

League of Women Voters Bloomington - Monroe County

League Letter – February 2017



Happy Birthday LWVB-MC!

Calendar

- Feb 1 Member meeting: Local Planning, MCPL Room 2A, 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- Feb 4 Legislative Update, City Council Chambers, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.
- Feb 13 Board meeting, Bell Trace Community Room, 7:00 p.m.
- Feb 14 LWVB-MC Anniversary 1914-2017!*
- Feb 18 LWVIN Presidents' Day, Glendale Branch Library (6101 N. Keystone Ave.), Indianapolis, 10:30a.m.-3:30p.m.
- Mar 1 Member meeting, MCPL Room 2A, 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- Mar 4 Legislative Update, City Council Chambers, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.
- Mar 22 Women's History Month Luncheon – see info within

Save the date: Annual Meeting May 3—details later

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- Reports on Voter Service*
- Reports on Membership*

Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through advocacy and education.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER – Kate Cruikshank



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As these first days of the Trump administration have unfolded, I realize how little I understand about how our government works and am wondering if you are experiencing the same sensation. There is the appearance of government by edict, and we know that's not how our system is supposed to work. But how much power does the executive actually have and in what areas? What are the checks and balances, and are they in place? How does government by the people play into this?

Interestingly, my first help with this came from a quite unexpected quarter. I have been reaching out to the Monroe County Republican Women in an attempt to understand why our League attracts so few people of more conservative views. On Monday, January 23, I was invited to speak to their group about the League. It was a small group. We ended up having a two-hour conversation related to building bridges, which I certainly enjoyed; and I believe they did as well.

Robert Hall, the head of the Grassroots Conservatives, was there to report on their activities, and he announced that on Thursday, January 26, their meeting would include a program presented by the national director of the *We the People* civic education program entitled, "Why Government? An Intimate Look at Federalist 51." You may recall that Brown County students consistently win awards in national competitions developed out of the *We the People* curriculum, which focuses on the development of our Constitution, the debates over what the structure of our government should be, and the issues that persist in our efforts to create and sustain our representative democracy. There are 87 schools in the state currently using it, among them the Bloomington Graduation School. I indicated interest, and Hall invited me to attend.

The title alone would have been sufficient to pique my interest, but the presenter, Robert Leming, had been mentioned to me by the current dean of the School of Education as a strong adult educator in civic education, so I wanted to see him in action. He was terrific-- an interactive teacher who knows constitutional history thoroughly and obviously loves guiding people to a deeper understanding of it. When he said at 8:45 pm he had to bring things to a close, one woman said she wished he'd go on all night, and many in the group clearly agreed. He is currently teaching a six-week course for adults in Fishers, and I couldn't help but wonder if he could somehow be brought to Bloomington to do the same.

This unexpected experience highlighted a couple of things for me. First, civic education is a need in the schools but clearly for adults as well. Second, taking a closer look at the development of our Constitution and the creation of our government is something that people from all across the political spectrum can do together. I am very concerned about building bridges in this badly polarized society, and this might be one step in that direction. Whether it is something the League would want to be involved in I leave to you to contemplate. That decision will be yours, not mine.

I hope that you will all try to attend the member meeting on February 1, which is an open discussion focused toward planning program for the coming year. I've invited the 19 women who indicated an interest in the League in December to attend, so perhaps we'll have the benefit of some fresh new ideas -- and some new members.

MEMBER MEETING FEBRUARY 1 – Kate Cruikshank

We have a member meeting Wednesday, February 1, in Room 2A of the MCPL at 11:30, at which I hope we can begin to sketch out some areas of work for the coming year. People all around us are expressing the desire to become more engaged politically and seeking ways in which to do it. We could be one of the avenues for that if we are ourselves actively engaged. What I hope we can discuss together is what form that activity might take.

There are large numbers of people outside the League and a few League members who are part of a growing local network ready to take action in contacting legislators about bills on particular topics. To be effective, such a network needs lots of people monitoring a few bills and reporting back to the whole group, which is what we are trying to build. Perhaps there are League members who would be interested in being part of this larger community effort. Some of our members are already engaged in such activity and would hopefully be able to share what they are doing.

Our participation in the LWVIN Ed Study consisted of three sessions of very good discussion that might be continued by those interested, looking ahead to the future work of articulating a state position.

Concerns often voiced in the past about the lack of civic education might provide another avenue to explore if there were a group of members interested in pursuing that. A bill (SB 117) has just passed out of committee to the full Indiana senate that would require that U.S. History classes include civics education and that students be required to pass the United States Civics Test prepared by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. Since civics education has been spotty to nonexistent for decades, teachers are going to be faced with trying to incorporate a curriculum about which they know very little themselves. Is there a role for the League in supporting them, perhaps with regard to local government?

