

WE VOTER

League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh

VOLUME 28, No. 4

JANUARY 2022



The Pittsburgh Courier honored our own Terrie Griffin, President of LWVPA as a Woman of Excellence on December 16, 2021. The dinner to award this honor was held at the Sheraton, Station Square. Eileen and John Olmsted and Annette Shimer attended the dinner.

We are delighted and pleased that Terrie and her hard work have been recognized in this way. Congratulations, Terrie!

Terrie married Mike Sable in March in Florida. More congratulations, Terrie and Mike!

PROGRAM PLANNING UNITS by Annette Shimer

Zoom sharing events:

Tuesday, Jan. 11, 7:00 - 8:00 pm

Thursday, Jan. 13, 10:00 - 11:00 am

Wednesday, Jan. 19, 1:00 - 2:00 pm

Give us one hour of your time. Share your thoughts on what is the most important and most impactful work we should do in the next two years.

Program planning is the grassroots process of recommending and selecting governmental issues for study using League principles and the transformational goals of relevance, impact, focus and culture. The *LWVUS Board recommends that Program 2022-2024 continue the Campaign for Making Democracy Work®* which includes:

- Voting Rights
- Improving Elections
- Money in Politics
- Redistricting

How will what you do impact the Campaign for Making Democracy Work?

What positions LWV already holds will you use in education and lobbying? See [Impact on Issues 2020-2022](#), page 2, to see the full range on issues LWV has adopted over the years.

For those with an extra eye to our local positions, we will take an extra 30 minutes to check our local positions especially the one on libraries.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH ROCIS by Michele Knoll

The September General Meeting introduced The League of Women Voters Greater Pittsburgh to the organization ROCIS (Reducing Outdoor Contaminants in Indoor Spaces). ROCIS originated in Western Pennsylvania funded by the Heinz Endowment; it reaches across the nation. Linda Wigington led the discussion on making our homes' air quality safer. We explored via zoom the impact air quality from the outdoors could have on our wellbeing and were then invited to join the upcoming cohort, the 49th in ROCIS' Low Cost Monitoring Project (LCMP) series.

Continued on Page 5

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

REDISTRICTING IS A MAIN FOCUS IN JANUARY



The Holidays are upon us, and the November election is behind us. It was a relatively low turnout election here in Allegheny County with just about 34% of us voting. For the most part, the election ran smoothly with a few isolated

glitches here and there. Many League members worked at the polls in a variety of capacities. Thank you to each and every one of them. League members never rest on their laurels, and we already have folks talking about how to improve our information to voters in 2022 and publicizing more robustly the valuable non-partisan information that we provide.

Speaking of 2022, we will need to keep our eye on the new Congressional and Legislative maps that will be produced based on the 2020 census data. **The Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC)**, which is responsible for drawing the State House and State Senate maps, met on November 15, 2021, and heard from a number of testifiers, including Carol Kuniholm of Fair Districts PA and a long-time League member, and David Thornburgh of the Committee of Seventy. Both testified about the need for a transparent and non-partisan process that considers comments from thousands of Pennsylvanians. There were also additional testifiers. Each brought a slight variation in their comments, but the overall theme remained the same. Be fair when drawing these maps. To watch the Hearing, you can go [here](#).

Since then, the LRC has adopted preliminary maps for the PA House and Senate. FDPA analyzed these maps

and compared them with the current maps. You can look at these maps, make comparisons, understand the schedule going forward, and submit your own comments [here](#) and [here](#). The deadline for comment is January 18. FDPA is providing Mapping Monday Open Houses on January 3 and 10 to help you look at and compare maps. This is an unstructured Zoom meeting with one or more of the FDPA mapping team. [Register here for a link and reminder.](#)

A reporter from a consortium called *Spotlight PA* has been following the redistricting process. Her reports appear in the Post-Gazette. On Monday, Dec. 27, she analyzed the proposed map for the PA Senate in detail calling it “much friendlier to incumbents.” You can read that article [here](#). These reports are worth reading.

Just announced: the LRC will hold hearings for citizens to comment on the proposed maps January 6 and 7. You can register [here](#) to speak at a hearing in person (in Harrisburg) or on Zoom. You can watch the hearings [here](#).

