

LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] OF MONTEREY COUNTY "THE VOTER" NEWSLETTER

"Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy" / February 2026, Volume 98, Number 4

Wednesday, February 11th, 2026 "Strengthening Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism and Accessibility"

The League of Women Voters of Monterey County will present a free talk titled: "Strengthening Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Today's Changing World." The speaker is **Jacinto Salazar III, Director IDEAA** (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility), at **Monterey Peninsula College**.

This presentation will explore the current state of equity in higher education within today's complex political landscape. As institutions face increased scrutiny and shifting social expectations, how can they support and sustain equity-centered efforts with courage, collaboration, and a clear sense of purpose? Drawing from both campus and personal experiences, and national trends, Dr. Jacinto Salazar, will provide practical insights for sustaining momentum, hope, and integrity in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Shelley Sweet



In-Person Lunch & Learn, Wednesday, February 11th

at the **Unitarian Universalist Church** <http://uucmp.org> 490 Aguajito Road / Carmel CA 93923

Topic "**Strengthening Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**"

11:30 am **Doors Open & Registration Begins**

12 noon **Lunch** (optional) / 12:30 to 1:30 **Presentation**

Optional lunch is \$25 per person: grilled salmon, rice, Greek salad, hummus, pita bread, and baklava dessert by **Chef Faris Nimry, International Cuisine of Pacific Grove**.

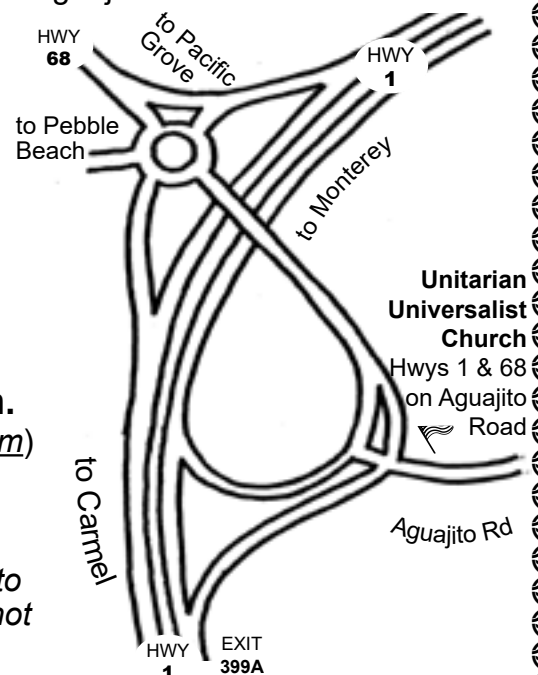
Reservations for lunch are required

and can be made through **Monday, February 9th**.

(Bev Bean: phone 236-1611 or e-mail beverlygb@gmail.com)

Pay at the door for lunch; meeting/presentation is **FREE**.

Reminder to Members: Reservations are a commitment to the caterer with a minimum number of attendees, and cannot be cancelled by the League after Sunday, January 11th.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: DEFENDING OUR RIGHT TO VOTE

For those of us who pay attention to current events, there is much to deserve our attention right now, especially events that have implications for the rule of law and integrity of our Constitution. The pure number of human rights violations covered by the news can be overwhelming and challenge anyone's ability to focus.

At the same time, we are headed into an important election year. ***The most powerful and focused way to defend our rights is to vote.*** When we



select people to represent us and vote for initiatives that align with our priorities and values, we can broadly defend ourselves against threats to our rights, rather than try to tackle them one at a time.

If voting is so powerful, then defending voting rights is the most powerful action of all. Read **Arlene Guest, Voter Service Chair's**, article (opposite page) summarizing current challenges to voting rights that deserve our undivided attention.

Dennis Mar & Tama Oliver, LWVMC Co-Presidents

ALERT! PROPOSAL TO OPEN OUR COAST TO OIL DRILLING

On Tuesday, January 20th, many of our **LWVMC Members** tuned into **Congressman Jimmy Panetta's Telephone Townhall** to discuss the **US Department of Interior's Five-year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program Draft Proposal**.



This proposal includes the sale of six leases off California's coast, **including two leases off our Central Coast**. It could be the first step in a process to open our coastline to offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling, which would negatively impact our local communities and coastal economy. We remember the **Santa Barbara oil spill** and learned that newer drills can go even deeper and do more damage (<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/28/688219307/how-californias-worst-oil-spill-turned-beaches-black-and-the-nation-green>).

