

The Voter



SPRING ISSUE

March 2019

A Message from the President

Proof is here that citizens working with the City can accomplish important goals!

The Billings League has been working in coalition with the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council and Eco-Angelas to establish the Energy & Conservation Commission. The Commission will need some staffing to do a baseline study to gather data necessary to make a viable plan for reduction of municipal energy use. Funding the baseline study has been one of our stumbling blocks. We were pleased to hear that Mr. Mumford has offered to contribute from his budget the shared cost of an Energy Corps member (through AmeriCorps) get the new Energy & Conservation Commission up and running. Proof is here that citizens working with the City can accomplish important goals!

Read more about Dave Mumford's talk at the March LWV meeting on page 5.

LWVBillings Annual Meeting

The Billings League of Women Voters will hold its Annual Meeting on Thursday, April 4, 2019, from 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at the Elks' Lodge.

Program proposals for the 2019-2020 year will be discussed. You can read an outline of possible programs that have been proposed on page 10. Additional programs can be added at the annual meeting.

LWVUS Supports HR1



LWVUS has been an active member of the Declaration for American Democracy coalition in developing this bill. The goal of the bill, as stated by the League of Women Voters CEO Virginia Kase in a press release is: "...to improve American elections by making our election system more free, fair, and accessible to all eligible Americans."

The League of Women Voters has always supported improving election fairness and increasing citizen involvement in the election process. HR1 aligns with many of the LWVUS positions, including election modernization and redistricting reform. Four key elements of HR1 are:

1. **Expand Voter Registration** by modernizing the registration process by expanding automatic and online voter registration.
2. **Implement Fair Redistricting** by ending gerrymandering.
3. **Outlaw Voter Purging.** The practice of keeping voter rolls current in order to illegally remove voters is undemocratic.
4. **Restore the Voting Rights Act.** Key provisions of the Voting Rights Act were rolled back in 2013. Since that time, voting has become more challenging, disproportionately affecting women and communities of color.



This bill has passed in the House, and now moves to the Senate. The LWVUS calls on all legislators, regardless of party, to support HR1.

Additionally, members are urged to contact their representatives to express support for this legislation and urge their representatives to vote YES for this legislation.



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

LWVUS Position

LWVUS acknowledges that this bill is not without flaws, and that the League does not support all pieces of the bill. LWVUS has developed a list of key talking points that align with their position:

- It should be easier, not harder, to vote. The For the People Act improves access to voting with reforms like Same Day Registration and Automatic Voter Registration.
- More needs to be done to protect voters’ voices. The For the People Act requires independent redistricting commissions, ends voter roll purges based on failure to vote, and restores the Voting Rights Act.
- Our government should respond to the will of the people, not the interests of powerful corporations and wealthy donors.
- The For the People Act includes strong provisions for improving transparency in campaign finance and strengthening government ethics enforcement.

LEARN MORE AT:

<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/talking-points-templates/talking-points-hr1-people-act>

HR1 at the LWVUS website: <https://www.lwv.org/blog/4-key-elements-hr1> and

Declaration for American Democracy coalition: <https://declarationforamericandemocracy.org/>

Who is Your Vice President

by Cathy Fitzgerald

When: Day Before the Election 2018

Where: Yellowstone County

Who: Ruth Blott – VP of the League of Women Voters of Billings

What: A citizen voter contacted the LWV-Billings on November 5th because she hadn't received her absentee ballot and was worried that she would not be able to vote. She is 87 years old and has voted in every election since she turned 21 years old. Our member picked her up and took her to the Yellowstone County Election Office where the staff were extremely helpful and patient with this anxious citizen who was very worried about her vote being counted. The officials were able to identify her undeliverable absentee ballot with the wrong mailing address and she was able to vote on the spot, allowing this citizen to keep her 66-year voting streak. Kudos to Ruth Blott, VP of the League of Women Voters, and the Yellowstone County Election Office for Making Democracy Work!

