

THE VOTER



Greetings Members!

Well, the holiday season is upon us and hopefully you are having enjoyable times with your family and friends. As I reflect on this year for the Helena LWV, I have learned a lot, have made new friends, and have a better understanding of why what we do is so important for the community, our membership, and myself.



Through our Local Government Committee, we are learning how our cities and counties operate and the critical issues that are facing local government in the future. In 2024, we will have the opportunity to decide if there is a need to review the local city and county governmental structures and establish a Study Review Committee to determine if a change in the form of government can address these concerns.

The 2024 election year and the resulting outcomes will affect our lives and generations to come. During his presentation at Lewis & Clark Library on November 6th, Professor Lee Banville reminded us that we all have the responsibility to learn the facts and challenge any ideas that we know not to be true (and can provide reliable source documentation). The preservation of democracy is a responsibility we all share.

As the holidays draw closer, we must also remember we are not in this alone. We can rely on each other to enlighten us when the need arises, educate us on the issues, and help strengthen our resolve to these ideals.

On Tuesday, December 5th, we are having our holiday party. Please come join us and get to know the other members. It is always easier to engage in these conversations when you have shared food and drink.

Sharon Haugen, Co-President

Board Members

Co-president: Sharon Haugen

Co-president: Becky Piske

Treasurer: Julie Huntington

Secretary: Cherri Jones

At-Large Board Members:

Ann Gilkey

Mary "Mickey" Harlow

Mary Johnson

Committee Chairs

Book Group: Cherri Jones

Communications: Patti Borneman

Local Government Study: Sharon Haugen & Mary "Mickey" Harlow

Membership: Wendy Wheeler

Nominating: Lynn Hinch

Program: Darien Scott

Publicity: Marga Lincoln

VOTE411: Becky Piske & Patrice Anderson

Voter Services: Rebecca Johnson

The Voter & Website Editor: Patti Borneman

League of Women Voters
of the Helena Area

PO Box 6534

Helena, MT 59604

Email: lww.helena@gmail.com

Co-President Becky Piske would like to say:

Hey, if you have not yet paid your dues, well, the time is NOW!

Seriously, our members are the lifeblood of this organization.

Page 3 has all the info you need to renew today. **Thanks!**

CONTENTS

Co-presidents' Messages	1
Calendar of Events	2
Book Group Calendar	2
Membership News	3
Observer Corps Report.....	4
Preparing for the Flood	5
Local Government Review	6
VOTE411 Report.....	6
Formerly Incarcerated Voters .	7
News from the VR Front.....	8

About *The Voter* and Other Communications

The Voter of the League of Women Voters of the Helena Area 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 also publishes a Montana Voter newsletter that is 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>
- Email: lwv.helena@gmail.com
- Visit our social media sites at Facebook and Instagram.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Tuesday, December 5, 4:30-6:30 pm—Member Holiday Gathering at the home of Donna & Kirk Miller—*details in emails sent December 4th and November 27th.*

Tuesday, January 16, 5:30 pm—Membership Meeting on Zoom. Topic: A Discussion of Education Matters Emerging from the 2023 Legislative Session. Sponsored by the 2023 Legislative Action Committee with Cheryl Crawley, Chair.

Monday, February 12, 4:30 pm—Membership Meeting in person at Lewis & Clark Library. Topic: Voter Registration Kick-off and Celebrating LWV's 104th Birthday!

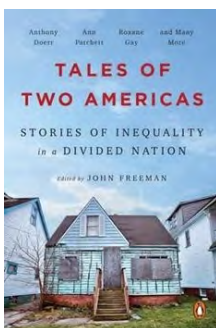
Monday, March 18, 4:30 pm—Membership Meeting in person at Lewis & Clark Library. Topic: Update and Action presented by the Local Government Study Committee.

Monday, April 15, 4:30 pm Annual Business Meeting, in person at Lewis & Clark Library. Presentation by co-presidents Sharon Haugen and Becky Piske.

