

Fairfax VOTER

November 2020

Volume 73, Issue 3

General Meeting - From Insights to Action: One Fairfax

In lieu of unit meetings in November, we encourage all our members to attend (via Zoom) the General Meeting on November 22 from 2 - 3:30 p.m. We have a distinguished panel of speakers and expect a lively, informative discussion.

Unit meetings will be back in December with a discussion on Program Planning.

Calendar

Note: No LWVFA Unit Meetings in November. We will hold a General Meeting instead.

- 2 *Fairfax Voter* Deadline for December issue
- 2 Sequoyah Condo Election, 6 to 8 p.m.
- 3 Election Day for US President, US Senator, US House of Representatives; Town of Herndon; Polls Open 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- 3 Last day to mail in Absentee Ballot; Absentee Ballots must be postmarked by Election Day and received three days later, November 6th
- 6 LWVNCA Board Meeting, Virtual Board Meeting, Zoom, 10:00 a.m.
- 6 Absentee Ballot Return Deadline, noon – must be postmarked by Election Day, November 3rd
- 9 LWV-VA Virtual Board Meeting, 9 a.m.
- 10 LWV-VA 100th Birthday
- 10 LWVFA Legacy Committee Meeting, 1 to 3 p.m.
- 15 Fairfax Cable Access Corp. Community Election, 1 p.m.
- 18 LWVFA Board Meeting, Virtual, 10 a.m.
- 22 LWVFA General Meeting: “LWVFA Advocacy Forum, One Fairfax: From Insights to Action,” 2:00 to 3:30 pm

Inside This Issue

Presidents’ Message	2
Program Director’s Notes	3
Membership Report	3
Donors and Supporters	3
Notice of General Meeting	4
LWVFA Statement on Gun Ordinance	6
Spotlight on Voter Services	7
Outreach to Underserved Community	7
Election Officers: Making Democracy Work	8
Update on Domestic Violence	9
Environmental Update	9
Interview With Lois Page	10



Presidents' Message



Fall Greetings to all our members!

The weather is cool and beautiful as we are in the thick of autumn. Election season is in full swing and as usual there has been much excitement. We have had two virtual candidate forums, one for the 8th Congressional District with Don Beyer and Jeff Jordan and one for the 10th District with Jennifer Wexton and Aliscia Andrews. We could not hold one for the 11th District as the candidates either declined or did not respond to our invitation.

On Constitution Day, the LWVFA held a student-led round table virtual event with Senator Tim Kaine which was both inspirational and informative. This event was sponsored by the Fairfax County School Board and we were co-sponsors. The students did an amazing job both in hosting the event and asking questions. It was very heartwarming to hear Senator Kaine praise the League so many times during the hour-long session. Here is a link to the video: <https://www.lwv-fairfax.org/2020senator-kaine-roundtable?rq=senator%20kaine>

The Voter Services team has been very active and has been conducting Voter Registration and Information drives at MOM's organic markets, Starbucks, strip malls and farmers markets throughout the area. We have also been actively promoting our events in our local newspapers and social media with tremendous success.

The LWVFA has established a new program called "Know and Tell." Our members are sent information packets each week which focus on a timely and important issue or event. The information is provided in a very straight-forward and bullet-point fashion. That is the "know" part. We then ask our members to please spread this knowledge however they best communicate with friends, family, neighbors and others within their community. That is the "tell" part. The mission of the program is two-fold – first, we seek to keep our members up to date on these critical topics. Second, we are striving to keep our membership involved and feeling empowered by their role in amplifying our League messages and helping to keep their community up to date.

We are also conducting several community and HOA elections and as usual we request that you sign up. Please visit our website to get dates and details of the various elections.

Remember to vote on November 3rd, if you haven't already done so.

In League,

Nancy and Anu



Fairfax County 24-hr.
Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline:
703-360-7273; 711 TTY

LWVFA Fairfax VOTER 2020 - 2021

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Please e-mail address corrections to the office
or call 703-658-9150.

Program Director Notes

by Jessica Storrs

We received a lot of positive feedback from the LWVVA Election Laws Update, Part I study that was discussed in September. Our members were impressed with the depth of the research though some units noted the report was very dense and required multiple readings. We appreciate our members' commitment to "dig deep" and provide thoughtful responses for the League of Women Voters of Virginia Election Laws Committee to consider. We will review Part II of the study in January.

The most controversial portion of the study was Section C: Review Language Supporting Electronic Voting which recommends the League position be updated to oppose the return of voted absentee ballots via the internet. Some units wanted it reworded into a positive message, another unit felt the wording was overly specific.

When our unit meetings resume in December, we will have our annual programming planning discussion. This year we will be reviewing the positions of the League of Women Voters of Virginia and League of Women Voters of the National Capital Area. Program planning is the time to express your opinions on what the respective League's focus should be for the next two years. We review the past positions and determine if a new position should be added for study, if past positions should be re-studied, and/or if advocacy for a position is appropriate in the League's next biennium.

Save the Date!

