



VOTER

February 2026

<https://my.lwv.org/washington/benton-franklin-counties>

LWVUS 106th Birthday Lunch Celebration - *The State of Immigration Locally*

Please join us as we celebrate the League of Women Voter's 106th birthday with a timely *Lunch and Learn*. Our presentation/discussion is on local immigration issues, ICE, deportation orders and more. The national news can be divisive but how is this affecting our community? Carla Chiotti, Donna Kary, Sonee Wilson, Carol Larkin and Glenda Williams (also members of the Tri-Cities Immigration Coalition TCIC) will help us understand what is happening locally. Donna and Sonee are new LWV members! This is a great time to invite your partner, friends, or neighbor.

Thursday February 19, 1 pm, CG Public House, 9221 W. Clearwater Avenue, Kennewick
There is a maximum of 30 so RSVP early to reserve your spot, we will order off the lunch menu.

Please RSVP to Polly Parton by Sunday February 15th. Text or leave a message 509-551-3818

LWV of Washington Newsletters – Polly Parton

Are you signed up for the LWVWA newsletters? Go to the State website:

(<https://www.lwvwa.org> and click on *About Us*, then *Member Newsletters*)

- **In League** – with member content to make the most of your League membership, once monthly on the third week
- **The Evergreen Voter**- with updates on elections, activities and events, every other month
- **Resisting Threats to Democracy** – how to resist threats to democracy, every 2nd and 4th week (not active while **The Legislative Action Newsletter** is published)
- **The Legislative Action Newsletter** - with key issues and action alerts through the State Legislative Session

Program Planning January 17 – Polly Parton

We had great discussions (with food!) on Program Planning and if our LWVBF positions should be reviewed for timeliness. Ideas for local education programs and topics for Table Talk included: Anna King or Tracci Dial on saving local news, Boys & Girls Club involvement (Brianna H. works for them), upcoming elections and the Benton and Franklin County dispute over the Juvenile Justice Center. We suggested combining Support, Advocacy and Resource Center (SARC) and Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) into a comprehensive presentation. Richard Badalamonte is our resource for this. The impact of data centers on power and water supplies could be done later in the year with both pro and con viewpoints.

Polly noted LWVWA is asking us to adopt and send the form for concurrence of Washington's study of *The Rights of Immigrants* as a National Position. The board voted on this earlier in the year.

Carla Chiotti, as one of several members involved with Tri-Cities Immigration Coalition TCIC, explained the whistle campaign, how to video ICE encounters and where to report encounters. This was supported as a timely topic for our February 106th Birthday Lunch. Lora Rathbone explained the Washington Legislative session, how to comment on bills, the power of individual testimony and meeting with our legislators.

They Represent You (TRY) brochure distribution was discussed with a reminder to remove the older versions and note how many were unused. Gracie Vally of Pasco Schools invited us to two events. We will attend/table at Virgie Robinson on January 21 but had no volunteers for Ochoa School on January 20 (conflicts with the board meeting). Diane Molleson noted there are future events. The in-person meeting was lively and fun. Our members are knowledgeable and very active yet they are eager to engage with our community to empower and educate us all.

Presidents Call – Polly Parton

Highlights of LWVWA Presidents' January 19, 2026 Call:

LWVWA 2025 Council: June 6 & 7, South Puget Sound Community College – Lacey.
Registration Fee Schedule for Council 2026 (approved at the November Board meeting):

Early Bird \$115

Volunteer \$75

New since Convention \$60 ***joined since 6/8/2025**, discounted price

Regular \$135

Early Bird Virtual \$25

Regular Virtual \$30

Unite & Rise 8.5 - Partnerships

- Playbook 4 coming soon: Deepening Electoral Power
- [Unite & Rise Playbook 3](#) – Partnerships! Great tools on the national webpage.
- LWVWA is seeking concurrence on our new positions re: welcoming immigrants.

Additional Updates from LWVUS: bold, loud, activist & influential

- December 24, 2025, the US Postal Service (USPS) released a new rule clearly defining postmarks.
- [LGBTQIA+ Rights Action Kit](#)
- LWVUS [opposes Equal Representation Act](#) adding citizen question to Census.

Updates from LWVWA

- Participation in America 250 Celebration (LWVBF will sign on for Benton/Franklin Counties).
- DEI Affinity Group: monthly meetings begin in February. Please contact Sasha Bentley and Robbie Soltz for more information: sbentley@lwvwa.org or rsoltz@lwvwa.org.
- Democracy Power Up! Training continues:
- January 20: Techniques used to sway opinion: recording available.
- February 24: Get to know Artificial Intelligence.