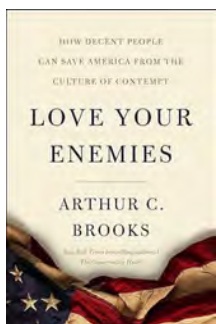


LWVHA Book Group

The LWVHA Book Group usually meets every 4th Thursday, either in person or via Zoom. Make sure you're on the Book Group list to be notified of locations or to receive the Zoom link. Book Group Chair Cherri Jones: cherrijones@missouristate.edu.



Thursday, December 7, 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. *Tales of Two Americas: Stories of Inequality in a Divided Nation* edited by John Freeman. NPR Reviewer Jason Heller: "This collection of 36 essays, poems, and short stories puts the focus squarely on inequality, from hunger and homelessness to racism and the treatment of immigrants. Rather than speaking academically or in the abstract, however, the book's impressive roster of contributing authors push their pens toward the personal."



Thursday, January 25, 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from Our Culture of Contempt* by Arthur C. Brooks. Kirkus Reviews notes: "Brooks argues that we must build bridges rather than walls, replace contempt with empathy, focus on the many values where we agree rather than on the relatively few where we disagree, and embrace each other's common humanity."



Thursday, February 22, 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. *Beyond Schoolmarm and Madams: Montana Women's Stories*, edited by Martha Kohl. The Montana Historical Society writes: "With grit and foresight, these women shaped Montana." Writer and historian Laura Ferguson contributed 19 essays on Indigenous/American Indian women. Rather than prepare by reading all 99 essays, we'll focus on these women's stories. Laura will guide our discussion and answer any questions we might have.

Join the Membership Committee!

Be one of the friendly faces greeting people at meetings.

Find out more about the talented members of the League.

Help plan engaging member meetings.

The Membership Committee is looking for a few friendly and social-minded folks interested in welcoming our new members, helping with the annual survey, and planning two membership meetings each year.

Contact: Wendy Wheeler, Chair

Call (406) 465-7464 or

email westernwheelers@msn.com

Renew your Membership in LWVHA

Thanks to all who have renewed your 2024 membership in the League of Women Voters of the Helena Area.

We are hoping to hear from a few more of our valued members. Dues are \$50 for primary members and \$25 for additional household members. (A primary membership with add-on household member is called a “family membership.”) Student members do not pay dues.

If you have joined since February of this year, the dues you paid will be credited toward the upcoming League year.

If you need to renew, please send a check made out to “LWV of the Helena Area” to:

**Treasurer Julie Huntington
c/o Helena LWV
PO Box 6534
Helena, MT 59604**

You can also pay your dues online! [Click here!](#)

We Strive to Keep You Informed & Engaged

Keeping our members informed and involved in the activities and the work of our local League is very important to us. Email is the preferred method of communication with our members; please do read our notes and updates. There are many ways to be an active League member. For members who do not use email, an alternative form of contact can be arranged.

All members receive a monthly update and occasional weekly emails from “Helena LWV” to keep you informed about upcoming meetings and events. Our quarterly newsletter, *The Voter*, is emailed to all members in December, March, June, and September.

A very warm welcome to our newest members!

**Debra Blossom
Sidney Burgess
Dee Dee Cress
Cathy Duncan
Elizabeth Hale
Celeste Jazwinski
Wendy Marsh
Sue & Bruce Newell
Margaret Regan**



Did you know we have Members-Only pages 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.

Observing: Helena School Board Meetings

Observed by Katherine Anderson

During the fall, the Helena School Board remains dedicated to implementing new policies and curriculums for both students and staff in the wake of the 2023 legislative session. The focus has been on ensuring a smooth transition and providing support for everyone involved, a sentiment that has garnered appreciation from the public.

