Message from the President

Cathy Fitzgerald

In my role as president of the League I have had some interesting interactions this election season related to the League’s nonpartisan stance. Candidates have asked if the League would like to endorse them – my answer – The League is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates or political parties. Door knockers ask me which candidate I support or if I would put a political sign in my yard – my answer – As the President of the League, I am not able to support any candidate or political party.

Friends and family assume that because I am a member of the League, I support the Democratic Party due to the social positions that the League supports. During the July LWV-Montana board meeting, we identified the strengths and weaknesses of the Montana League during a strategic planning session. We agreed that one of our weaknesses is credibility for accurate candidate information due to the assumption that the League is aligned with the Democratic Party. That day I learned that the League was originally considered to be made up of members who supported the Republican Party - because social positions where the League has found consensus were more aligned with that party in its early years. The parties have shifted in their positions over the years – the League has not.

What I found important from this lesson is the fact that the League has remained a stable, non-partisan organization for almost 100 years. As the parties shift and change to draw supporters, the League remains strong in our support for what I call “common sense” positions that support the things women in general have always cared about – education, equality, and the importance of a healthy and safe environment. As your spokesperson for the Billings League, I will continue to reinforce our nonpartisan position and to work towards supporting those Positions our members find important.
Turning 18 years of age has never been more fun with birthday voter registration bags. Cathy Grott introduced an innovative way to register eligible voters in Montana high school government classes at the Montana Education Association conference on October 19.

The idea for voter registration bags did not start in Billings. A civic organization outside of Detroit developed birthday boxes for 18 year-olds in early 2017. The idea was so successful, the civic organization was awarded a $100,000 grant from the James L. Knight Foundation. Several LWV chapters discovered the innovative project and developed their own version of the birthday boxes.

After reading about the idea reported in the national LWV newsletter, Grott developed a voter registration birthday bag for high school students in School District 2. The bags contain: a MyVoterPage card, registration form, non-partisan LWV literature on the importance of voting, patriotic pencil, candy, an “I registered to vote today” sticker, and a registration card. The cost is approximately .41 for each bag. The idea was tested at Senior High School and Mr. Gage, the chair of the Social Studies Department registered over 30 students right away. He reported the fun the students had going through the bag, reading the non-partisan information on the importance of voting and then registering to vote. The “I registered to vote today” sticker was a badge of honor that students stuck to their water bottles.

After the October presentation, Mr. Jette, from Skyview High School, ordered 50 birthday bags. The LWV’s only requirement for receiving the bags is to track how many students are registered through the program. The teachers also ensure that the completed registration forms are delivered to the election office. So far, LWV has supplied about 150 bags and have registered about 91 new voters through the program.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ISSUES

FIGHTING VOTER SUPPRESSION

“We challenge all efforts and tactics that threaten our democracy and limit the ability of voters to exercise their right to vote.”

Read more about the League’s involvement in current federal and state voting rights cases around the country at: https://www.lwv.org/voting-rights/fighting-voter-suppression
The Billings League was out registering voters on National Voter Registration day, September 26th, and having a good time doing it!
What is the League Education Fund?
Cathy Fitzgerald

The national League is making a clearer distinction between the two non-profit arms of the League.

First, the educational arm, ruled by IRS Code 501(c)(3), is funded by money that you can claim as a tax-deductible donation on your federal and state income tax returns. As a result, there are rules about how that donation can be spent - it has to be for non-political educational purposes. The Billings League uses these funds for our public presentations and voter education.

The second arm, regulated under IRS Code 501(c)(4), is funded mostly by membership fees and other donations that are not tax-deductible. This money can be spent more freely, for example to lobby our legislature on or advocate for changes to social policies.

I know that many of our members add an additional donation to their membership dues each year. If you want the donation to be tax-deductible, you will need to identify that as a donation to the Education Fund. Your regular membership dues are not tax-deductible.

Vote411 was launched by the League of Women Voters Education Fund. It provides nonpartisan information to the public at the general- and state-level, on the following aspects of the election process:

- Information on state-wide candidates
- Absentee ballot information
- Ballot measure information
- Election dates and early voting
- Factual data on candidates at the federal and state level
- Polling place locations
- Registration deadlines
- Voter qualifications and ID requirements
- Voter registration forms and voting machines

https://www.vote411.org
There were about 25 people who attended the presentations and follow up discussion at The House of Books. The presenters talked about their hands-on experience working with visa programs.

Abby Cook – immigration specialist with MSU-Billings Office of International Studies, talked about the complicated process she helps hopeful foreign students maneuver. She brought with her a student, Vivian Oray, who has been through the vetting process to get a visa to study here. Vivian brought her sponsor “sister” to the event as well. Abby wants League members to be aware that they can be a host family for a foreign student, helping the student experience our culture. This is a very low commitment and could include hosting the student for dinner once a month or taking them on a family outing. If you are interested, you can call (406) 657-1705 to be a host family.