Congressional redistricting is under the control of the State Legislature and the Governor. Committees in both the State House and State Senate held hearings. The legislature adjourned for a break and scheduled only three working days in December: 13, 14 and 15. A map had been previously proposed and is on the House Republican Caucus web site [here](#). During those three days, two bills, HB 2146 and HB 2147, were introduced, and maps were attached, neither of which was the previously proposed map. They have been “laid on the table” for possible action in January.

Very little has been communicated about how the process will unfold in January. However, we do know that the Governor will veto any map that he considers egregiously gerrymandered. The maps for Congressional and Legislative seats must be finalized by mid-January if we are to adhere to the Election Calendar for 2022.

Typically, in December, we have a social event where League members can get together in a fun and festive atmosphere. However, given the state of uncertainty surrounding Covid-related issues in Allegheny County, we have not held that event this year.

I hope all of you are enjoying a relaxing, joy-filled time with family and friends. Best wishes for the holiday season and the New Year!

Maureen Grosheider

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The League is a nonpartisan organization whose purpose is to encourage the informed participation of citizens in government and to influence public policy through education and advocacy.

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THINGS TO REMEMBER!

1. **VOTE to be HEARD; Your VOTE is a GIFT and a DUTY.**
2. **Participate in our DEMOCRACY to Make Government Work for You**
3. **Do all you can to be an ACTIVE, INFORMED VOTER**

"Empowering Voters,
Defending Democracy"

civic.education@lwvpg.org

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BECOME A SUPER-VOTER AND VOTE IN EVERY ELECTION
"Democracy is NOT a spectator sport!"

LEAGUE MEETING STRUCTURE

Board Meetings

- ✓ **Second Monday of the month..**
Meeting: 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.,
currently by Zoom.

Local Area Unit Meetings

- ✓ **Pittsburgh Central:** Currently not meeting. Contact Martha Raak at 412-477-7572 or marbiker1@gmail.com
- ✓ **North Hills:** Currently not meeting. Contact Nancy Mott at 412-779-3089 or namott001@gmail.com
- ✓ **South Hills:** Currently not meeting. Contact Maureen Mamula at 412-760-9642 or mamula159@hotmail.com

Other Ongoing Meetings

- ✓ **Education Committee**
1st Wednesday by Zoom.
Chair is Kathy Nagle,
education@lwvpg.org or
1-814-241-8149
- ✓ **Voter Service Committee**
1st & 3rd Tuesdays, 12:30 pm.
by Zoom. Additional meetings
occasionally added as needed.
Chair is Judy Clack at
512-731-0280
voterservice@lwvpg.org
- ✓ **Gun Safety Committee**
Currently not meeting.
Contact Nancy Naragon at
412-366-2446 or
development@lwvpg.org
- ✓ **Non-fiction Book Club**
3rd Friday, 10:15 am. Meeting
place determined each month,
see calendar. Contact Joan
Cucinotta, 412-708-2335 or
joancucinotta@gmail.com

This column will be updated
as in-person meetings become
possible or as changes in
League programming are
made.