Member Spotlight



Pam Jones-Hahn and Ed Hahn, peripatetic travelers, decided to retire in Billings. Pam was born and raised on a ranch in Central Montana, and Ed was born and raised in the Milwaukee area. After living and working in California, and then in Hong Kong, for many years, they have found adjusting to winter weather to be a challenge. However, they like being close to nature and family, and are impressed with what Billings has to offer -- friendly people, entertainment, culture, recreation, proximity to beautiful scenery for miles around.

Pam and Ed divide their time between Billings and Portland, Oregon, when not traveling overseas or around the US. They are passionate about people being aware of and thinking about issues, and value the role that the League of Women Voters plays in furthering this.



March Speaker Dave Mumford, Director of Public Works

In 1975 the Billings League created a Consensus Position that describes what good local government should provide. Two of the criteria we established as important are the provision for maximum citizen participation, and accessibility and accountability to the public.

Our speaker on March 7th told us how we can be more active in the decisions made by the Public Works Department.

Dave Mumford, Director of Billings Public Works, talked about the new Billings City Lakes going in on the west end of town. The new drinking water reservoir is now in the planning stage and is scheduled to be complete in 2021. When asked how the public can give input on these important projects, Mr. Mumford listed the following pointers:

1. City Engineering has a website that will have updates on the progress on this and other projects: <https://ci.billings.mt.us/556/City-Projects>
2. Public Works will give updates to City Council. You can find the agenda, minutes and video of the meetings at this website: <https://ci.billings.mt.us/117/Agendas-Minutes>
3. Public hearings will be advertised in the newspaper and on the Public Works website: <https://ci.billings.mt.us/66/Public-Works>
4. Public Works has a Citizen Advisory Board that makes decisions about projects. You can get agendas, minutes and contact information for board members to give them feedback: <https://www.ci.billings.mt.us/90/Public-Works-Board>

Mr. Mumford also talked about the many ways his department has implemented energy cost savings and emission reductions as well as some plans to do more in the future. Many of us were very surprised at the number of projects that are not common knowledge. When asked whether the City of Billings has a Public Information Officer to distribute this information, we found that Billings does not currently have staff dedicated to this function.



LWV-Billings Climate Action Committee

"Billings League members can help get the municipal Energy and Conservation Commission restored by City Council this spring!

The LWV Billings Climate Action Committee has been working with a community coalition since November 2017 to bring a proposal to City Council for city-wide energy conservation.

Our proposal, presented to City Council at the Jan 7, 2019 work session, described a municipal Commission on Energy and Conservation, similar to the one which met and advised the city from 2007 to 2010. The Coalition proposes a 10 year sunset clause so that plans for large municipal projects that cost million of dollars would have continuity from the commission.

The council decided Jan 7 to continue the discussion and asked the City Administrator to return with details about the way the committee would work with the city administration, and the qualifications for committee members. Council members will be considering the length of the term of members and of the committee itself. Four years was favored by some.

The City Administrator's follow up report to the council has not been scheduled yet but is looked for in the next month or so. You can help get the resolution passed by telling your city councilperson to support a 10 year Commission on Energy and Conservation."

What's happening in the Montana Legislature...

A number of bills being considered in the legislature are directly related to positions the LWVUS hold. There is a list of bills related to LWVUS positions listed at the end of the Voter. You can follow bills at:

[http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w\\$.startup?P_SESS=20191](http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w$.startup?P_SESS=20191)

From this page you can look up a specific bill, or bills by legislator, topic or sponsor.

Spotlight on the Issues: Citizen's Right to Know (1984)

Transparency and Freedom of Information is a central issue for LWVUS. The LWVUS position on Citizen's Right to Know (1984), states:

The League of Women Voters of the U.S. believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government. The League further believes that governmental bodies must protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible.



LWV Billings' member Lorraine Collins shared thoughts on proposed changes to the Freedom of Information Act in her Letter to the Editor.

Subverting Our Free Press

by Lorraine Collins

As a journalist who once lived in a country that did not have freedom of the press, I've become worried about our government's tendency to try to subvert our Constitutional protection of freedom of the press, which is freedom to get information and then publish or broadcast it.