I'm sure there are other possibilities and hope that you will bring those to the meeting. Although I will not be continuing as president of the League, I would like to see us get our ideas started for the coming year.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BLOOMINGTON-MONROE COUNTY CELEBRATES 103 YEARS—A Little Bit of Our History

The League of Women Voters Bloomington-Monroe County had its beginnings in April 1914, when five women officially organized the Bloomington branch of the Women's Franchise League to work for passage of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution which would give women the right to vote. In an account written for "The Bloomington League of Women Voters Pre-Easter Special Edition" of the Bloomington Telephone in 1934, one of the five, Mrs. Chester Evans, recalled that the Women's Franchise League "soon took its place among the leading educational forces in the city. Mrs. Emily Pankhurst, the famous English suffragist, and Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, veteran American suffrage worker, spoke before joint meetings of the League and the AAUW, thrilling large audiences and winning scores of women to the suffrage movement."

On February 14, 1920, scarcely a month after passage of the 19th amendment, the League of Women Voters of the United States was established at a national convention in Chicago. The Bloomington branch of the Women's Franchise League opted to join its ranks almost immediately afterward.

Among the earliest local activities of the League of Women Voters of Bloomington (the name later expanded to embrace Monroe County) was the presentation of a series of ten lectures about "The Principles of American Government," given by Professor of History James A. Woodburn, whose wife was a keen participant in the group. The League also addressed topics such as "Laws of Indiana Regarding Women;" the "Machinery of Elections;" "Needed Changes in the Form and Nature of the Ballot"; and the "Economic Basis for Woman's Suffrage." During the 1940s, the League took on "Defense Aid" and the Lend/Lease bill, as well as the organization of the Monroe County Department of Public Welfare. With a campaign entitled "Rough on Rats!" it was successful in getting the city to pass an ordinance requiring rat control. It also pressed for mandating "pure" (pasteurized) milk, assigning members to check the bacteria count in milk purchased in the city at regular intervals and then to present all the horrifying details at public meetings.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the League began publishing a handbook on government in the city and county, which came to be known as *Here's Your Local Government*. It supported school reorganization and the establishment of the Bloomington Utilities Service Board. It also spent much time and effort advocating for clean local water resources, and closely monitored the development of Lake Monroe by the Corps of Engineers.

Natural resources and the environment continued to be a focus from the 1970s onward, with the League studying and weighing in on the Hoosier National Forest, PCBs in Monroe County, and planning and zoning. In 1973-75 it worked for a zoning ordinance for the county and the area around Lake Monroe. In the 1980's it held televised debates with 8th and 9th District Congressional candidates. It established an Observer Corps, the members of which still today attend and monitor meetings of many local governmental boards and commissions.

The 1990s saw the League paying special attention to the cleanup of PCBs in the county, as well as to plans for the Hoosier National Forest and various issues related to Lake Monroe. In 1991 it published *A Study of Young At-Risk Children in Monroe County, Indiana*.

In the new century, PCBs are still an issue, and the League continues to advocate for their complete cleanup. It has studied the issue of township trustees, and is working to educate voters about Indiana's new voting laws and districts, as there are seven different state representatives for various parts of Monroe County. The Health Committee has spoken to groups about women's health issues, and they put together a presentation booklet, trained speakers, and made resources available to the League nationally for use by other local leagues. They are also leading the League in studying and advocating for affordable healthcare and end-of-life quality. Public education has also been a focus in recent years.

Throughout its entire existence the League has worked to inform local members and citizens about local, state, and national issues. During the past ten+ decades it has helped to register voters and to educate them by means of candidate questionnaires and forums, voting machine demonstrations, and sessions with local legislators. It compiles and publishes information about candidates for all local elections, published as "Keys to the Candidates" in the *Bloomington Herald Times*.

Now, 103 years after it began, the League of Women Voters of Bloomington-Monroe County is still going strong. The League is looking forward to many more years of striving to make democracy work!

Reports on Program

PLAN COMMITTEE, MONROE COUNTY ORDINANCE 2016-44 – Jim Faber

The Plan Committee met on January 11th at Juanita’s Restaurant to discuss Monroe County Ordinance 2016-44, starting with Chapter 216 which is intended to make uniform the procedures and policies that apply to all of the boards and commissions that serve Monroe County Government. The terms of the members are set at two (2) years the members must provide evidence of residency in Monroe County. The boards cannot hold a meeting unless a quorum of members is present. There are a number of other provisions that cover members and rules for these groups.

The following boards, commissions and committees were covered. Chapter 220, Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee is repealed and not replaced. Chapter 225, the Environmental Commission is created. The following groups starting with Chapter 230, the Women's Commission, are being created. Chapter 235, the Technical Services Board; Chapter 240, the Public Defender Board; Chapter 249, the Hospital Authority refers to State Law; Chapter 292 shall be repealed (whatever this is?); Chapter 433, the Electrical Contractor Registration and Plumbing Contractor Registration; Chapter 435, the Local Child Fatality Review Team for Monroe County; Chapter 440, Animal Management group; Chapter 458, the Monroe County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council; Chapter 460, the Traffic Commission; Chapter 520, the Monroe County Human Rights Ordinance; Chapter 620, the Monroe County Cemetery Commission.

The Technical Services Board will consist of 19 or 20 members, one each from each County Group. This ordinance does not appear to have any faults that were obvious to the Plan Committee.

