

League of Women Voters Bloomington - Monroe County

League Letter – January 2017



Calendar

- Jan 4 Member meeting: LWVIN Education Study Consensus Meeting and Local Planning, MCPL Room 2A, 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- Jan 7 Legislative Update, City Council Chambers, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.
- Jan 9 Board meeting, Bell Trace Community Room, 7:00 p.m.

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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.



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PRESIDENT'S LETTER - Kate Cruikshank

Our newsletter is once again brief, and I'm to be blamed for whatever errors are in it, as Doris is on her way to Brussels. Once again I'm sharing some book notes from my attempt to find possible paths out of the wilderness or to at least get a better sense of what is in the wilderness. Again, please consider sharing book notes in future newsletters. I'm hoping that Doris will solicit material from all of you when she is back and looking toward the February newsletter.

My focus over the next four months is going to be twofold. First, I'll be monitoring bills introduced in the state legislature as they appear (the first 105 bills introduced by senators are already on the Indiana General Assembly website, www.iga.gov) and alerting you to important ones. There is already one that is very significant, SB 35, the summary of which states that it "Provides that a school corporation **may** use objective measures of student achievement as part of a teacher evaluation plan. (Current law provides that the use of an objective measure of student achievement **is required** as part of a teacher evaluation plan.)" In other words, school corporations will not have to use state-mandated tests for teacher evaluation; it will be up to the school corporation. The change is from "is required" to "may" and that's a huge change.

My second focus is on the need for better quality civic learning in the schools. Many of you have also commented on this need, but just saying we need it isn't going to accomplish it. I've been reading the report of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of the Schools, headed up by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and Lee Hamilton. O'Connor said that this would be the project of her retirement, and they have produced an excellent report, *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of the Schools*, that talks about what quality civic learning looks like; which knowledge, skills and dispositions should result from it; and what has to happen at all levels to get that embedded in the schools.

In 1977-1979 I headed up a law-related education project for the State of Wisconsin, which was trying to get teachers to incorporate what was essentially civic learning into the classroom. It was nearly impossible in light of the many demands on their time and the fact that they themselves lacked the background and experiences that would make introducing that material a doable task. Things are no different now. A history of civics courses will point to the 1960s as the time when the required three courses of civics, US government, and problems in democracy disappeared from the curriculum, but the central problem I faced in high school in the late 1950s was that they were all taught by coaches with no particular interest in them, a situation that a current junior at Bloomington High School South assures me has not changed. So that means that teachers coming out of such a school experience would have no background to draw upon.

So I'm focusing on the problem of how quality professional development for teachers could be supported in the area of civic learning and having some interesting conversations with potential stakeholders. I've gathered information on the We the People project, which you'll find in a little article below. I would love to see a group of us explore how the League might become involved in this. Please let me know if you would like to be part of that: cruiksha@indiana.edu.

Best wishes for the new year--

-- Kate

Call for Nominations

SEEKING BOARD MEMBERS FOR 2017-2019

Just a reminder once again that our nominating committee will be seeking nominations for president, secretary, and three directors.

Albrecht Holschuh will continue as vice president, as will Carol McGregor as treasurer and George Hegeman and Ann Heath as directors. (The terms of directors Peter Kaczmarczyk and Doris Wittenburg are expiring.)

Report on Program

CIVIC LEARNING IN OUR SCHOOLS: SOMETHING TO PURSUE?

Attendees at the last LWVIN convention will remember the impressive presentation by Brown County High School student winners of the national We the People competition. Sponsored by the Indiana Bar Foundation, We the People is being used in 83 schools in 40 school corporations as well as in 18 independent or religious schools and a school of the Indiana Department of Corrections. This is impressive, but Indiana has 419 school corporations with 1859 public schools and 359 nonpublic schools, with a total enrollment of 1,133,380 students.

It is worth remembering that the reason for establishing public schools in the first place was to provide civic learning in order to ensure the continuation of democracy. This is the basic mission of compulsory schooling. Clearly we are failing miserably. Can the League have a role in supporting the development of quality civic learning for all children? If you would like to be part of a group to discuss and explore this possibility, please email Kate at cruiक्षा@indiana.edu

Report on Voter Service

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES - SAVE THE DATES!

Our legislative updates are now scheduled for the City Council chambers on January 7, February 4, March 4, April 8, and May 13 at the usual time of 9:30-11:00 a.m. Please note that the first three are on the first Saturday of the month, the last two on the second Saturday of the month. This is necessary in order to avoid conflicts with other major city events. So save the dates.

Our volunteer roster is already full for January through March, thanks to a great response to the call for volunteers. Bravo, members, for stepping up to help.

Book Notes

SEEKING THE WAY FORWARD, Part 2 - Kate Cruikshank

George Packer, *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America* is a set of biographical narratives pursued simultaneously through chunks of time from 1978 through 2012, ranging from the unskilled laborer in declining Youngstown, Ohio, to the aspiring political operative to the small town entrepreneur and with the likes of Newt Gingrich, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell and other notables sprinkled throughout, all following their own narrative lines. (One of those narratives is of Jeff Connaughton, whose book, *The Payoff; Why Wall Street Always Wins*, has just arrived at my house.) I came away from this book feeling as though I had finally gotten a picture of things as they are in the U.S. and a better understanding of how the 2016 election could have happened. It's a stunning book (National Book Award winner).

Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life* appeared in 2004, which was the reason I picked it up: someone had been telling us for 12 years what was happening and that it's part of our accepted daily life, which is unnerving to realize.

That book sent me back to one on my bookshelf that I don't think I ever got to, namely Charles Lewis' *935 Lies: The Future of Truth and the Decline of America's Moral Integrity*, published in 2014, which tracks deception in government and the collusion of the media (as well as their heroism on occasion) since LBJ and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Looking at the last 50 years, Lewis does what historians are supposed to do (he's an investigative reporter), which is point out patterns and developments that we at the time only saw as separate crises. He's done his research, and it's full of new details on just about everything.

A third book, called *Lies, Incorporated: The World of Post-Truth Politics*, by Ari Rabin-Havt and Media Matters and just published, takes the major issues that have dominated political conflict (climate change, health care, debt, immigration reform, etc.) and provides in great detail exactly who is creating the falsehoods and how they're being disseminated. It yields a pretty good list of the innocuous-sounding think tanks and nonprofits to watch out for, among other things. There are some pretty heroic investigative reporters in this one as well.

Events

CELEBRATING IRIS KIESLING

Iris Kiesling's decades of outstanding public service to our city and county were celebrated following the County Commissioner's staff time on December 13, with tables of tributes and photos on the courthouse rotunda's third floor, a set of elaborate cakes to share, a proclamation from Mayor John Hamilton, and crowds of people eager to honor Iris. Her retirement and birthday party at the UU Church on January 1 from 3:00 to 6:00 will continue the celebration of her marvelous work and the example she has set for all of us as to what it means to be a true public servant.



Mayor John Hamilton presenting the proclamation honoring Iris.



Iris tackling the array of cakes provided in her honor.

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