Experts from **Save our Shores** and the **Monterey Bay Aquarium**, and all the commenting members of the public agreed that opening our coastline to offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling would negatively impact coastal wildlife, the environment, tourism, fishing, jobs, and recreation. It would

erase billions from our economy while leading to increased greenhouse gases.

What can we do to fight back against such a dangerous proposal? Many of us sent **comments opposing the proposal** to the **Bureau of Ocean Energy Management** before the

comment period deadline on January 23rd. There will be more such opportunities as revised versions of the plan emerge. Also, we can:

Remain educated and engaged, including showing up at townhalls or meetings on the topic.

Work to update and strengthen federal, state and local regulations designed to protect the beauty and bounty of the 19th Congressional District, including upholding the spirit of the national marine sanctuaries.

Elect those who understand how oceans work and why we must protect them.

Support and collaborate with organizations and leaders who protect our coast.

Use our social media to spread the word.

Sharon Miller



SPOT & STOP VOTER SUPPRESSION



Voter Suppression—we've all heard this term but what should

we be on the lookout for in the upcoming election season? It can take various forms, from long lines and a shortage of polling places, to voter ID laws and voter roll purges. In this

article I present an overview of some important legislation and court cases that are pending. One of these is a Mississippi case, **Watson vs the Republican National Committee**, which will be decided by the Supreme Court in June (<https://www.scotusblog.com/cases/case-files/watson-v-republican-national-committee/>).

Ballot Arrival Deadlines

This case challenges states' ability to count ballots that are received after the day of the election. 29 states have such procedures including California, which counts ballots received up to seven days after the election, as long as the ballots are postmarked by Election Day. The League has filed an amicus brief in this case, along with other organizations representing groups such as disabled people and Native Americans.

An article by the **Native American Rights Fund**, (NARF, narf.org), gives an example in Arizona where a ballot mailed from a voter on the Navajo Nation in Window Rock, Arizona is routed to Gallup, New Mexico, then Albuquerque, New Mexico, then Phoenix, Arizona, then Show Low, Arizona, and then—finally—to the county seat in St. Johns, Arizona! The amount of time it takes to complete this circuitous route means that the time is not only long but unpredictable.

Requiring Identification

Voter ID laws that would require voters to show identification when voting have been passed in many states. One was introduced in the California Assembly last year (AB 25) called the **Election Integrity Act** (https://calmatters.digitaldemocracy.org/bills/ca_202520260ab25).



[org/bills/ca_202520260ab25](https://calmatters.digitaldemocracy.org/bills/ca_202520260ab25)). In particular, **this type of law suppresses the vote among women** (who may have a different married name from the name on their birth certificate), or **people who do not have a passport**. It also presents difficulties for transgender

people who do not present as the sex officially stated on their birth certificate, passport or other identification. **This bill would also have purged voter rolls, which would have made it harder for infrequent voters to vote.** Fortunately, this bill was stopped with the help of the **League of Women Voters California**, but an initiative is currently in the signature-gathering stage of qualifying for this November's ballot.

But at the Federal level, the **SAVE Act (Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, lwv.org/blog/safeguard-american-voter-eligibility-save-act-trick)** would require documentary proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate or passport, when registering for federal elections in all states. The bill passed the House last year but hasn't been taken up by the Senate.

Voting Disinformation

Another method of voter suppression is using **misleading or false information**, such as disinformation about when or how to vote. For example, you may remember a case involving robocalls using President Biden's AI-generated voice telling Democrats not to vote in the New Hampshire primary, and to save their vote for the general election. The use of AI has skyrocketed since then, and there is no doubt that people will find new creative ways to use AI to suppress the vote.

The League's mission of educating voters remains more important than ever!

Arlene Guest,
Voter Service Committee Chair

Monterey County Sheriff's Department and Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE)

At 1:30 on January 27, the **Monterey County Board of Supervisors** met in the Salinas Board Chambers in regards to the Sheriff's TRUTH Act Report for 2025 (the Sheriff's Department is the only county agency still cooperating with ICE). California Law under the TRUTH and the TRUST Acts (preventing local jails from wastefully holding people for extra time, solely for deportation purposes) limit local law enforcement cooperation with ICE unless those in jail are convicted or charged with certain crimes.

Other counties with civilian oversight of the Sheriff's Department have been more successful in stopping ICE cooperation than Monterey County has been. Our League had observers at the meeting and will provide a report in the March Voter. For more information or an update, contact Sharon Miller or go to: <https://www.countyofmonterey.gov/home>



USPS Postmarking of Ballots

The US Postal Service will no longer necessarily postmark mail at your local post office

on the day you mail it. Instead, it may be postmarked when it reaches a regional processing center, which may be days later (<https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2025-20740.pdf>).