REDISTRICTING MADE FAIRER? – George Hegeman

In November voters go to the polls and choose their public officials. But every ten years, when the census has been done, officials choose their voters--by redistricting. Historically, redistricting is done by the party that controls the State legislature. Consequently, district lines are drawn to favor that party by either corralling voters of the opposing party into awkward districts so as to minimize the number of seats the opposition can win, or by slicing up population centers dominated by members of the opposing party and joining them to districts dominated by the majority party so as to achieve the same result. This partisan redistricting perverts a process meant to equalize voting district populations into a politicized, self-dealing political weapon that undercuts democracy. Partisan redistricting, also called “gerrymandering” after the salamander-shaped district drawn to favor Elbridge Gerry in the early days of our nation, results in low voter turnout and in non-competitive races. Since it enables individuals and one party to dominate legislatures and offices for many years, it may lead to cronyism and corruption.

Recognizing the drawbacks of partisan redistricting, some states have taken the job of redistricting wholly or partially away from their legislators and placed it in the hands of judicial or citizen-based commissions.

In the spirit of reform, Representative Jerry Torr, heading up the Special Interim Commission on Redistricting, has led the way toward a fairer redistricting process in Indiana involving citizen input. He and Speaker Bosma have proposed HB1014. In the Senate, Mike Delph has put forward a somewhat similar bill, SB136. Members of the LWVIN and Common Cause, who are watching the progress of this legislation as the “Indiana Coalition for Independent Redistricting,” point out that both bills suffer from an important defect--they allow legislators to appoint a majority of Commission members. It is to be hoped that the amendment process will put citizens in charge of an independent process.

To follow this legislation and to learn the names of legislators on the Senate Election Committee or the House Elections and Apportionment Committee, so that you may contact them, visit:

<https://iga.in.gov/>

Kate Cruikshank, our president, also heads our Redistricting Committee. She will talk on legislative progress toward an independent redistricting process in Indiana on Wednesday, February 22nd, 4-5 PM in the Terrace Room of the Meadowood Retirement Center.

Reports on Voter Service

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Our next legislative updates are February 4, March 4, April 8, and May 13. They are scheduled for the City Council chambers in the Showers Building at the usual time of 9:30-11:00 a.m. Please put these on your calendar and plan to attend. We can always use assistance in tasks at the events. You can volunteer for those by contacting Kate Cruikshank.

VOTER EDUCATION ALERT

Marge Faber, our observer of the Election Board, reported that at the December Election Board meeting it was reported that many of the rejected provisional ballots in the November election were from people who thought that if they were registered in Indiana they could vote anywhere in Indiana. This especially was a student problem. The Voter Registration Office has been alerted to this misunderstanding, but League members working with voter registration need to be aware of it as well.

REPORTS ON MEMBERSHIP

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS - Ann Heath, Membership Chair

We are pleased to welcome new members and those who have resumed membership in the League this year in Bloomington-Monroe County:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| * Shelby Babcock | * Kathy Loser |
| * Tara Babcock | * Deborah Myerson |
| * Ann Birch | * "Tommie" Owens |
| * Jonna Marie Capio | * Vicki Polansky |
| * Kayla Close | * Catherine Stafford |
| * Marjorie Hudgins | * Allison Zimpfer-Hoerr |
| * Janet James | |

NEW MEMBER SPECIAL! - \$20.00

For the first time, we are pleased to offer a special membership for folks who have never been members of the League of Women Voters. This membership will begin immediately, and end on June 30, 2017. It will cost only \$20.00.

It is an easy way to learn about the League – to attend meetings and to receive all publications and action notifications.

It's a great gift for friends who would like to find out more about the League!

JOIN THE LEAGUE AS A NEW MEMBER -
(This membership will expire on June 30, 2017)

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Zip: _____ E-mail address: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell: _____

Please complete this form and return it with your check to:

League of Women Voters of Bloomington-Monroe County
P.O Box 5592
Bloomington, IN 47407

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH LUNCHEON - March 22, 2017

The annual Women's History Month luncheon is planned by the Women's History Month Luncheon Committee, which is organized by the City of Bloomington Commission on the Status of Women. [Learn more about the commission](#). Nearly 500 people from throughout the community attend the luncheon. The lunch serves as an opportunity to recognize individual and collective accomplishments of women in our community. In addition, organizations for women and women-owned businesses will exhibit at the luncheon.

The 32nd Annual Women's History Month Luncheon will be held on Wednesday, March 22, 2017, at the Bloomington-Monroe County Convention Center, 302 S. College Avenue. The doors will open at 11:15 a.m. for viewing of women's exhibits, and the program will begin at 12:00 p.m. and end at 1:30 p.m. The Woman of the Year and the Lifetime Contribution award recipients will be honored at the luncheon.

Ticket(s) to the luncheon must be purchased through the BCT Box Office located at 114 E. Kirkwood Avenue. Tickets will be available beginning January 2, 2017. BCT Box Office, hours are 11am-6pm Mon-Fri and 12-5pm Sat-Sun, or go to [Buskirk-Chumley Theater](#) for more information. Cost is \$22.50 per seat. A reserved table for eight may be purchased for \$250.00. Please include the names of the individuals that will be seated at the reserved table.

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