Scholarship Committee - Judy Golberg and Peggy Gregory

We are pleased to announce three (3) \$2500 scholarships will be presented this year during our annual meeting in May to graduating students from the public high schools in Benton and Franklin Counties whose 500-or-less word essays will be judged written to the theme: ***Is the Electoral College still relevant? Explain how it works and support your position for or against it.***

The application is ready. Please let your friends and family know if they know a student who meets the criteria above, encourage them to apply. The dollar amount is a tribute to the 250th birthday of our Country. Thanks to John Perkins and many of our generous members and friends, we were able to increase the number of scholarships. Deadline for entry is March 29, 2026.

To access the scholarship application: <https://forms.gle/7HNPfTx9M3rZFGsd7>
 Judy - jgolberg@charter.net and Peggy - palfgreg@gmail.com

Advocacy – Lora Rathbone

How we can help the LWVWA during the 2026 Washington Legislative Session.

The last week of January is LWVWA Lobby week. There will be evening programs online. Our league, along with others around the state, will also be meeting with our legislators to share the LWVWA priority bills. A small group in the 16th legislative district will be meeting

with our legislators online January 27 and 30. The 8th legislative district group has meetings on January 29 and February 3 and 4. If you are in the 8th legislative district there is still time to join them. If you are interested, please contact Diane Molleson molleson@frontier.com.

The LWVWA priority bills we will be asking our legislators to support are listed here with summaries that can be used when you send written testimony, comments, or leave a message on the hotline at 1-800-562-6000.

SB 5400/HB1836 - Supporting Local News Journalism. This bill calls for a surcharge (1.22%) on search engines and social media platforms that would raise an estimated \$20 million annually to benefit both nonprofit and for-profit publications and broadcasters. It does not call for a tax on individuals or businesses, unless those businesses are social media platforms or search engines that gross more than \$5 million a year.

HB 1916 - Protect Voters from Mass Registration Challenges. Many mass challenges rely on unreliable data. This bill would protect voters by restricting who can bring a registration challenge and by requiring proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the challenged voter is not qualified to vote. Individuals who make false statements or frivolously challenge a voter, either before or during the election, may be subject to criminal penalties.

HB 2238 - Concerning Statewide Food Security. There is a need for a comprehensive program to address multiple factors contributing to food insecurity in Washington State. Many people in Washington experience food insecurity while food is wasted in fields or is sent to landfills. A Food Security Strategy would help farmers and preserve agriculture lands.

SB 5906 - Protect Washingtonians in Sensitive Public Spaces. Provisions were requested by the Attorney General to clarify and strengthen the existing “Keep Washington Working” Act.

- Requires a warrant signed by a judge for entry into nonpublic areas.
- Restricts public institutions from collecting or sharing personal information related to immigration status.
- Ensures that all residents, regardless of status, can access schools, daycares, health care facilities, and courthouses without fear of encountering immigration enforcement.
- Requires certain areas to be designated as “nonpublic” to prevent federal agents from entering without a warrant or order signed by a judge.

We included information on other LWVWA bills in the meeting confirmation message so our legislators will know we also want them to support [HB 2515/SB 6171 Large energy use facilities – data centers](#), [SB 6026/2580 Concerning Housing](#), and [HB 2173/ SB 5855 Prohibiting Facemasks in Law Enforcement](#).

If you haven't already, please [sign up for the LWVWA weekly legislative newsletter](#) . This list of action alerts that are only distributed during Washington's legislative session arrives on Sunday evening. They make it quick and easy for all of us to participate. You can find descriptions of all of the bills the LWVWA is following, along with when action is needed at <https://lwvwa.org/2026Issues>. The session ends in mid-March, so please don't wait!

LWVBF Treasurer's Report – Carla Ciotti, Treasurer

LWVBF Treasurer's Report – November and December 2025

As of November 30, 2025:

Checking is	\$6619.40
<u>Savings is</u>	<u>1,857.52</u>
Total	\$8476.92

As of December 31, 2025:

Checking is	\$6653.21
<u>Savings is</u>	<u>1857.54</u>
Total	\$8510.75

Income:

Membership dues	\$ 188.26
Member donations	\$ 123.52
Savings interest	<u>.03</u>

Total income: \$311.81

Expenses:

There were no expenses in November or December.

Membership Dues and Donations: In November and December we received renewals from 14 members and dues for 3 new members. Thank you!

