A Message from the President

Message from the President - New Members Taking on the Challenge

I am energized by some of our newer members who are using the League to achieve some important education goals in our community. Julie Schultz, Hope Smith, Bonnie Lorenzen and I have been working to put together the Local Government Seminar in July. The League’s reputation as a nonpartisan organization has helped us to find speakers and allowed the Billings Public Library to partner with us to present the first three events. Thank you to those long-time members who have held the League in high esteem, giving us the opportunity to carry on the League’s presence in our community. We hope to make you proud!

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – What’s it all about?

Theresa Schneder, Janice Munsell and Cathy Fitzgerald are putting together a workshop to be presented in October that explains it all! Watch for a survey later this summer to find out which dates work for our members and more information about the workshop.

LWV POSITION STATEMENT

LWV is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization’s current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.

Read more about the League’s efforts at: https://www.lwv.org/league-management/policies-guidelines/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-policy
Upcoming Local Government Seminar

We are approaching the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in the United States, which coincides with the founding of the League of Women Voters. However, while the recent Rucho v. Common Cause Supreme Court decision has amplified the importance of voting by pushing solutions to partisan gerrymandering back to the states, democracy encompasses so much more than the ballot box.

For instance, in the earliest days of our nation, even without the right to vote, women and black Americans were key contributors to the abolitionist movement, and before that, women like Anne Hutchinson were getting banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for expressing a right to religious freedom. In other words, while voting is foundational to full participation, it is not the only way to make your voice heard. Luckily banishment is no longer a legal reaction to speaking up, but we live in a world of information overload, and it is often difficult to know how to elevate your voice above the clamor.

To mitigate the hubbub, the Billings chapter of the League of Women Voters is hosting a local government seminar over four evenings in July. The brainchild of president Cathy Fitzgerald in coordination with members Hope Smith and Julie Schultz, the seminar aims to introduce Billings-area residents to different ways they can play a part locally. While the news media dedicate more airtime and column inches to the national stage, most of the day-to-day interaction people have with government is at the state or local level.

Nevertheless, even well-informed policy junkies may not understand the relationship between the state, county, and city governments or how the taxes we pay are administered across programs. That makes advocating effectively for a particular position difficult, as the confusion on both sides of the recent One Big Sky debate highlighted. Anecdotally, Cathy had heard that many people want to do more but don't know what the options are. Consequently, the seminar will blend education about nuts and bolts with information about specific ways to get involved.

See the series schedule on the following page….

New Member Spotlight — Kathy Connors Rumph

Raised in a large Irish Catholic family where political discussions and involvement were emphasized continues to be an important part of my life. Joining the League is an opportunity to be informed and after retirement as an educator, I have more time. My husband Dale and I raised three daughters in Billings. As the Grandma of ten wonderful grandchildren proactive approaches to doing want I can to make the world a better place is essential. One of my Dad's frequent sayings- "if you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem."
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERIES

The first session, on Thursday, July 11th, is called "How do we pay for everything and who decides?" It will focus on an overview of the city's budget and include a discussion of both tax increment funding (TIF) and the One Big Sky project.

At the second session, "What are the rules?", on Wednesday, July 17th, participants will learn about the community planning process, including zoning and Project Re:Code, the first update of city codes in almost half a century.

On Wednesday, July 24th, the third session, "How can I have a voice?", will cover various ways to get involved, from participating in city council, either directly or as an advocate at meetings, to signing up for a neighborhood task force or citizen advisory board.

To wrap everything up, the final session on Wednesday, July 31st, will be a social hour so that attendees can informally mingle, discuss their impressions, and ask further questions. It will include sign-ups for ways to learn more.

All sessions will be 5:30-7:30pm. The first three will be held in the Community Room at the Billings Public Library downtown. The last session, the drinks and nibbles reception, will be held two blocks south at This House of Books, 224 N. Broadway.

You can register for some or all of the sessions here: [click here]

Visit our website at: [http://lwvbillings.org/localgovconf.html]
Naturalization Ceremony

by Cathy Grott

On February 14, Ruth Blott headed up the Naturalization Ceremony at the James Battin Federal Courthouse. She and a cadre of volunteers registered 12 newly minted U.S. Citizens. Naturalization ceremonies take place all over the country. The ceremony is the culmination of the Naturalization process in which the Oath of Citizenship is administered to individuals seeking citizenship.

In Montana, about 300 petitioners participate in the ceremony at federal courthouses around the state. The one-hour ceremony is extremely uplifting. Family and friends generally pack the courtroom to witness the oath. After the ceremony, the League of Women Voters registers the new citizens in a beautiful lobby downstairs from the courtroom. In addition, the Daughters of the American Revolution celebrate with cookies and punch.

The next ceremony is July 18 at 11:00 am. We’re always looking for volunteers. For a complete schedule and more information go to https://www.mtd.uscourts.gov/naturalization. To help with registration, contact Cathy Grott at cjgrott@gmail.com or Judy Allen at judymont@centurylink.com.