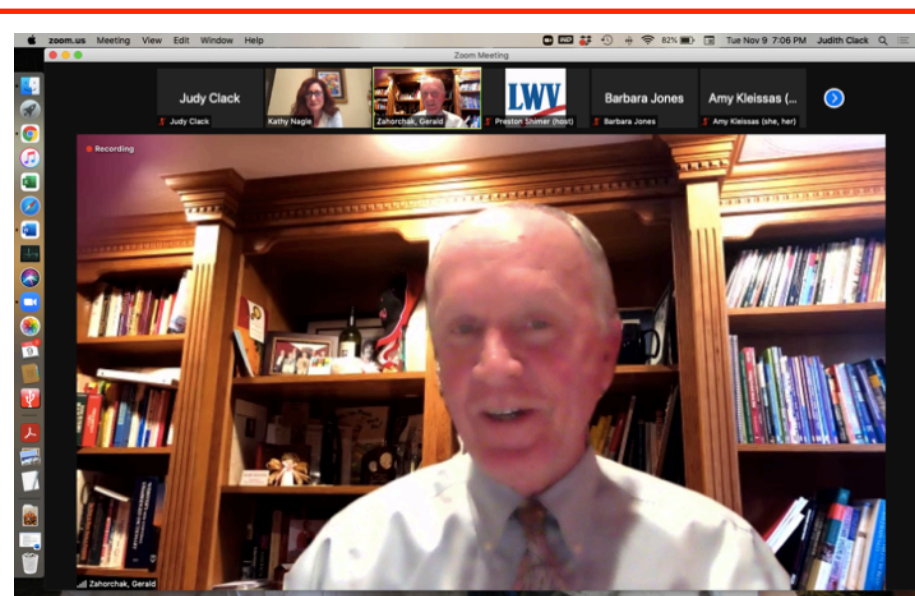
January-February Calendar

January

| | |
|--------|--|
| 4 Tue | Voter Service Committee meeting, 12:30-2:30 pm on Zoom |
| 5 Wed | Education Committee, 7:00 pm, on Zoom |
| 10 Mon | Board meeting, 12:30 pm, on Zoom |
| 11 Tue | Program Planning Unit, 7:00-8:00 pm on Zoom |
| 13 Thu | Program Planning Unit, 10:00-11:00 am on Zoom |
| 17 Mon | Advocacy Committee meeting, 11 am on Zoom |
| 18 Tue | LWVPA Government Policy Update, 7:00-8:00 pm. Register to watch here . Updates are held the third Tuesday of each month. |
| 19 Wed | Program Planning Unit, 1:00-2:00 pm on Zoom |
| 21 Fri | Non-fiction Book Club meeting, |

February

| | |
|--------|--|
| 1 Tue | Voter Service Committee meeting, 12:30-2:30 pm on Zoom |
| 2 Wed | Education Committee, 7:00 pm, on Zoom |
| 14 Mon | Board meeting, 12:30 pm, on Zoom |
| 18 Fri | Non-fiction Book Club meeting |
| 24 Thu | Program on Gun Safety. Evening. Save the date. |



Dr. Gerald Zahorchak, former PA Secretary of Education, shared his perspectives and insights on a number of education issues at the LWVPGH Zoom meeting in November, titled "What's Happening in Our Schools."

ROCIS, Continued from Page 1

My husband, Doug Krings, and I joined the cohort, thereby committing to a six-week study of our home's air quality including radon levels, particulate counts, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide levels. We took readings of these measurements twice a day, writing the results on a clipboard then sharing the results at biweekly cohort meetings. The instruments were in our family room, our bedroom, and our basement as well as a particulate meter outside on our porch.

We found that our radon levels were unacceptable reaching 18-20 picocuries per liter in our living space which is well above the acceptable range of 4.0 per the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) or 2.7 per WHO (World Health Organization). A picocurie is the measurement of radiation emitted by radon and its daughter radionuclides. These radioactive emissions are the major cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers. Living in our home for 38 years has elevated our risk of lung cancer. We moved quickly to remediate these levels. A specialized contractor will be installing radon mitigation system consisting of drilling a hole beneath the basement slab, installing an exhaust pipe and a fan that will disperse the radon above the roofline via the pipe.

Doug began running a HEPA filter in the sleeping area and built an ingenious contraption using a box fan and furnace filters to help reduce the particulate levels which were elevated at times. We found that cooking added to the particulate load. We also have a Yellow Lab, Piper, who most likely adds to our particulate count. Adding to these indoor sources are the outside influences of being near Neville Island, an industrial area, and two interstates.

We have just completed our time in the cohort and are working to use our stove fan more often, to reduce the impact of our cooking on the indoor particulate counts, running the box fan furnace filter device, and using our HEPA filter routinely.

ROCIS will have an informative zoom on November 22nd and another November 23rd prior to starting the next cohort. You can find out more about ROCIS at [ROCIS.org](https://rocis.org). As Advocacy Director for the League, I encourage you to be your own activist and find out how to improve your homes' air quality while forming relationships with likeminded citizen advocates from across the country.

You can also monitor Pittsburgh's air quality in a real time by downloading the Smell Pittsburgh App on your phone. This App allows you to report bad odors to the Allegheny County Health Department. When you pick up your phone and report a foul smell, the App generates an email that is sent to the Health Department. You will also receive notifications of smells others have reported. An excellent example of how well the App works, was in September when more than 100 individuals reported a smell which was directly traceable to a Neville Island facility. There is an ongoing investigation of this event by the EPA. This facility, Metalico, has been put on notice by the EPA that it is a major emitter. They do not have a permit as a major emitter. This violation can carry a fine of up to \$37,500 per day. Citizen reporters finally got the EPA's attention by using this App to document the emissions.

Consider following air quality on Purple Air (www2.purpleair.com) which provides graphs of trends in particulate air quality across the world. Purple Air is a company selling low cost monitors which connect to the Internet and can be easily monitored by checking their website.