In pursuit of educational innovation, the Helena School District submitted applications under HB549 to establish charter schools. Two of these charters aim to expand existing educational programs, namely the Project for Alternative Learning (PAL) and the Montessori Charter School. Additionally, a new hybrid program called the Mount Ascension Learning Academy has been proposed.

Responding to community concerns, the district has prioritized school safety by installing new security cameras and implementing an emergency messaging system. Collaboration with the Helena Police Department led to the launch of the “Handle with Care” program, providing support for students facing traumatic incidents outside of school hours. The district has already received 58 Handle with Care



notifications, underscoring the need for expanded student support services.

Tragically, the Helena School District faced the loss of a beloved Helena High School science teacher, Dave McKim, in November. Despite this, efforts persist in supporting both students and staff during this difficult time.

Updates on school-district owned properties include a lease agreement with St. Peter's Health to transform the former Ray Bjork Learning Center into a child care facility named Pete's Place. Similarly, the Seventh Avenue Gym is now leased to Queen City Football Club, serving as its new headquarters with an indoor soccer pitch and locker rooms.

Ongoing concerns regarding staffing problems persist within the school district, with the merger of Ray Bjork Learning Center and Bryant Elementary before the 2023/2024 school year intensifying these difficulties. This has led to vocal expressions of concern from district teachers, highlighting issues such as inadequate support, overall chaos, and burnout among the staff.

Beyond these developments, the district remains committed to addressing issues related to student mental health and support services, and food security and homelessness, particularly as winter approaches.

Observing: Montana Legislature Interim Committee Meetings



In June of this year, our State League published their *Voter* newsletter with an article that invited all Montana LWV members to sign up for and become involved in one or more working groups. One of those working groups is

observing the Montana Legislature Interim Committee meetings that are currently taking place at the State Capitol and also via Zoom. Some committees meet in other locations around the state.

In Helena, Clare Kearns is observing the Children, Family, Health and Human Services Committee meetings and Mickey Harlow is observing the Water Policy Committee and Local Government Committee meetings. Reports are submitted to Nancy Leifer, President of the Montana LWV.

When League members attend these meetings, they are visible to the legislators, and it's a good opportunity to get to know elected officials and state staff. Background information on the issues is also provided.

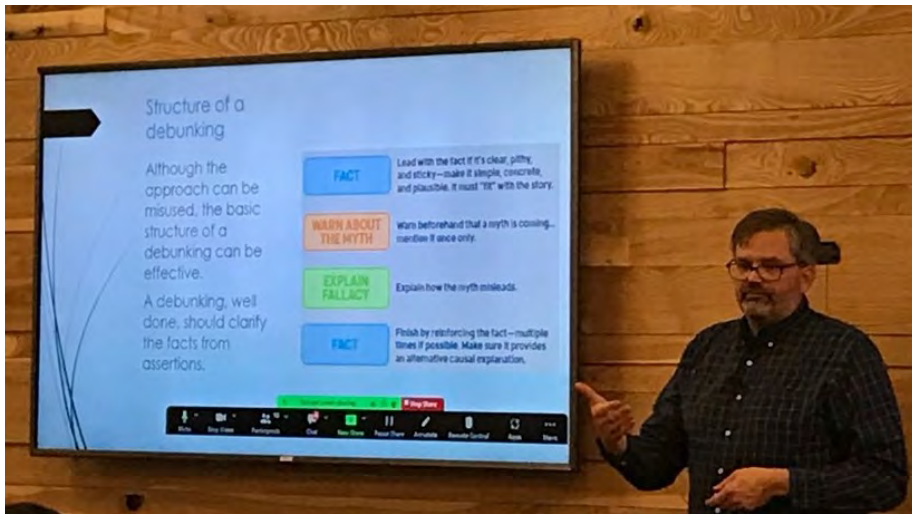
On a personal level, LWV members can learn more about how government works and be involved in a meaningful way.

