At the parade terminus, Anchor Park, they met other League members who had set up a table and were offering voter registration. A rally was held in Anchor Park afterwards where speeches were made, including by candidates for the upcoming city election. Some preparations were made in advance, should any conflicts arise and participants needed to seek safety, but in fact the parade was totally chaotic – in a fun way!

Submitted by Rebecca Johnson

Fall, 2021



Marching for a good cause and having fun at the same time

Helena League Demonstrates in Support of the For the People Act



On August 3 members of the Helena League participated in a 'stand in' at the offices of Montana's congressional senate delegation to demonstrate our strong support for Senate Bill 1 (S1), the 'For the People Act'. League chapters in Missoula, Bozeman, and Billings participated in similar demonstrations in their cities. The stand in was organized by the Montana League, with each local League handling their own logistics.

First the Helena members met up at Senator Tester's office with a signed letter from the League to Senator Tester asking for the Senator's support for the For the People Act and asking him to reform the filibuster if needed. The demonstrators brought their own cards or letters as well as the League's letter and gave them to Tester's Helena representative, Robyn Madison. They stayed for a

half hour or so, standing on the sidewalk in front of the office, carrying signs urging the drivers to honk if they supported the For the People Act. Members of the public who supported the For the People Act were encouraged to join the demonstration. Then the demonstrators proceeded to Senator Daines' office. No one was available to receive the cards and letters as Senator Daines' office was closed, so the demonstrators simply slipped their cards and letters under the door and stayed for a half hour waving their signs to the passersby and engaging any pedestrians who supported the For the People Act.

Submitted by Rebecca Johnson

National Voter Registration Day

When National Voter Registration Day dawned, bright and early on September 28, the voter registration wing of the Helena League was ready. Led by the amazing Rebecca Johnson, we fanned out to our appointed places at Shodair Hospital, Carroll College, Helena College, Hunters Pointe, the library, Red Alder Apartments, and a few other places. Mindful of Covid, we wore masks. Our base was a table in the library, where the person in charge registered voters, doled out extra forms and pens, and minded the Wonder Woman and Captain America cardboard cutouts. Little kids happily accepted a 'Future Voter' sticker and didn't need much encouragement to pose in front of Wonder Woman while their mother took their picture. Becky registered an enthusiastic man, sitting in front of God's Love, who wanted election information. Hunters Pointe was ready when Ronnie Whitaker showed up. Twelve folks who had recently moved in excitedly allowed her to change the address on their voting registration so their absentee ballot could find them. A voter at PureView was unsure if he was still registered, and allowed a member of the registration team to look him up on My Voter Page. At Carroll, Clare found that partnering with a student, Virginia Meador, was a huge help in drawing students to the voter registration table. The students at Helena College were too cool for school; they all claimed to already be registered. Shodair Hospital was so pleased to see Rebecca arrive that they plied her with hot chocolate and helped her set up; because of Covid Rebecca had to set her table and supplies up outside. All in all, it was a successful day, with at least 41 voters registered.



Ronnie helps voters at Hunters Point



Future voters meet Captain America

Candidate Forum for Helena City Election

On October 7th, the Helena League hosted a candidate forum at the Helena Avenue Theatre for candidates running in the November 2 Helena city election. Darien Scott, Mary Johnson, Marga Lincoln, Tom Cherry, and Marie Bourgeois comprised the committee that organized the forum. Barb Harris was the moderator. The forum ran exceptionally smoothly. One attendee commented that of all the forums he had attended so far for this election, the League forum was by far the most professionally run.

In this election, voters chose two city commission candidates and one mayoral candidate. The candidates included: Steve Allen, Eric Feaver, Troy McGee, Melinda Reed for city commission; and Wilmot Collins and Sonda Gaub for mayor. Steve Allen did not attend the forum. The winners in those races were Wilmot Collins, Eric Feaver, and Melinda Reed. The voters also selected up to four representatives for the Helena Citizens' Council district in which they live.

Submitted by Darien Scott



Candidates Wilmot Collins, Sonda Gaub, Eric Feaver, Troy McGee, and Melinda Reed



Darien Scott explained forum rules, then moderator Barb Harris asked the candidates questions

Montana 2020 Census, as explained by Mary Craigle

At our October 19 meeting we heard from Mary Craigle, the Research and Information Services Bureau Chief of the Census & Economic Information Center at the Department of Commerce. In October of 2019, Colleen McCarthy had talked to us about working for the Census Bureau during the 2020 Decennial Census. A few League members took her up on her suggestion and went to work as enumerators. At the October, 2021, meeting Mary gave us a first look at the results of the 2020 Census data gathered by those enumerators.

Because of the Covid pandemic, the 2020 Census got off to an 8-month late start. Still, 60% of the population responded voluntarily by mail, online, or by phone. Mary was quite pleased by this response. The enumerators' job was to find the other 40% and account for them. In spite of having to be ever mindful of Covid and in spite of the late start, enough addresses were accounted for and enough Montanans were enumerated for the state to join five other states that qualified for additional Congressional representation. See the chart below.

State	Seats gained	State	Seats lost
Texas	3	Rhode Island	1
Florida	1	Illinois	1
Colorado	1	Michigan	1
Montana	1	New York	2
North Carolina	1	Ohio	1
Oregon	1	Pennsylvania	1
		West Virginia	1
Total gain in 6 states	8	Total loss in 7 states	8

Helena's population has increased each year on average by 1%, but Mary said it is gradually increasing by a larger amount each year. Last year's increase was by 1.4%. She said that 'population attracts population, i.e., as an area increases in population it becomes more attractive and the rate of growth accelerates. She used Bozeman as an example of a city whose rate of population increase is accelerating.

Mary also discussed the shift in population from rural to urban. This shift is dramatic in some states, but is much less pronounced in Montana where rural areas are generally holding their own. The dramatic fall in Rosebud County's population is an anomaly, a result of the closure of the Colstrip Power Plant. See the chart below. In general, Mary said that Montana is buffered from wide swings in population because we have a variety of economic sectors so even if one sector dies out (copper mining in Butte, for example?) there are other economic sectors to absorb the people put out of work. She suggested that Montana also attracts retirees living on fixed incomes because it is cheaper to live here than it is in many other states.

County		Nominal change
Yellowstone	Most populous county	164,731
Petroleum	Least populous county	496
Gallatin	Largest population gain since 2010	+29,447 (32%)
Rosebud	Largest population loss since 2010	-904 (-10%)

As one of the League members who worked as an enumerator for the 2020 Census, I found Mary Creagle and this meeting particularly interesting!

Submitted by Nancy Perry

Fall, 2021



You run with a classy crowd when you do voter registration



Kim and Rebecca at the NAMI Walk. "Neither snow nor rain..."

“Without a vibrant and expansive right to vote, without a meaningful franchise, there is no way to prevent our country and our state from joining the ranks of authoritarianism and despotism. Indeed democracy cannot and will not survive if the politicians in power degrade, diminish, and destroy the ability of We the People to vote.”

Judge Jim Nelson June 21, 2021