CMU, Carnegie Mellon University, has over the last several years been installing RAMPs or Real-time, Affordable, Multi-Pollutant monitors. These measure carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) sulfur dioxide (SO₂), ozone (O₃) and fine particulate mass (PM_{2.5}). They were developed by CMU's Center for Atmospheric Particle Studies (CAPS). The data generated by these monitors (and many others) can be viewed on www.environmentaldata.org. CAPS personnel have a history of working with local advocacy groups to support their efforts in tracking air quality. These groups have often been successful in acquiring grants to purchase Purple Air Monitors.

I urge you to act by becoming a citizen advocate by using an App or joining a ROCIS cohort or following your local monitors.

VOTER SERVICE by Judy Clack, Voter Service Chair



The next meeting of the Voter Service Committee is Tuesday, January 4 at 12:30 pm on Zoom.

Salute General Election Successes. Help Prepare for the Primary Election.

A huge note of thanks goes to all League members who helped inform our community prior to the November election. The subcommittees of the Voter Service Committee were very busy providing voter education and voter registration information prior to the November 2 General Election for many constituencies. Each of these committees needs more members to join them.

After reading these reports, which of these committees speaks to you? Would you like to support those living in senior subsidized housing, or enduring food insecurity, or attending college, or those arranging candidate forums, or those reaching out to the faith-based communities, or those becoming naturalized citizens, or those creating content for the webpage or for social media? Do you like working with details, have design experience, like searching for information on the web, or enjoy speaking on the phone? Please email the chair of any committee you'd be interested in assisting or email me to suggest a best fit. We'll have a big job in the spring informing the public about newly drawn district boundaries for Congress and the PA Legislature as well as which candidates are running in the primary for Governor, US Senate, Congress, PA House and PA Senate. Committee work won't start until 2022, but let the chair know now that you'd like to help. Thanks for volunteering.

Candidate Forum Committee, Judy Clack, Chair, voterservice@lwvpg.org

Of the six school board races for which we attempted to arrange candidate forums (Bethel Park, Moon, Mt. Lebanon, North Allegheny, Penn Hills, and Plum), we only held one: Bethel Park. In the other cases, an insufficient number of candidates agreed to attend. The LWV cannot hold a forum with candidates of only one party. LWVPGH successfully produced forums for the three contested Allegheny County magisterial district judges (Fox Chapel, Mt. Lebanon, and Pittsburgh 26/27). For the 18 candidates running for 10 Common Pleas Judge positions, we updated our Video Gallery and provided a PDF mini guide of their Vote411 answers. There were over 1,100 views of our Common Pleas Video Gallery web page. LWVPGH also significantly collaborated on three other forums organized by partner organizations, Casa San Jose and the Black Political Empowerment Project: Pittsburgh Mayor, Common Pleas judges, and Pittsburgh School Board. More League members interested in learning how to conduct candidate forums are needed.

Civic Education in Schools and Community, Amy Kleissas, Chair, civic.education@lwvpg.org

Please refer to the separate article in this issue from Joanne Moore and Amy Kleissas on page 9. Here is a brief summary of this committee's fall efforts. The team did presentations to five universities, either virtually or in person: to Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham University, Duquesne University, LaRoche University, and University of Pittsburgh. The civic education team led a LWVPGH general meeting on October 26, 'Make Government Work for You.' They distributed 1,000 "Ready-Set-Vote" bags to high schools, B-PEP and VEEEM. They developed six TikTok videos, featuring Martha Raak, to promote Vote411. Future plans include developing a buddy system with new members, encouraging high school students to become poll workers, and increasing the distribution of "Ready, Set, Vote" bags. They need more members who are interested in expanding our civic education outreach.

College/University Committee, Cynthia Cominsky, Chair, cynthialcominsky@gmail.com

These committee members reached out to campus liaisons at each area college or university and regularly emailed them "Teasers" – short voter education messages they have developed – with hotlinks to LWVPGH documents. The liaisons, in turn, shared them across their respective campuses – to students, faculty and staff. Some campuses asked for additional training and the League's Civic Education team provided online or in-person presentations. The C/U committee hopes to get back to in-person voter registration drives on each campus before the primary. More League members are needed who enjoy working with college students.

Faith-Based and Community Outreach Committee, Marilyn Mulvihill, Chair, mimi15143@yahoo.com

86 faith-based and community organizations were provided with voter information via email attachments. Please send information of your personal house of worship to Marilyn including an email address and contact name so they can be sent voter education information for the Spring Primary. We need more League members interested in expanding our outreach to the faith-based community.