Education Fund: We received an update on our Education Fund account at the end of December. Three members donated a total of \$3000 to our fund. The balance of our 501(c)3 Education Fund is now \$19,894.54. Our league greatly appreciates the members who have donated.

To donate to the Education Fund: Members can donate to our education fund by sending a check to: **LWVWA Education Fund**. The address is 1511 Third Avenue, Suite 801, Seattle, WA, 98101, Attention: Ed Fund Treasurer. **Please note on the check or separately that your donation is for the Benton-Franklin League Education Fund.** Donations to the Education Fund are tax deductible.

To donate to our local league: Members can donate to the League of Women Voters of Benton and Franklin Counties by either writing a check to LWVBF, P.O. Box 765, Richland, 99352 or clicking the Donate button on our web page and using PayPal <https://my.lwv.org/washington/benton-franklin-counties>.

LWV Membership Renewal: Members will be notified by LWVUS 60 days and 30 days before their renewal date and again on the renewal date. Members will be considered active members for 60 days beyond their renewal date (the grace period). If members do not renew within that grace period, they will be dropped from the national roster and our local league's email list. If you have questions or need to know when your membership is due for renewal, please contact Carla at (509) 521-2158 (text is fine) or cchiotti@gmail.com.

Education Fund – Carla Ciotti, Treasurer

Education Fund Usage

Several members have generously contributed to our 501(c)3 Education Fund administered by the League of Women Voters Washington. In fact, our account now is close to \$20,000! This has allowed our local league to give scholarships to many graduates in Benton and Franklin Counties over the last few years. This year our scholarship committee will grant scholarships of \$2,500 to three deserving students!

For the last several years, LWVBF has used the education fund only for Marilyn Perkins Scholarships. But education fund monies can also be used for other educational purposes. For example, education funds can be used to print TRY's (They Represent Us) pamphlets, to purchase tabling supplies, and to cover room costs for Table Talks or presentations. Going forward, if you would like your donation to the education fund to only be used for the scholarship program, please send a note along with your check; your donation will be earmarked for scholarships. You may also notify the treasurer of your intent. Donations that are not designated for the scholarship program may be used for other educational projects. If you have any questions, please contact me. Carla Chiotti, Treasurer cchiotti@gmail.com or (509) 521-2158.

Communications Corner

Celebrating 106 Candles – Bree Bowen

Happy birthday, League of Women Voters! While many of us know that the League of Women Voters was officially founded on February 14, 1920, some of you may be surprised to learn that the League of Women's Voters *Washington* was formed less than a year later. The cities of Seattle and Tacoma were the first official local leagues, and the League's founding purpose was not simply to celebrate the victory of women's suffrage but to ensure that women understood how to use their vote effectively. In the early days, the League of Women Voters of Washington supported state legislation pertaining to protection of children in fields of labor (lobbying for child labor laws), women's health and education.

The founding of the League of Women Voters marked not only a turning point in women's history but also a lasting commitment to the health and fairness of American democracy, and in my humble opinion, has been both on the right side of history and ahead of the curve for over 100 years: the LWV was an early and leading advocate for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the LWVWA was behind the push for Motor Voter Laws (registering to vote when getting a driver's license in Washington state), being one of the first civic groups to officially recognize environmental protection as a democracy issue (climate action, clean water and air laws, and environmental justice), championing transparent redistricting processes, and beyond women's suffrage, the LWV supported equal pay, reproductive rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) far before the majority of the country.

So raise a glass of local wine, or grab a cupcake and toast to the League of Women Voters-looking better than ever at 106!

Protecting Representation in a Changing Legal Landscape - Richard Badalamente

The League of Women Voters (LWV) is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to protecting and expanding voting rights and ensuring **that everyone is represented in our democracy**. Nonpartisan does not mean neutral on democracy itself. The League has long opposed political and racial gerrymandering because distorted electoral maps undermine fair representation, weaken accountability, and dilute the voices of voters.

This work has become more urgent as federal guardrails protecting voting rights have eroded. In *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019), the US Supreme Court ruled that claims of partisan gerrymandering present "political questions" beyond the reach of federal courts. While the Court acknowledged that extreme partisan gerrymandering is incompatible with democratic principles, it declined to provide a federal remedy. The practical effect of *Rucho* was to weaken long-standing protections against maps drawn primarily to entrench political power rather than reflect voters.

That trajectory continues in the Court's current consideration of *Callais v. Louisiana*. If the Court rules in favor of the plaintiffs, the decision could significantly weaken Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which prohibits voting practices that dilute the voting strength of racial or language minority groups. Such a ruling would also narrow the practical force of the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, making it harder to challenge discriminatory redistricting that operates through effect rather than explicit intent.