Maria Beltran-Jensen is an attorney who provided legal services to migrant farm workers. Maria talked about the rights and responsibilities as well as the legal services available to foreign workers. These services are funded by Congress. To be part of the visa program, the workers cannot have domestic abuse or felony convictions.

Carolyn Sian – is a 7th grade math and 8th grade science teacher. She and her husband own and operate a farm near Huntley Project, where they employ migrant farm workers. They moved to the program because they were unable to find citizens who were willing and qualified to do the agriculture work – the jobs are required to be posted at Job Service. The foreign workers are contracted through a third-party employment agency who charges a fee to arrange for wages, travel for the worker round trip from their foreign home to the farm each year, as well as workers’ housing inspections. The workers are only allowed to work in the US for 9 months and can only return after they have been gone for 3 months. The program has worked well for the Sians for fifteen years.

**WHERE THE LEAGUE STANDS**

“We support a federal immigration law that provides an efficient, expeditious system for legal entry of immigrants into the United States including the DREAM ACT. We support policies to improve economies, education, job opportunities and living conditions in nations with large emigrating populations. We support provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status. We support federal payments to impacted communities to address the financial costs borne by states and local governments with large immigrant populations.”

Learn more at: https://www.lwv.org/other-issues/immigration
LWV-Billings Climate Action Committee

The current goal of the League Climate Action Committee is to work with the community to encourage the City Council to pass a resolution to re-establish the Commission on Energy and Conservation with updated guidelines. Committee members continue to meet with a coalition of groups on the third Thursday of every month at the Northern Plains Resource Council.

Currently, coalition representatives are meeting with City Council members and asking for support from stakeholders in the form of a sign-on letter. If you are interested to help spread the word about our efforts or by testifying before the City Council, you can contact Cathy Fitzgerald at lwv.billings@gmail.com.

To learn more about what the earlier Commission had accomplished, you can read their 3-year report at:

https://ci.billings.mt.us/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/2972

Member Spotlight

Sam Randall

Born and raised in Billings, MT, the youngest of five children of a single mother, I learned early to be very independent! I received my BA from MSU Bozeman in 1986. After living in New Mexico for over 20 years, my husband and I returned to Billings in 2015 to help care for my mom. I currently own and operate an artisan jewelry gallery in downtown Billings within Terakedis Fine Art. I enjoy walking my dog, eating my husband’s amazing cooking, and spending time with family and friends.
The Montana League has produced a flyer for use at our voter registrations that informs voters with information about the security of the voting process. If you would like a copy to print, please write to the Billings League mailbox, lwv.billings@gmail.com, to get an electronic copy. In addition, the state League is just finalizing a report on the same topic that will be presented to the State Legislature. As soon as that is complete, it will be available on our website.

**Augusts 2nd Speaker – Dr. Peter Miller**

**Membership meeting**

Dr. Miller led an engaging discussion focused on the use of voter registration files in social science research and political campaigns. The presentation included the history of the need for voter registration files dating back to the 1884 introduction of the secret ballot and through the 1993 National Voter Registration Act.

The voter files are used primarily by candidates and political parties to micro-target voters during elections. The files are cross-referenced with the vast amount of individual consumer data purchased from organizations that collect that information. The files are also used by social researchers such as Dr. Miller, who used the data in his research about the change in voting behavior when a co-ethnic candidate is running in an election.

Each state makes the decision about what voter information is released and to whom it can be released. Social researchers are subject to oversight by a university review board. They are required to protect personally identifiable information. Other purchasers of the voter information have no oversight.
TIME FOR DUES

We will be kicking off our 2019 membership update and dues collection starting in November.

Due amounts remain unchanged from 2018 and are as follows:
- $50 for an individual membership
- $75 for a household membership (2 people living at the same address)
- $20 for a student membership ($15 scholarship available)

Dues can be remitted at the November general meeting, the December holiday party or mailed to the League’s post office box. Our mailing address is:

LWV-Billings  
PO BOX 21631  
Billings MT 59104

We would also like to use this opportunity to make sure our membership contact information is up to date with current and accurate information. Please include any changes to address, phone or email that have occurred over the past year.

It’s our goal to have the dues process wrapped mid-December to meet our national and state deadlines. If you have any questions or concerns please contact the membership chair, Jacqie Gee, at 371-3143 or at gjacqie@gmail.com.

Don’t miss the League’s Annual Holiday Party!

When: December 1st, noon

Where: Montana Club  
1791 Majestic Lane, Billings  
(map on final page of the Voter)

The holiday party will include a full menu with separate checks, and a guest speaker from a local charitable organization.