Continued next page

Food Pantry Committee, Kathy Herbst, kathy.herbst@lwvpg.org

The committee developed a new version of the “Ready, Set, Vote” card created in 2020 and renamed it “Get Ready to Vote” for the 2021 general election. The document included new language about the municipal elections, the new paper-ballot system, and the need for poll workers. After approval by the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (GPCFB), 16,000 copies were ordered. Nine LWVPGH members assembled packets for 143 food pantries in Allegheny County. These packets were delivered to the GPCFB for delivery to the pantries. More League members concerned about outreach to those with food insecurity are needed.

Naturalization Committee, Judith A Diorio, Chair, naturalization@lwvpg.org

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, League volunteers were no longer able to attend naturalization ceremonies, but we still provided materials for the candidates: voter registration applications, *Facts for Citizens*, and a two-sided information sheet describing how to fill out the PA voter registration forms line-by-line, and how to vote by mail or in person in PA. An over-printing of the Food Pantry’s committee rack cards were also distributed in Fall 2021. We fulfilled the requirements for the 2020 LWVUS New Citizen Grant, reaching 2,500 new citizens, and will apply for the 2022 grant. We participated in a small, “practice” day of naturalization ceremonies on August 19, 2021, when we were able to speak and register 31 of 54 new citizens over three small ceremonies that day. The practice day went very well, and USCIS wants us to return to participate in the future, but they also want to wait until current covid restrictions are relaxed. In addition to providing an important service to new citizens, our League volunteers, new and established, receive a lot of reinforcement and motivation from these lovely ceremonies. We need more League members to help with registering new citizens.

Senior Subsidized Housing Committee, Linda Schneider, Co-Chair, linda.schneider@lwvpg.org

The outreach for the fall 2021 election employed letters, a digital flyer, resource material, an in-person presentation, and printed door hangers. In addition to communicating by email with over 250 residential buildings, outreach was expanded to include some senior centers and community groups. Members developed and distributed as an email attachment a two-page “Get Ready to Vote” flyer adapted from the Food Pantry Committee’s rack card. Door hangers were updated, printed, and distributed. Adapted for seniors, it had larger font, more concise language, included basic election information, was easier to read, and it was small enough to keep handy. Some building managers requested in-person presentations. Due to Covid, we haven’t tackled that yet, but we met with Amy Kleissas, Civic Education, to discuss material which could be used for in-person presentations in the future. Another avenue is making or sharing videos that can be used in buildings or by public access television channels. We have made a foray into the community by reaching out to senior centers and Wesley Family Services, connecting with B-PEP, and providing materials to Alpha Kappa Alpha to assist in their outreach. We would like to continue our expanded outreach but need more members to assist us.

Social Media Committee, Emily Ferri, Director, social.media@lwvpg.org

After rendering and adding the LWVPGH logo, the four LWVPGH candidate forums garnered 260, 700, 700 and 1,000 views on Facebook – plus between 40 - 135 views on YouTube. 1,700 viewed the Casa San Jose forum on Facebook. 178 viewed the B-PEP Oct. 29 forums on YouTube. For Common Pleas candidates, half of the 18 candidates received about 100 views each of their YouTube videos. Martha Raak’s Grandma Bunny’s Vote411 videos, produced by Michelle Grant and Amy Kleissas, received 1,000 views on TikTok and over 3,000 views on Instagram. Our counts were up on Twitter over 100% in the month preceding the election.

Over 1,900 followers on Facebook viewed the 35 unique pre-election posts on the LWVPGH Facebook page. Favorites were Calendar of registration deadlines, Get ready to vote, Allegheny County ballot envelope printing error, One-week to registration meme, Judicial races Angela Merkel bird meme, Candidate forum reminders, Bethel Park candidate forum (1,800), pictures from our presentation at Chatham University, County drop box hours, and Rolls to the Polls from B-PEP. We need a couple more Leaguers to suggest and/or create content for each of our social media platforms.

