

President's Report
Jeanne Roberts, President

The League of Women Voters is entering a transformational journey to begin its second century. Nearly 100 years ago, women decided after their decades old fight for full suffrage that in order to be the best possible voters, they needed to be the most informed voters. The League took on the task of educating women not only about the voting and registering process, but also about the nonpartisan facts of the issues that they were going to be voting for (or against). The League of Women Voters has thrived using the model that was started by the women of the 20th century. However, in order to continue thriving and reaching out to more of our neighbors, we need to evolve into the 21st century. The LWV-US has called this a "transformational journey" and has asked state and local Leagues in addition to doing our current excellent work, to expand what we do by reaching out to a younger and more diverse population, by improving our communication and increasing our use of technology and social media. While we begin on this journey, we must hold onto what makes the League special – what has made the League of Women Voters the respected organization that it is – our strict nonpartisanship, our advocacy based on grassroots research not opinion, our incredible talent pool, our reputation as being honest and fair-minded – all of these contributing to the brand of the League as the trusted, pro-democracy organization that it is.

Membership is dropping in the League of Women Voters nationwide due to many reasons. Our membership on the contrary has increased by 30% over the past year. I believe that this increase is due to many reasons. People are more concerned about the attacks on our democracy and interested in taking some type of action. The League of Women Voters has the reputation to be a natural landing place for those people. At the same time, we as a League have reached out. We have implemented monthly programs at the Copper Rock as a site that may attract younger and more diverse populations. Our programs have been on topics of interest to a wide variety of people locally. We have had two interactive programs educating people about who the League of Women Voters of Appleton is and what the League process is. Attendees at these programs came away with an understanding of the important fact-based, nonpartisan work that the League does and this was enticing to many people. We plan to continue this over the next year.

Our voter services team has reached out to many organizations, especially those in which we can engage disenfranchised voters. Our voter registration team has had voter assistance at all three public high schools (we reached out to the private schools who indicated that they would provide their own voter registration.) We have held voter events at FVTC and UW-Fox Valley, Partnership Community Health Center – both dental and medical/behavioral health, the Emergency Shelter and Library, and many more. We have had voter registration at Latino Fest, Juneteenth and the Celebrate Diversity Picnic. We have collaborated with the ACLU, AAUW and Celebrate Diversity Fox Cities on a voter ID assistance program. We had voter registration assistance at the start and the finish of the March for Our Lives. Jacqui has started a voter registration team to begin looking at a strategy for continued voter services including a team to work on Vote411.

Our membership committee has worked hard to develop means to not only recruit new members, but engage both new and current members in the work that we are doing as a local League. The committee has developed a new member packet to share with both new and prospective members to help them understand the work being done and decide how they want to get involved. In addition, the committee has met with new members to invite them to be an active part of our local League. In fact, this July, Barbara Kelley and Shirley Strange will be hosting local League of Women Voters socials at their houses for both new and prospective members as well as current members.

We have increased our social media presence. Our Facebook posts have been much more effective in increasing our presence within the community. We have also changed our website to one that interacts with other Leagues nationwide who use its template. If you have not looked at our website in the last couple of months, take a little time to check it out. It is much more visually appealing and much easier to navigate. If we want to reach young people, we need to do it using technology and social media.

When you go to the website, you will notice that we have one tab specifically for "Youth Voters". This is at the recommendation of the Willems' student marketing team who we have been working with to develop a marketing strategy aimed at not only getting young people to register, but also to understand the importance of other elections besides just the presidential election. We plan to continue to involve young voters to getting an understanding of what will appeal to them and motivate them to get more involved.

In order to continue with our local journey, we need to keep moving forward with what we have started. There are also some additions that we can make. I have asked the nominations committee to find members who could serve as a Communications Director and as a Fiscal Director and they have found two excellent candidates. I have also been working to recruit both members and non-members to a diversity advisory committee with the goals to lead us in making sure that we are doing what we need to in order to reach out to and at the same time be a welcoming League to our diverse communities.

I want to thank all of you for your support over the past year regardless of what that support has been. You will see at the end of your Annual Meeting packet that there is a page listing most if not all of the volunteer opportunities for next year with our local League. We ask that you complete this form and leave it on the table for us to pick up at the end of our meeting. We understand that everyone has different talents and different time availabilities and we want to respect that in all of our members. At the same time, we want to make sure that we are using the talents of the people in this room in the best way possible.

While we need to engage in the "transformative journey" of the League, we cannot forget our past. In a little over a year, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the LWV as well as the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment granting women nationwide the right to vote in all elections. What a great way to start our new century than by celebrating the work of our first century.