This will affect many transactions, including vote-by-mail. California election law refers to a "postmarked by" date for mail-in ballots, so this change in postmark protocol will most effect rural corners of Monterey County. Our LWV of Monterey County will want to **encourage the use of community drop boxes and to advise voters to mail their ballots at least a week before the deadline.** It is still to be determined whether asking for a manual postmark at the post office counter is feasible.



Housing Activities, Monterey County Pacific Grove City Council Housing Element

As a LWVMC Member I attended the December 17, 2025 **Pacific Grove City Council Special Zoom Meeting on Housing**, having previously emailed questions regarding trees, wildlife, local control, deadlines, alternate sites, and notifications. All were answered satisfactorily.

Further information regarding the **Carmel River Cease and Desist Order**, the **Builders Remedy**, and anticipated fines appeared to justify the Council's 6-0 approval of the Housing Element.

Public Utilities Commission (PUC)

The PUC will make a decision on **Pacific Gas & Electric's proposed rate hikes** by May 2027 (8% in 2027, and 6.1% each in 2028, 2029, and 2030).



The request does *not* include costs for wildfire mitigation, community rebuild, billing system upgrades, electric undergrounding, electricity procurement costs, fuel and purchase power costs, or the **Diablo Canyon Power Plant** (DCPP).



The PUC will also hold in-person public hearings on **California American Water's rate hike request** of 24.36%. In-person hearings were at the **Sand City Council Chambers** on January 13, and virtual hearings set for January 28 at 2 pm and 6 pm.

Tune in by dialing 1-800-857-1917, Passcode 1673482#*1 to speak.



**Sharon Miller,
LWVMC Government/Observer Corps**



LWVMC MEMBER PROFILE: LORI BLACK OGENE



Lori Black Ogene is both local and nationwide. She graduated from **Seaside High School** and went away to earn her law degree in 1992 from **Southern University Law Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana**.

Lori then set up her practice in **Miami, Florida** where she specialised in **Family Law** handling child custody, divorce, and mediation cases, and flourished in her field.

Lori married a tennis professional from Nigeria, and they had two girls (now aged 33 and 31). Lori has since parted ways with her husband. She now has a 6-year-old granddaughter.

Just when things were running like clockwork in Florida, she got restless. So in 2019, Lori moved back to her childhood playground, the Monterey Peninsula. Lori's beloved mother, who she admired for her singing and playing the piano in church, has since passed away. But her father and sister still live close-by in Marina.

Lori set up her business, **"Divorce with Dignity"** in Monterey, where she handles divorce mediation, divorce coaching, and estate planning ([https://](https://dwdignity.com/lori-black-ogene/)



DIVORCE WITH DIGNITY
A dependable ally during a difficult transition

dwdignity.com/lori-black-ogene/). She has been working on expanding her business and enlarging her connections.

The Covid years were difficult for Lori, compounded by health issues. She has had to replace both her knees (one in 2023 and one in 2024), and now needs to stay on flat ground when walking on the water's edge. She says it's easier to just enjoy meals in restaurants and go to movies in theaters with her boyfriend. Lori is now considering joining a chorus.

Lori joined our **League of Women Voters** in July, 2025 because she wanted to connect and contribute. She has previous experience working in election campaigns in Florida, so has an interest in helping to promote democracy, register voters, volunteer as a poll worker, and contributing by writing as needed.

Lori says that in the League she has found the right place to be to enlarge her connections and continue her contribution to democracy.

Sylvia Shih



"Dictatorships are one-way streets. Democracy boasts two-way traffic."

Carrie Chapman Catt

Key Leader, American Women's Suffrage movement, leading to granting women the right to vote in August 1920.

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE

After a quiet period over the holidays, the committee is meeting to organize for the coming year. At the same time, we are headed into an important election year. The most powerful and focused way to defend our rights is to vote.

League Members **Kate Egerton, Elizabeth Hall, Sandy Hoag, Carol Kaplan, Bev Kreps, Tama Olver, and Branham Rendlen** will be planning to continue the tabling at events that were successful last year, as well as considering other ways to support the League's mission to defend our democracy.