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Vote411 and Voters Guide Committee, Annette Shimer, Chair, vote411@lwvpgh.org

With over 130 municipalities and 40 school districts in Allegheny County, Vote411 in 2021 had over 1,000 candidates entered. LWVPGH entered more candidate names and offices in Vote411 this year than at any time in the past. For 2022, LWVUS is changing its Vote411 software. Annette is asking for many League members to attend an introductory one-hour webinar, with multiple dates from mid-November to early January. We'll compare notes and provide input for our future Vote411 efforts. With redistricting happening for Congressional and state legislative districts, many current boundaries will change. Vote411 will be needed by the public for them to know who is running in their new districts. We are looking for members who like working with details as well as those who like doing web searching for candidate contact information.

Website Committee, Ruth Quint, Webmaster, webmaster@lwvpgh.org

Preparation for the November Election began in June. Important election dates and deadlines were added to the Event Calendar with each event having a link to a relevant website: i.e.: last day to register to vote links to the voter registration application online and Election Day links to a polling place finder. Amy Kleissas and Ruth Quint updated former infographics and voting pages and changed all references from www.votesPA.com to www.Vote.PA.gov. Amy modified the Voter Resource Library to place Election information at the top of the page.

In October, the main menu was restructured to create a November 2021 Election submenu. The homepage (4182 views) began featuring links and promos for the election pages, along with the Vote411 widget. Mini-guides, new this year, (100 - 700 views) of common pleas judges, magisterial judges, and some school boards were created and uploaded, featured on the homepage, and linked to other relevant pages. The new PA Courts page (742 views) was introduced, with consolidated information about judicial races at all levels, and an overview of the PA Court system. The Common Pleas Gallery was re-opened with updated information for the general election, and the new Green Party candidate added. The Candidate Forums page was updated, with selected primary videos remaining visible. A form was added to submit forum questions. New forum videos were loaded as they became available. The *En Español* page was revised and moved to the Election Menu with (thanks to Eileen Olmsted) additional text translated into Spanish, 2 updated Spanish language documents, a new Spanish version of the rack card, and a Spanish voiceover of the Mayoral Forum (thanks to Casa San Jose.)

In the final two weeks before Election Day, "last minute" links were added to the homepage, including one to find your polling place, trace your mail-in ballot, reminders to use postage on your mail-in ballot, and information about the envelope misprint. Mail-in page was revised to add information about misprinted, lost, or damaged ballots, along with photos of the mail-in envelopes with directions on how to return the ballots. Ballot drop-off times and directions at the County Election Division were noted.

Thoughts for Primary 2022 Content: We should continue to focus our efforts on gaps in information, which are mostly at the local level. In a big midterm election with national seats at stake, this means focusing on PA legislative races where we are one of the few sources of information available to voters. We are considering a version of the video gallery to cover up to 23 state house races in Allegheny County. We'll continue the new Mini-Guides which received from 100 - 700 downloads! We need members to post a link to the mini-guides on their own community pages on Facebook or Nextdoor. This is an enormous undertaking. We need a few Leaguers to assist who either have web experience or design experience, or who are interested in creating new content or who can edit content.



CIVIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

by Joanne Moore and Amy Kleissas

At the October 26 LWVPGH membership meeting, the Civic Education Team presented its high school outreach PowerPoint, “**#Make Government Work for You,**” which was *flipped* making the members and attendees the audience. The goal of this program is to provide both civic education and voter registration information to students in Allegheny County high schools, colleges, and universities. The audience response was enthusiastic and the presentation may be viewed on the **LWVPGH You Tube channel. (Go to the Homepage and scroll down to “Follow Us” in the bottom left-hand corner. Click on the 4th icon from the right.)**

Part of the presentation included data from schools we visited virtually, which represented much of the very positive feedback the team has received over 4 years. Outreach Coordinator, Joanne Moore, explained how to measure “success” due to the pandemic’s effect and the shift to virtual (online) delivery of classroom presentations and resources, which follows below.

Measuring success is an essential component to directing the growth and evaluating the sustainability of every organizational program. The fiscally responsible accountant in us wants to insure that our dollars are appropriately directed while the community activist/educator in us wants to know that our message is clear and understood. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, measuring success for the Civic Education Team was very straightforward. We were visiting classrooms, counting students and teachers, and using the number of returned voter registration applications as hard-copy proof that we were doing the job. We had engaging interactions and were able to look at faces and assess reactions. The returned student feedback forms let us know how program messages were being received. Boom! Dollars ok! Message clear!

With the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 and the pivot to on-line programming in the “virtual classroom,” everything changed. We were now looking into faceless computer screens and walking students through electronic voter registration with the website, turbovote.org. Our tried and true measuring sticks were no longer applicable. We needed to reevaluate our process and find other measuring tools. And find them we did!