Member Spotlight — Laurel Hanson

Laurel grew up in Nebraska and South Dakota and graduated from MSU with a Bachelor of Architecture degree. She worked in the architectural field for 35 years taking a sabbatical in her thirties to be a Peace Corps volunteer in the Fiji Islands. After retiring she has spent several weeks each summer visiting various areas of the US, exploring National Parks, Monuments and museums with her husband. Her hobby is photographing landscapes and flowers and that has expanded in the past five years into oil painting. She loves to experiment with various materials and paints abstract works on canvas, velveteen, lace, and corduroy.
Explaining his job in the Office of Professional Standards in the Billings Police Department, Captain Neil Lawrence said, "I police the police." In his May 2nd presentation to members and guests at the noon meeting of Billings League of Women Voters, Captain Lawrence spoke of police training and encounters between police and citizens.

There are about 150 complaints per year, some generated by citizens and some by the police department, involving conduct of officers. A Class One complaint concerns criminal conduct and Class Two incidents involve events such as a police car backing into a citizen's vehicle. Complaints about a policeman's use of force will be reviewed in a Response to Resistance Report. This begins with a report sent to a sergeant and may include a subsequent criminal investigation, an administrative review, a review by an outside agency, or a coroner's inquest.

Billings police officers undergo training twice a year after they have had three months of training at the Police Academy and have been through a probationary period for a year. Citizens can ask for a specific policeman's personnel file that includes resolved complaints.

A 25-year veteran of the Billings Police Department, Captain Lawrence indicated that several things have contributed to higher crime statistics in the area, including drug trafficking. The Billings department is a member of the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area which receives federal funding. An increase in assault reports is due in part to strangulation now being charged as a separate felony.

Anyone wanting to learn more about the Billings Police Department can consult the department's website, attend a coroner's inquest, or apply to attend the Citizen's Police Academy. This eight-week course is designed to acquaint individuals with activities of the Billings Police Department.

LWVMT Study 2019-2020: Criminal Justice

LWVMT passed a proposal to conduct a Criminal Justice Study in the upcoming year. The committee will follow a process recently completed by the LWV California. The California task force reviewed criminal justice positions from state and local Leagues across the country, and based on this research, drafted a position on criminal justice: [https://lwvc.org/our-work/positions/position-criminal-justice](https://lwvc.org/our-work/positions/position-criminal-justice).

League member Beth Sirr is heading this committee. If you are interested in volunteering with this committee, you can contact Beth at: healthempowers@yahoo.com.
Billings NEW Energy & Conservation Commission

The Billings City Council approved on a 10-1 vote the formation of a new citizen advisory board promoted by the Billings League in a coalition with YVCC and Eco-Angelas. The Commission will coordinate a baseline study of the city’s current energy use and make recommendations to the City Council and City Administrator for future action on conservation and alternative energy sources, for example.

This Commission will have seven citizen members and applications can be found on the city website at: https://ci.billings.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/38501/Energy-and-Conservation-Application (you may need to copy and paste this link).

If you know of a likely candidate for this new and exciting board, please pass along the information – the applications need to be in by July 22. Successful applicants need to have experience in energy and conservation in order to help find ways to limit the city’s impact on the environment, while achieving cost savings for the city budget.

Juliana v. United States

The League of Women Voters sponsored a live stream of the Juliana v. United States trial at the Billings Public Library in May. In 2015, Rose Juliana, 23, and 20 other young people sued the US government asserting that they have a constitutional right to a sustainable climate, and requests that the court orders the United States to prepare an energy plan that would transition the nation away from fossil fuels. The attorney representing the youth and US DOJ Attorney for the EPA responded to questions from a 3-judge panel.

You can read more about this trial at: https://www.oregonlive.com/crime/2019/06/federal-appeals-court-hears-climate-change-kids-case.html
The League of Women Voters believes that immigration policies should promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business, and employment needs of the United States; and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. Provision should also be made for qualified persons to enter the United States on student visas. All persons should receive fair treatment under the law.

LWV Demands Immediate Action to Resolve the Inhumane Treatment for Asylum Seekers

Virginia Kase, the CEO for LWV of the United States issued a statement on June 24th in response to the situation developing at the border.

“For nearly a year now, Americans have watched in horror as children have been ripped from their parents’ arms and detained in inhumane conditions along our southern border. The trauma of family separations and children in cages will have a lasting impact for generations to come.

“This administration is responsible for creating these conditions and has the duty to rectify this crisis. The U.S. government must expedite asylum processing, improve housing conditions, provide humane care, and reunite families at the border.

“Seeking asylum is not a crime. Refugees from Central America are fleeing dangerous conditions in their home countries, risking everything to survive. They must be greeted with dignity and respect.