In light of these developments, the League's role at the state and local level is more important than ever. Where federal protections fall short, state constitutions, courts, legislatures, and citizen advocacy become the front line of defense. The LWV must continue—and intensify—its work to promote fair maps, transparent processes, and inclusive participation so that every voter's voice counts and every community is fairly represented.

Anti-Voter State Level Action Shaping the 2026 Midterm Elections – Richard Badalamente

As the 2026 midterm elections approach, efforts at the state level are increasingly focused on reshaping election rules in ways that can influence who votes and how votes translate into political power. These efforts fall into two broad categories: restricting access to the ballot and structurally favoring party candidates.

In Washington State, where all elections have been conducted by mail for over a decade, there is a move to dismantle the vote-by-mail system entirely. In 2025 an initiative was promoted to end universal vote-by-mail and require in-person voting, coupled with documentary proof of U.S. citizenship for voter registration. Critics argue that such requirements disproportionately burden elderly voters, rural residents, people with disabilities, students, and lower-income citizens, despite no evidence of widespread voter fraud in Washington's elections.

Similar strategies are being pursued nationally. Organizers in several states have advanced proof-of-citizenship laws modeled on the federal SAVE Act, tighter voter registration deadlines, limits on ballot drop boxes, and stricter signature-matching rules for absentee ballots. These measures often increase ballot rejection rates and reduce participation among historically underrepresented groups. Ongoing litigation in states such as Mississippi seeks to invalidate long-standing rules allowing mail ballots postmarked by Election Day to be counted if received later.

Courts have repeatedly pushed back on these efforts. Federal judges have blocked attempts by the administration and allied groups to impose proof-of-citizenship requirements or Election Day receipt mandates that conflict with state election law. The U.S. Supreme Court has also intervened selectively, allowing some state-level proof-of-citizenship provisions while reaffirming federal protections under the National Voter Registration Act.

Beyond voter access, partisan gerrymandering remains a powerful tool. After the Supreme Court removed federal courts from policing partisan gerrymanders, legislatures have drawn maps that entrench partisan advantage.

Taken together, these actions represent a coordinated strategy to shape electoral outcomes before a single ballot is cast.

What can you do? Stay informed. Speak out. Be an active, civic-minded citizen.

Book Club – Polly Parton

Our December book club pick was *The Wedding People* by Alison Espach. The book's protagonist, Phoebe Stone, checks in at the Inland Inn, where she has made up her mind to end her life, but a chance personal connection changes everything. *The Wedding People* turned out to be an interesting and unexpected read about a heavy subject. We skipped

January but on February 9th we will review *James* by Percival Everett. It's a new take on an old book.

Join us the 2nd Monday each month at 6 pm via Zoom by emailing or texting Polly Parton to be added to the link. We keep discussions to one hour. Please join in even if you did not squeeze the book into your schedule. pparton34@gmail.com or 509 -551-3818

Calendar of Events

February

9 – Book Club via Zoom

17 – LWVBF Business and Planning Meeting/Board Meeting via Zoom

19 – LWVBF Birthday Lunch, RSVP to Polly Parton by February 15th

OFFICERS:

President: Polly Parton

1st Vice President: Ruvine Jimenez

2nd Vice President: Michelle Pirotte

Secretary: Diane Molleson

Treasurer: Carla Chiotti

ELECTED DIRECTORS:

Margie Bass

Brianna Harty

Marci Palmer

Mary Shaw

Glenda Williams

Shirley Sonnichsen

APPOINTED DIRECTORS:

Lora Rathbone

JoAnne Dimond

Leona Hassing

Beverly Johnson-Torelli

Richard Badalamente

Emily Dirkes

Mailing Address:

League of Women Voters of Benton and
Franklin Counties

P.O. Box 765, Richland, WA 99352

Email: lwv.of.bf@gmail.com

Instagram: [lwv.of.bf](https://www.instagram.com/lwv.of.bf)

Facebook: [League of Women Voters of
Benton & Franklin Counties](https://www.facebook.com/LeagueofWomenVotersofBentonFranklinCounties)

U. S. Constitution

The Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments)
was ratified December 15, 1791.

Amendment 1.

Congress shall make no law respecting an
establishment of religion, or prohibiting the
free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom
of speech, or of the press, or the right of the
people peaceably to assemble, and to petition
the Government for a redress of grievances.