With a critical eye we looked at the data that we did have:

- The requests for *return engagements* from high schools where we had previously presented and had established relationships came in. In a year where every minute of class time was coveted, *schools wanted us back*. Notably, our program was viewed as relevant and important, even in chaotic times.
- During this time of upheaval, we were also able to establish *new relationships*. In the 2020-21 academic year, we were welcomed into several **new** high schools including Urban Pathways, Montour School District, Central Catholic High School and Shaler Area School District. These engagements further reinforced for us the value and need for our civic education program.
- We learned that our reputation continues to grow. From August 28 through November 19, 2021, Carnegie Mellon University, Duquesne University, University of Pittsburgh, Chatham University and LaRoche University *reached out to us* for civic education programs for their students. In addition to being in-person, some of these programs were livestreamed as well as recorded for later viewing. While this is wonderful as it allows the information to be available all hours of the day to countless students, faculty and staff, it *completely eliminates* our ability to count heads and registrations. So we must take a measure of pride in that the major universities in our region sought our collaboration. We believe the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh is seen as an important, active civic education partner.
- And we realized that we rose **to meet the needs of our community**. For the 2020 general election, when community partners including B-PEP, VEEM, The Jewish Community Center, UPMC community clinics, and others voiced a need for printed voter educational materials for their neighborhoods and clients, they looked to the League for help. That alone is a measure of success! We responded with the creation of more than **3000 Ready-Set-Vote Bags** filled with non-partisan, voter registration and mail-in ballot information *and* civic education infographics that were safely distributed throughout our partner

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networks. The Ready-Set-Vote Bags for our community partners were requested again for the 2021 primary and general elections. While we can never be sure of a hard-number impact of these bags, our partners tell us that they are effective and productive.

- Building off the community success, the Ready-Set-Vote Bags played an integral part in strengthening our relationship with **Pittsburgh Public Schools**. We have provided **Ready-Set-Vote Bags for over 1500 eligible students** (two classes of seniors, 2020-2021) that are packed with voter registration information and relevant civic education infographics. While we do know that several hundred students were registered to vote before the 2020 presidential election, we can only guess how many shared the information with family and friends and what impact that may have had.
- A word about our terrific website and webmaster, Ruth Quint and all of the voting, election, and government information that can be found there. This includes the **Voter Resource Library** with its 50+ nonpartisan resources, also a great place to measure success. The Club Express platform gives us counts of hundreds of downloads of the unique infographics, documents, and non-partisan civic education lessons. We also have a new page, the **Presentation Library**, which previews the many PowerPoints that the Civic Education Team and other League members have created. These resources and slide decks are available for students, teachers, and local Leagues throughout Pennsylvania. We even had a local League in Tennessee request *seven* of our high school, college, and League presentations.

Whether or not we can quantify our work with the hard data that we can hold in our hands, we must remember that all we do is *aligned with our mission*. We are seizing the opportunities provided by the pandemic to find creative ways to reach our targeted users, evolving with the technological age that moves ever faster, and finding ways to meaningfully support our community with both voter registration and civic education. We plant seeds.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE NEWS

November 9 Program

"What's Happening in Our Schools?" A Conversation with Dr. Gerald Zahorchak was held on November 9 via Zoom. Dr. Zahorchak, former PA Secretary of Education, shared his perspectives and insights on a number of education issues including, fair funding; cyber schools and charter schools; curriculum; critical race theory; and the pandemic impact on education (photo, page 4). If you missed this informative talk, you can view the recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klyvoXELQ00>.

We Want YOU for Observer's Core!

The Education Committee is looking for volunteers to attend school board meetings. School Boards meet monthly to address budgets, curriculum, personnel issues, district policies, district goals and more. Attending a school board meeting is an excellent opportunity to listen, learn and observe a governing body in action. And it's never been easier to attend as many boards now live stream meetings via Zoom. You can watch or listen from home. A quick visit to your local school district's website will reveal dates, times and attendance guidelines.

Let us know how it went! We have created the one-page form on the next page for you to record your observation(s). Please submit completed forms to education@lwvpgh.org. Understanding local school district issues will help the committee develop its future activities and actions.