“The administration’s 'no tolerance' policy for asylum seekers has created constant fear and chaos for immigrant families while doing nothing to strengthen our national security. We call on Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes a long-term plan for asylum seekers and a commitment to all refugees seeking freedom in our great nation.

“America must do better than this.”

You can read more about the League’s position and actions on Immigration Reform at: https://www.lwv.org/immigration/reforming-immigration.
A proposal to conduct a study on civics education in Montana was passed at the recent convention. Member Tom Cherry presented the proposal at the convention, highlighting important reasons to conduct such a study, including a concern that “young people lack sufficient awareness of the meaning and value of Democracy”. Montana is in the minority of states that do NOT require courses in Civics or American Government, and that the currently required two units of social studies does not meet the requirements set forth in other states.

The study will include expert interviews, a review of civics education in other states, as well as actions that other Leagues have taken in this area. As appropriate, the committee may then develop Consensus Questions, and a resulting Position.

If you would be interested in working on this study, send us an e-mail at: lwv.billings@gmail.com.


**LWV Billings Monthly Meeting - CHANGE OF VENUE**

Beginning this fall, monthly meetings will be held at the **Community Room at the Library**. The first meeting will be **Tuesday, September 3rd**. The speaker will start at 12:10 and finish by 1:00, giving people time to get to the meeting during their lunch hour.

Lunch will no longer be provided. However, you are welcome to bring your own lunch. We will set the room up with some tables to accommodate those who wish to eat during the meeting. **Feel free to come early if you are able to help with set-up**. Sweet Café in the library is open Monday through Friday from 10am-2pm. They serve coffee and light refreshments.

**PARKING - first 2 hours are free**: Visitors must enter their vehicle’s license plate number into the parking kiosk inside the south door to get 2 free hours. Pay fees for additional hours at the kiosk by cash or card. Fees are:
- Hour 3 is $1
- Hour 4 is $2
- Hour 5 and after is $3 per hour
The convention theme was “Diversity in Democracy”. Guest speakers included Aaron Johnson & Sesar Bonillo from the Montana Migrants’ Council, who spoke on Challenges of Farm Workers in Montana, and Marena Mahto, an Indian activist from the Bozeman area, who spoke on election and justice issues facing Native Americans.

Nancy Leifer spoke on Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion, and attendees watched the TedX Talk by Peggy McIntosh on White Privilege, with small group discussion of white privilege following.

You can watch the talk at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-BY9UEewHw

The annual business meeting was held Sunday morning. Members reviewed and voted on the proposed program for the 2019-2020 year, and approved an action plan that included creating a Civics Education Study Committee and a Criminal Justice Study Committee, beginning DEI Training at the Local level, the adoption of DEI language at the State level, and continue work of the 100th anniversary planning committee for 2020.

Following Maren Mahto’s presentation, which highlighted voting difficulties that Indians encounter, many members expressed a strong interest in further investigating the impact of the recently passed LR129, which prohibits individuals from delivering more than 6 absentee ballots to county election facilities on behalf of others. As a result, a committee was formed to initiate this investigation. Nancy Leifer and Bonnie Lorenzen have since met with Meg Singer from the Montana ACLU and will be in contact with Montana Women Vote, as this organization is currently working on this issue as well. More information will follow in the upcoming months, as this develops. A shout out to Billings member Maggie Arbuckle, who has volunteered to work on this this committee. Please let us know if you would be interested in volunteering, by e-mailing us at lwv.billings@gmail.com.
Calendar

Thursday, July 11  Local Government Series
How do we pay for everything and who decides?
Billings Public Library Community Room
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 17  Local Government Series
What are the rules?
Billings Public Library Community Room
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 24th  Local Government Series
How can I have a voice?
Billings Public Library Community Room
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 31st  Local Government Series
Social hour/wrap up
This House of Books, 224 North Broadway
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, September 3rd  Monthly Membership Meeting
Topic: Legislative Update
Billings Public Library Community Room
12:00 - 1:00 - Bring your own lunch, optional

Tuesday, September 24th  National Voter Registration Day
Cathy Grott will be sending out a schedule and asking for volunteers.
Learn more about us at…

- Billings League: www.lwvbillings.org
- Follow our Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/lwvbillings/
- Montana League: https://my.lwv.org/montana
- Contact us at: lwv.billings@gmail.com

Join a Local League
You can join the League of Women Voters as a member of a local League, or as a member at large for Montana. In addition to Billings, there are also Leagues in Bozeman, Helena, and Missoula. When you join as a member of a local League, you are also automatically joining the Montana and the national Leagues.
Join on-line at: http://lwvbillings.org/join.html

Contributions
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 deductible. 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.

Contributions can be made online at: http://lwvbillings.org/donate_form.html
Or by filling out the form below:

My gift is for (please check one) _____BLVW _____ BLWVEF

CONTRIBUTION INFORMATION: (PLEASE PRINT)

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Phone: (Home)________________________(Cell)______________________

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!