The Montana League will publish its next *Voter* in mid-December. Look for an update from Nancy Leifer about the Interim Committee meetings and another call for volunteer Observers.

Read more about the Interim Committees [here](#).

YOU CAN BE A LEAGUE OBSERVER!

Log into the Montana LWV website and click on Members-Only to access the [Observer Corps webpage](#).



Debunking Misinformation in 2024

By Ann Gilkey

On November 6, the Helena League and Lewis & Clark Library hosted "Preparing for the Flood: Misinformation in 2024." University of Montana journalism Professor Lee Banville presented to almost 200 people in person and on Zoom.

Professor Banville engaged and entertained the audience while explaining how to recognize misinformation on social media and in political ads. He distinguished personal opinions from disinformation (intentional misstatement of facts) and misinformation (getting the facts wrong).

Banville addressed how to politely debunk false information which harms our democracy, while impressing upon the viewers that we each have our own biases and are hardwired to want to believe a narrative which supports our personal values and views. He admonished all to be careful when "debunking" misinformation to not disparage the person, and to acknowledge truth that often coincides or correlates with misinformation.

The presentation with slides is posted on the [League of Women Voters of Montana](#) website or click on the image below. The LWVHA intends to host two more presentations in this series before the primary election in 2024. Stay tuned!



Lee's Lifeboats for the Coming Flood of Misinformation

Best Fact-Checking Websites

In the age of information, verifying the accuracy of news and claims is essential. Here are some of the best fact-checking websites, trusted for their rigorous analysis and commitment to the truth:

1. [Snopes](#) — Snopes has investigated a wide range of claims, from urban legends to political statements since 1994.
2. [PolitiFact](#) — Run by the journalistic think tank Poynter Institute and focused on fact-checking political statements and claims.
3. [FactCheck.org](#) — A project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center.
4. [The Washington Post Fact Checker](#) — Uses a "Pinocchio" rating system from one to four.
5. [BBC Verify](#) — Focuses on verifying claims related to global news, politics, and major events.
6. [AFP Fact Check](#) — Operated by Agence France-Presse (AFP), it verifies global news and misinformation often in multiple languages.
7. [OpenSecrets.org](#) — Focuses on fact-checking claims related to campaign finance, lobbying, and political influence from the nonpartisan Center for Public Integrity.
8. [Lead Stories Fact Check](#) — Uses analysis of what is trending to identify social media content gaining traction and then employs journalists to examine the claim.

When using fact-checking websites, it is important to cross-reference information and consider multiple reputable sources for a comprehensive understanding of a topic.

These websites are valuable tools in the fight against misinformation and provide an extra layer of credibility and accuracy in today's information landscape.

[Download a copy of Lee's Lifeboats handout.](#)

Panel Gives Webinar on Local Government Review in 2024

By Mary “Mickey” Harlow

The Helena League Local Government Study Committee provided an opportunity for participants across the state and for the public to learn more about the local government review process at our October 16th member meeting held at Lewis & Clark Library.



Participants were provided an overview of the process for the upcoming 2024 Montana State Constitution-required ten-year review of the structure of both Montana cities and counties form of government.

This process is unique to Montana. Participants were cautioned to remember that the review was not an evaluation of people in public office and in the different departments of the city or county; it is a review of the structure and form of current city and county governments to ensure they meet the needs of the people now and into the future.

The expert speakers participating in the Zoom meeting were Dan Clark, Director, Local Government Center at Montana State University; Thomas Jodoin, Deputy Director, Montana League of Cities and Towns, and Eric Bryson, Executive Director of the Montana Association of Counties.