The country I lived in was not a terrible place. It had many good things about it and was generally a pleasant place to live. The leader of that country did not say "The press is the enemy of the people," as the president of the United States has said. But if you were a journalist, you knew that the Ministry of Culture was keeping track of what you wrote and published so you tended to be careful, to censor yourself before you wrote something that the government might not like. And if you wanted information from a government agency, there was no Freedom of Information Act to protect you. There still isn't, though I haven't lived in Singapore for nearly forty years.

I didn't move to Singapore as a writer and didn't admit to being one for a while. I'd been advised not to put that on my visa application "because some countries are suspicious of writers." I went there because my husband was transferred there by his company and the wife and kids went with him. But before long I learned there was a community newspaper published by the American Association for Americans living in Singapore, so I joined the volunteer staff. Soon, I encountered a problem.

We wanted to publish a feature about a children's hospital and I tried to arrange an interview with the woman doctor who ran it. A photographer would go with me. It took a long time to get government approval for this story, though we finally did. The Singapore American Newspaper was completely non-controversial and never mentioned anything about politics anywhere in the world. It was circulated only to the 10,000 or so Americans living there. There should have been no problem. But I learned that deadlines depended not so much on our schedule as that of the Ministry of Culture that would, in due time, decide whether to permit the story.

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When as a freelancer I wrote a story about the women of Singapore for the Singapore Airlines magazine, "Silver Kris" I ran into considerable delay again. The story was very complimentary, I thought, and mentioned that women had a wide variety of roles in the nation, including piloting jet fighters in the Air Force.

The editor finally called me to say that they really felt I should take out one line of my story. That line said, "There are no women in government in Singapore." That was certainly true, but if we wanted to publish the story, we'd best delete that line. So it was taken out.

The Singapore Constitution, like ours, theoretically provides for freedom of the press and speech, but several laws have been made to define and limit what is actually permitted. The same thing is happening here. Last Sunday the Gazette published an editorial about new rules that will curtail Freedom of Information requests at the Department of Interior. This is a good example of making rules that limit freedoms we think we have. If we are worried about what the new rules will do to our Freedom of Information, we have to say so by January 28.

The judiciary in Singapore lacks independence from the government and tends to side with it in judging which rules governing speech and the press have been violated. Authors found guilty pay steep fines and are denied employment in their profession. I think about that when President Trump says that libel laws should be more strict, and that it's too bad newspapers can print whatever they want to. It's time to pay attention when he appoints extremist judges because he believes they are loyal to him, personally.

Freedom of the Press was part of the First Amendment to our Constitution, at the top of the Bill of Rights. Two hundred and twenty-eight years ago our Founding Fathers knew a free press is essential for free citizens. When we see attempts by government agencies to subvert our right to gather and publish information, we know it's time to recognize threats to Freedom of the Press and stand in its defense.

The **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)** was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966. The act dictates the scope to which US government documents are disclosed upon request. Over the years, changes have been made to the law, including amendments, expansions, and restrictions. For example, in 2001, Executive Order 13233 under President George W. Bush restricted access to the records of former presidents. In 2009, this order was revoked by President Obama's Executive Order 13489.

In December, the Department of the Interior proposed a new rule changing how it processing records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), making it more difficult to obtain public records. Under the new rule, the Department of the Interior would have greater discretion in determining how to handle public records requests, and limits the number of documents processed for individuals and organizations monthly. The changed is attributed to an "unprecedented surge in FOIA requests and litigation." You can read the rule at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-12-28/pdf/2018-27561.pdf>



Convention 2019 of the Montana League of Women Voters

“Diversity in Democracy”

Convention is intended for every League member who wants to learn more about the challenges and opportunities facing the League. Every member of a local League is also a member of the state and national League. There are no limits on how many people can come and participate in the sessions and speakers on Saturday and Sunday morning. The business meeting on Sunday morning is also open to all, although only designated delegates from each League are allowed to vote.