Please RSVP by Monday, Nov. 26th to Audrey Wagner at 248-8433 or Ruth Blott at 969-1069.

If you need transportation, contact Cathy Fitzgerald at lwv.billings@gmail.com or 406-431-0027.
September meeting speaker: Debra Bongofsky

Debra recounted the events that led to her filing a complaint with the Commission of Political Practices against her opponent during the 2010 election cycle. This event was highlighted in the recently released documentary film “Dark Money” and underscored the prevalence of outside influence in our elections.

Debra took us through her campaign, her discovery of undisclosed coordination between a PAC and her candidate and the filing and investigation of the complaint she filed with the Commission.

Debra decided to run for the state legislature in 2010. She was not supported by her party who had thrown their support behind her opponent. Debra did extensive campaigning mostly by going door to door meeting neighbors face to face during the primary season. On a particular occasion, Debra was leaving a home after campaigning when her opponent approached the same person who was an acquaintance of his. When the acquaintance asked if he was worried about the primary, her opponent replied “I have nothing to worry about.”

About a week before the primary, an unflattering mailer went out regarding Debra from a political action committee. Because of the timing, she had no time to respond or refute the information in the mailer and lost the primary. Debra recalled the “I have nothing to worry about” statement made by her opponent and how sure he seemed of winning the primary and began to do some digging. None of her opponent’s campaign finance disclosures listed the PAC as donors. After a chance discovery during a drug bust in Colorado, some incriminating evidence against the PAC was discovered. This led to a former staffer of the PAC providing evidence against the PAC and the candidates who used their services. Debra expressed her respect and admiration for this staffer who went out on a limb to testify against the PAC. This staffer was told that her career in politics would effectively be over if she testified, however she said she felt a moral obligation because the PAC had acted illegally.

Continued on next page…. 
September meeting speaker: Debra Bongofsky, cont.

The Commission of Political Practices found Debra’s opponent and several other candidates from around the state had violated campaign finance laws and levied fines. Many of these violations had just been settled shortly before our September meeting.

While victorious in her suit, the matter had a hefty cost in terms of both time and money for Debra. When asked at the meetings end if she would ever consider running for office again, she answered with an unequivocal NO, an unfortunate conclusion to this story.

If you didn’t get a chance to see Dark Money when it showed in Billings, you can watch it online at PBS:

http://www.pbs.org/pov/darkmoney/video-darkmoney/

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**Calendar**

**Thursday, Nov. 1st**  
General League Membership Meeting  
*Topic: I-185 Forum*  
The Elks Lodge — 934 Lewis Ave  
11:30 - 1:00 p.m.

**Saturday, Dec. 1st**  
LWV Billings Annual Holiday Party  
The Montana Club — 1791 Majestic Lane  
Noon

**Thursday, Jan. 3rd**  
General League Membership Meeting  
*Topic: Climate Action Committee Report*  
The Elks Lodge — 934 Lewis Ave  
11:30 - 1:00 p.m.

**Thursday, Feb. 7th**  
General League Membership Meeting  
*Topic: TBD*  
The Elks Lodge — 934 Lewis Ave  
11:30 - 1:00 p.m.
LWVBillings
Board of Directors

President - Cathy Fitzgerald
Vice President - Ruth Blott
Co-treasurers:  Janice Munsell & Jacqie Gee
Secretary:  Bonnie Lorenzen
Board Members-at-Large:  Kathy Masis,  Theresa Schneder, Hope Smith & Audrey Wagner

Committee Chairs:
  Publicity - Coralee Hicks
  Voter Services - Cathy Grott
  Program — Audrey Wagner & Ruth Blott
  VOTER Editor & Website — Bonnie Lorenzen
  Membership — Jacqie Gee

Directions to the Montana Club for the Holiday Party, 1791 Majestic Lane:
DONATIONS
Contributions can be made to the Billings League of Women Voters (BLWV) or the Billings League of Women Voters Education Fund (BLWVEF). Contributions made payable to the Billings League of Women Voter of Billings, a 501 (c)(4) organization, are not tax deductive. Contributions made payable to the Billings League of Women Voters Education Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization, are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

My gift is for (please check one) _____BLWV ______ BLWVEF

CONTRIBUTION INFORMATION:
(PLEASE PRINT)

NAME: ________________________________________________________________
ADDRESS: __________________________________________________________
C/S/Z: ______________________________________________________________
Email: __________________________________________________________________
Home Phone: __________________________________________________________
Cell Phone: __________________________________________________________________

Please make checks payable to: The League of Women Voters of Billings
Please mail checks to: LWV-Billings, PO Box 21631, Billings, MT 59104-1631
Thank you for supporting the League of Women Voters. Only with your support can we achieve our mission!