Learn more and stay up to date on the 2024 Local Government Review in Montana by visiting:

[MT LWV webpage on Local Government](#)

[MSU Local Government Center](#)

[MT Voter Review](#)

[Download Dan Clark’s Slides from our October webinar.](#)

Timeline for 2024-2026 Voter Review Process

- **March 11, 2024** Deadline for governing bodies to call for local government review
- **June 4, 2024** Primary election citizens vote on whether or not they want to conduct local government review
- **June 18, 2024** Beginning of study commission candidate filing
- **August 12, 2024** Last day for local government review commission candidates to file declaration of nomination by 5:00 p.m.
- **November 5, 2024** Study commission election
- **Late November** Study commissioners have their first meeting and are sworn in no later than 10 days after the election to the study commission is declared or certified



VOTE411.ORG

Non-partisan, personalized voting information you need

By Becky Piske

The VOTE411 Committee successfully entered candidate questions for all the November 2023 Helena and East Helena elections. The only contested race was for Helena Citizens Council District #1: four positions to be filled with 5 candidates.

All five candidates responded to our invitation to answer questions, which linked into the VOTE411 website.

Two of the positions were write ins, which made our website particularly useful to the HCC District #1 voters, because write-in candidates’ names are not listed on the ballot.

Few voters submitted their absentee ballots; it was a confusing election. But one of the candidates called to let us know he was referring citizens to our VOTE411 website. All Helena City Commissioner and East Helena Council candidates were invited to respond, but alas, only Commissioner Andy Shirtliff responded to our invitation by entering his question responses into the Voter Guide.

Of course, the big focus for our committee is preparing for the 2024 elections. We will start gathering information for 2024 elections and look for ways to use the website as an ongoing resource to voters and, hopefully, potential candidates. We want to work closely with the other committees to get the word out about VOTE411.

Along with our sister Leagues in Missoula, Bozeman, and Billings, we’ll use VOTE411 to empower Montana citizens to vote.

Helena LWV Launches Formerly Incarcerated Voters Project

By Rebecca Johnson

Helena LWV was awarded a grant in 2023 from the US LWV to promote voter registration of formerly incarcerated voters in Montana. We designed Montana-specific voting posters and bookmarks with the outstanding work by Haley McKnight utilizing her graphic designer skills. The posters and bookmarks emphasize these voters' rights to vote as well as instructions on registering to vote using the online Montana Voter Registration Portal website at <http://mtvr.org/mwv>.

With the support of members from the Leagues in Helena, Missoula, Billings, and Bozeman, packets of these posters, bookmarks, and mail-in VR forms in pocket folders were distributed to 22 parole/probation offices and 8 pre-release centers throughout Montana. These voting materials will now be publicly available to voters visiting these offices.

We partnered with Nicole Gomez from Montana Women Vote to gain approval from the Department of Corrections for this project, making contact with all of these offices, creating voting materials for these community members, preparing 30 packets for mailing, and writing an introductory letter to all of these facilities.

Each of the city Leagues received additional voting posters and bookmarks to distribute in their local areas. Thank you to the Helena League members who assisted in numerous ways to make this project successful: Becky Piske, Cherri Jones, Mary Johnson, Clare Kearns, Janet Seymour, and Rebecca Johnson.

Over the past month, Becky Piske, Clare Kearns, Rebecca Johnson, and Nicole Gomez with Montana Women Vote have visited the county jail several times to successfully register many eligible voters to vote. We are the first in the state to offer these voter registration services to folks in jail with strong support from the staff at the county jail. Pat Bik joined our team of volunteers to begin this voter registration work in December.

SAVE THE DATE!