Highlights of Convention 2019

- * Compelling vision of the League’s role in Defending Democracy in the 21st Century
- * Insight into the barriers we carry that keep us from building trust with those different from ourselves
- * Understanding of some of the challenges facing migrant workers and Native Americans in Montana
- * Information from the team that monitors, does lobbying and issues action alerts for the Montana 2019 Legislative session
- * Showcase of Local League Sharing to learn what other Leagues are doing
- * Opportunity to join the team planning the League’s 100th anniversary in 2020
- * Entertainment and a fun time with League members from across the state
- * Consideration and discussion of convention business of electing officers and approving the budget through 2021, and approving the Program Studies, Issues and Actions through April 2020 (and voting if a designated delegate).

Why the theme “Diversity in Democracy?”

In February of 2020, the League of Women Voters will be 100 years old. As the League enters its second century, we have the opportunity to learn from our past as we move into the future.

The League of Women Voters abandoned women of color in the fight for the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution. While our membership criteria now embrace all people 16 years and older, whether citizens or not, the actual membership of the League remains predominantly older white women. If we are to be relevant in defending democracy in the 21st century, we need to reflect the diversity of our communities in our membership and partnerships with other organizations. The first step is learning about Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) and how we can help our Leagues broaden our involvement with others.

Billings League Program Proposals for 2019-2020

Actions or Studies to Support State or National Initiatives

1. DEI - Embody a more inclusive, welcoming, and diverse organization. Strengthen social impact and collaboration
2. 2020 Celebration
3. Concurrence on Voter Representation / Election Process

Category: Government. Possible title: Voter Representation /Election Process

Position in Brief: Support election methods at each level of government that encourage participation, are verifiable and auditable and enhance representation for all voters.”

Issues of Local Concern

1. Provide Public Education through a workshop series of “Getting Involved in Local Government”.
2. Provide Public Education through movie sponsorship with The Art House of Billings or other venue.
3. Effect of the initiative on Ballot Collection and is there a better solution?

Calendar

Thursday, April 4th

Annual Membership Meeting

The Elks Lodge — 934 Lewis Ave
11:30 - 1:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 28, noon

Convention 2019 of the Montana League of Women

Sunday, April 29, noon

Voters

Diversity in Democracy

Bozeman, Montana

Thursday, May 2nd

Member Meeting

The Elks Lodge — 934 Lewis Ave
11:30 - 1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 7th

School Election & Special District Elections

Ballots Mailed: April 19th

Close of Regular Voter Registration: April 8th @ 5 p.m.

Start of Late Voter Registration (In Person Only): April 9th

New to the League of Women Voters? Want to learn more? Like to make a contribution?

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 League.

Join on-line at: <https://my.lwv.org/montana/join-local-league-0>

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: <https://my.lwv.org/montana/donate>

Or by filling out the form below:

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

CONTRIBUTION INFORMATION: (PLEASE PRINT)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

C/S/Z: _____

Email: _____

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!

Montana legislature 2019 Regular Session

Follow bills at: [http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w\\$.startup?P_SESS=20191](http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w$.startup?P_SESS=20191)

- SB147** **Revising laws concerning human trafficking and sex crimes to protect victims**
Passed Senate. In Second House Committee – Judiciary. Nontabled.
- SB148** **Drop off absentee ballots at precincts**
In Second House Committee – State Administration. Nontabled.
- SB162** **Allow absentee ballot counting to begin day before election without sequester**
In Second House Committee – State Administration. Nontabled.
- SB245** **Establish commercial property assessed clean energy program (C-PACE)**
3/28/19: Scheduled for 2nd reading.
- SB304** **Authorized conceal and carry for legislators, & sergeants-at-arms & their deputies**
4/03/19: Hearing
- HB480** **Revise gun laws to provide for safe gun storage**
3/18/19: Tabled In First House Committee – Judiciary.
- HB536** **Secure voter registration when applying for Driver’s License or ID card (Automatic voter registration)**
3/9/19: Referred to Committee – State Administration. Nontabled.
- HB658** **Generally revise healthcare laws and permanently expand Medicaid**
3/26/19: 10Bill passed as amended
- HJ10** **Study resolution to address American Indian voting**
4/1/2019: Hearing – State Administration.