School Funding Trial Starts in Harrisburg

The long-awaited school funding trial began on November 12. The lawsuit, initially filed in 2014, addresses disparities in public school funding among PA's 500 districts, as well as, the relatively low percentage of state-allocated funding for education. The plaintiffs are six school districts, a group of public-school parents, the NAACP-PA State Conference and the Pennsylvania Association of Small and Rural Schools. The defendants include Governor Wolf, the PA Department of Education, the state Board of Education, and the PA House and Senate Majority Leaders. The trial is expected to continue into 2022. Visit fundourschoolspa.org to follow the trial through a live stream. The fundourschoolspa.org site also offers an interactive map. By clicking on your school district on the map, you can find out your district's funding shortfall per student.

The next Education Committee meeting is Wednesday, January 5 at 7:00 pm on Zoom

LWV of Greater Pittsburgh: School Board Meeting Observer's Report

School District: _____ Date: _____

| FEATURE EVALUATED | YES | NO | COMMENTS |
|--|-----|----|----------|
| Did meeting start on time? | | | |
| Were all members presents? | | | |
| Did the members appear to have done their "homework"? | | | |
| Were members courteous to each other and the public? | | | |
| Was an agenda sent/posted at least 24 hours in advance? | | | |
| Did agenda items clearly describe what was to be discussed? | | | |
| Was there adequate opportunity for public input? | | | |
| Was there the appearance that some action items were discussed in closed rather than open session? | | | |
| Was background information available to the public? | | | |

1. Were any issues on the agenda relevant to LWV state or local positions or programs?

2. Do you recommend local League action on any of these issues? Yes ___ No ___ If "yes" what action do you recommend?

3. Do you have any other concerns?

Observer: _____ Date Submitted: _____

Please submit report to education@lwvpgh.org . Please attach agenda, if possible. Thank you!

BOOK CLUB REPORT by Joan Cucinotta

UPCOMING MEETINGS

1/21 – *The Sum Of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* by Heather McGhee. The library has many copies available currently.

2/18 – *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* by Robert D. Putnam. The library has several copies available.

BOOK REVIEW: *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Our selection for November, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, coincided with the COP26 Climate Summit in Scotland. Following the pattern of most of the previous twenty-five summits, this year's summit ended with yet more pledges and promises to address the climate crisis. For twenty-six summits, the member nations' promises have amounted to checks in the mail. If only they would listen to Robin Wall Kimmerer's advice in her 2013 publication of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants*.

Kimmerer, a member of the Potawatomi Nation as well as a professor at SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry, writes passionately about how humans can get more from nature's bounty by doing less. Well poised with both a scientific and indigenous background, she insists that wisdom is not solely available through traditional Native American harvesting practice and that demonstrable facts and results are not exclusive to science.

In this book Kimmerer attempts to gently but thoroughly remind members of our consumerist society that the source of all of the goods we enjoy, want, and need is the earth itself. More importantly, it points out that the earth's resources are gifts and that a gift taker has an obligation of gratitude and respect for the giver. Our current attempts, Kimmerer feels, to regulate and oversee natural resources are disrespectful and dysfunctional and have led to a mismanagement of natural resources. Instead of trying to maximize nature as a utility, we must recognize our role within it, not separate from it. We need to reconnect, the book says, with nature and by extension with each other. Kimmerer muses on a better world and asks, "What would it be like to be raised on gratitude, to speak to the natural world as a member of the democracy of species, to raise a pledge of *interdependence*?"

Kimmerer points out that as the recipients of these gifts freely given, we have the responsibility to show some gratitude. We are caught in a bind, however, because "Gratitude cultivates an ethic of fullness, but the economy needs emptiness." Our consumerist society shouts that we always need more things and insists our 'wants' are 'needs.' She shows through scientific evidence that ever increasing demand for goods, the consumerist dogma, is not sustainable, and she proves with evidence that the indigenous approach to cultivation will yield more product in the long run. She is saying that we are killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

Besides science and indigenous knowledge, the third strand of Kimmerer's braid lies in the elements of memoir. Recollections of her educational experience, her journey as a parent, her learning alongside her students, and her commitment to her Potawatomi heritage all enrich and expand her point "...to live as if your children's future matters...."

This book had a marked effect on several in the group. Although none of us grew up in an indigenous culture, it did make some of us yearn to have had that as part of our own cultural heritage. One said that she "savored" the book and that it seemed almost like a meditation. Others said that it was like "reading the Psalms," or that it was "like the way my parents lived." It was neatly summed up with one comment — that Kimmerer asks us not to live in the present, but in the "presence."