Tama Olver, Chair, Defending Democracy Committee

★ A "PLANNING POTLUCK" FOR YOUTH OUTREACH & VOTER REGISTRATION ★



Participants at the January Planning Potluck Luncheon: **Jane Meade-Roberts, Dennis Mar, Susan Courrejou, Paul Fleishman, Lauren Keen, Candy McCarthy, Michael Roberts, Ann Jaramillo, Ellie Salow, and Michelle Barth.** Supporting but unable to attend were **Heather Visscher and Tama Olver**

In **Salinas** on **January 13th**, a group of ten met for a planning potluck lunch at the home of **Jane Meade-Roberts**. The purpose was to explore initiatives to **bring more voter registration opportunities to Salinas and South Monterey County**. Our group is interested in getting **more young voters** and **new voters registered**, particularly in **South Monterey County communities**.

A developing plan envisions regular tabling events with League voter registration materials at the **Hartnell College Salinas** campus, its satellite campuses in **Soledad** and **King City**, at **Farmers**

Markets in **Seaside** and **Marina**, as well as at other sites as they and additional volunteers become available.

In anticipation of a March launch of activities, prior to the **June and November 2026 elections**, we hope to staff tables several times each month at recurring locations.

Interested in participating, or suggesting possible sites to register voters in the Salinas Valley?

Contact **Jane Meade-Roberts** or **Heather Visscher**

LWVMC STUDENT VIDEO CONTEST

Spread the word about LWVMC's ongoing high school student video contest encouraging registration and voting. Students must submit **30-60 second videos** to support voter registration for either theme: **"Ready, Set, Vote"** or **"Voting is Democracy in Action."**

Deadline to create, upload videos, and send submission and release forms ends **midnight, Thursday, February 26, 2026**. **Video Contest Overview and Rules** are at <https://tinyurl.com/3kd7563w>.

Winners to be announced **March 16, 2026** with Award Event in April (specific dates to be announced). **Prizes** for **three First Place awards** are **\$200 each**, ten **Merit awards** are **\$75 each**. Questions? Contact lwwartcontest@gmail.com

Marianne Gawain, Sandy Hoag, Shelley Sweet

VOTER SERVICE MEETING

There will be an **online (Zoom) meeting** on **Wednesday, February 4th at 7pm** to present an overview of all the voter service activities we are planning for in advance of the **2026 Primary Election**.



Voter Registration and Tabling, Youth Outreach, VOTE411, Candidate Forums, and Poll Work duties will be discussed.

Come and find out more about these opportunities, and consider volunteering for one or more activities.

No obligations and all are welcome!

Arlene Guest

JOIN OUR LEAGUE OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

www.LWVmryco.org

Any person age 16 or older may be a member of the League of Women Voters Monterey County

No set yearly dues: Suggested level \$75 / minimum \$20 (suggested for students)

Everyone is an individual member:

No household memberships (e.g., two members sharing one mailing address)

For household members, if each individual pays \$50, total is similar to former household rate.

Dues for new or renewing members by credit card or e-mail:

Create or access your existing account on the national LWV database

1. Go to **www.LWVmryco.org** / 2. Scroll down and click on the yellow button on the left side, Join/Renew/Profile/PROFILE / 3. Follow the page prompts

Dues by check via US Mail:

Write a check payable to: LWVUS / Mail to: LWVMC, PO Box 1995, Monterey, CA 93942-1995

Questions? Contact **Dennis Mar** at: LWVmryco@gmail.com



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LWVMryCo Calendar 2026



FEBRUARY

LWVMC 2026-2027

Zoom Program Planning Meeting

Monday, February 2nd

10:30 - 11:30am

Board Meeting

11:30 - 1pm

contact: Dennis Mar

LWVMC General In-Person Meeting

Wednesday, February 11th, 12 noon

**"Strengthening Diversity, Equity, and
Inclusion in Today's Changing World"**

**Guest Speaker: Jacinto Salazar III, Director,
Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism, and
Accessibility, Monterey Peninsula College**
contacts: Pam Bonsper, Shelley Sweet

Natural Resources Committee

Zoom Meeting

Thursday, February 19th, 11:30am

contact: Janet Brennan

MARCH

Board Zoom Meeting

Monday, March 2nd, 11:30am - 1pm

contact: Dennis Mar

LWVMC General In-Person Meeting

Wednesday, March 11th, 12 noon

"Water Update: Salinas Valley Basin"

contacts: George Riley, Janet Brennan

Natural Resources Committee

Zoom Meeting

"Water Planning Overview"

Thursday, March 19th, 11:30am

contact: Janet Brennan

*We are a nonpartisan, grassroots organization
working to protect and expand voting rights,
and ensure everyone is represented in our
democracy.*