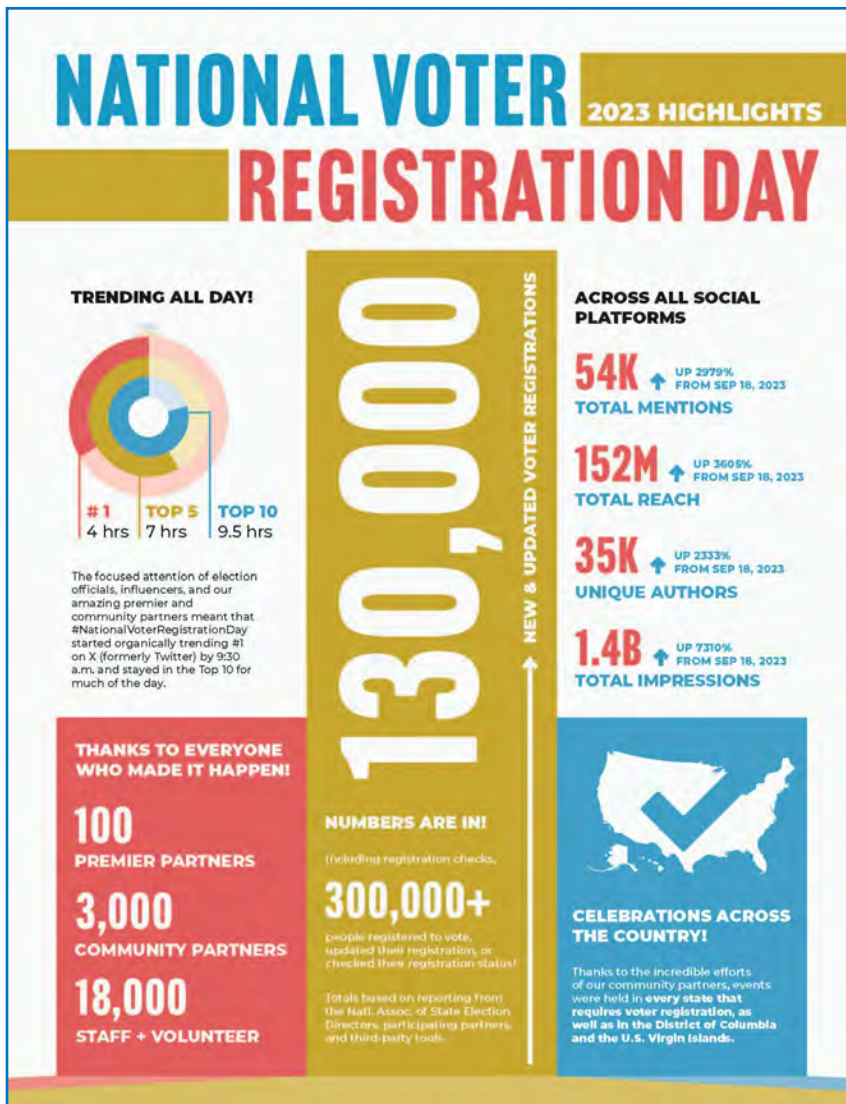
Monday, February 12, 2024

*Voter Registration Volunteer
Kick-Off Party*

News from the VR Front

League member Laura Gerlach has been working closely with Rebecca Johnson to get all the plans in place for the biggest voter registration effort by Helena League members. **Our goal in 2024 is to register at least 1,000 voters in the Helena area during the upcoming Election Year.** We will need all the help possible to register this many voters in 2024. Please consider volunteering to register voters. It is fun, easy, and very rewarding work.

Come to the Voter Registration Kick-off on Monday, February 12th! Stay tuned!



National Voter Registration Day in Helena

An enthusiastic team of volunteers—League members and non-members alike—registered **48** voters on National Voter Registration Day, September 19, 2023.

Covering 12 different locations throughout Helena were Becky Piske, Clare Kearns, Lynn Hinch, Patti DeLauter, Rebecca Johnson, Mary Johnson, Darien Scott, Dick Thweatt, Patti Borneman, Jane Kollmeyer, and Nancy Perry.

LWVHA Communications Committee Member Hadley Scoles turned 18 just in time to register to vote on National Voter Registration Day. Congratulations Hadley!

Outstanding teamwork by all!



Now is the time to get involved to help register eligible Montanans to vote.

If you are interested in helping with voter registration, please contact Rebecca at (406) 223-4300 or send her an email: 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.