Virginia League State Convention 2021 will take place May 21-23, 2021, at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center. The theme will be: Democracy for All – Now is the Time. Carolyn Jefferson Jenkins, former President of the LWVUS and author of *The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters*, has accepted our invitation to speak at the Opening Session.

We are looking for members who can help with fundraising and identifying exhibitors for the convention. We are also in need of a sign language interpreter. If interested, please e-mail convention organizers Judy Helein (judith-helein@aol.com) and Kathy Matusiak (kmatusiak@comcast.net).

LWVFA Membership Report

If you were a member of the Fairfax League before February 1, 2020, and have not renewed your membership, it is time to do so for the 2020-2021 year. Current rates are \$75 for individuals, \$100 for households, and free for students and life members. A subsidy fund is available for members who have special financial circumstances. The easiest way to renew is by visiting our web site at <https://www.lwv-fairfax.org/join>, where you can fill out the membership form online and submit payment through PayPal OR you can print the membership form and send it with a check to the LWVFA office in Annandale, Virginia. There is an option for automatic online renewal so you won't ever forget to complete this little task in the future!

Our membership stands at 518 as of October 5, 2020. We extend a warm welcome to the following individuals who have joined since mid-September:

Leila Butler (student)
Christine Harold
Judith Lettes
Roberta Paul
Kathryn Schultz
Tamara Sheiffer
Judith Smith
Caitlin Wyant (student)

LWVFA Donors and Supporters

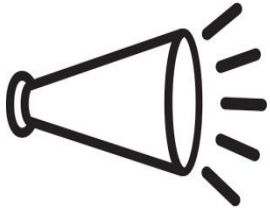
The LWVFA Board extends an overwhelming thank you to the following individuals and organizations for their amazing support!

September 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020

Stephanie Abbott	Dianne Mero
Dorothea Brueckner	Susan O'Neill
Susan Burk	Ingrid Oxaa
Shana Cassidy	Alice Reilly
Mary Jane Cleary	Marjorie Runge
Sherri Gillam	Donna Simpson
Gloria Maher	Kathryn Squires
Judith Helmich	Jennifer Victor
Dorothy Joslin	

FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION: ONE FAIRFAX

Please join the League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area for an insightful program on Fairfax County’s policy on social and racial equity-ONE FAIRFAX



PANELISTS OF DISTINCTION:

Jeff McKay, Chairman-Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Dr. Scott Brabrand, Superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools

Karla Bruce, Chief Equity Officer, ONE FAIRFAX

MODERATOR:

Jill Follows, Co-Chair, LWVFA Committee on Action and Advocacy

Sunday November 22, 2020

2:00 – 3:30 pm

ZOOM: Details to follows

The League seeks insight into the County’s social and racial equity policy, called *ONE FAIRFAX*, and into whether or not the *ONE FAIRFAX* policy casts a big enough net to remedy:

- inequities in PAST programs as well as future programs
- barriers to equal opportunities for ALL Fairfax County residents, especially minority persons, women and persons who are elderly, disabled and otherwise disadvantaged due to discrimination
- human rights violations
- slow attainment of the 17 areas of focus to attain equity in Fairfax County
- minimal awareness of the policy

To prepare for the General Meeting and to submit questions for the panelists, please review the resources at the end of this notice and then send your questions, before November 10, to jill.follows@lwv-fairfax.org. Although your specific question may not be asked during the meeting, every effort will be made to categorize similar questions and cover all topics of interest.

There is much to look forward to. The *ONE FAIRFAX* policy commits the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the Fairfax County Public Schools to consider equity in decision-making and in the development and delivery of future policies, programs and services.

The Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Jeff McKay, will highlight legislative initiatives intended to accelerate the process of achieving equity. Chairman McKay is the highest-ranking elected official in Fairfax County. We welcome him to our General Meeting and thank him for his efforts.

The Superintendent of Public Schools for Fairfax County, Dr. Scott Brabrand, will address the implementation of the *ONE FAIRFAX* policy in our schools. This is our first opportunity to meet Dr. Brabrand. We appreciate his willingness to join us.

The Chief Equity Officer for *ONE FAIRFAX*, Karla Bruce, is a key actor in Fairfax County's implementation of the program. She will define "equity" and tell us how things get done! We appreciate her undertaking this work.

The November 22 General Meeting is an opportunity to have all League members demonstrate our commitment to improving the lives of ALL residents of Fairfax County. The insights gained from the General Meeting program will help craft our future actions, goals and legislative initiatives.

The program planners for this meeting are Jill Follows and Judy Helein.

Fairfax County's Equitable Growth Profile by PolicyLINK (non-profit)

https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/Fairfax_Summary_16June2015_Final.pdf

One Fairfax Policy-County website:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/one-fairfax>

Fairfax County Public Schools Dedicated Webpage to One Fairfax policy:

<https://www.fcps.edu/onefairfax>

One Fairfax Policy (2017) Purpose, Definitions, Areas of Focus, Process, Roles, Related Policies

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/sites/topics/files/assets/documents/pdf/one-fairfax-policy.pdf>

Fairfax County Strategic Plan to Facilitate Economic Success

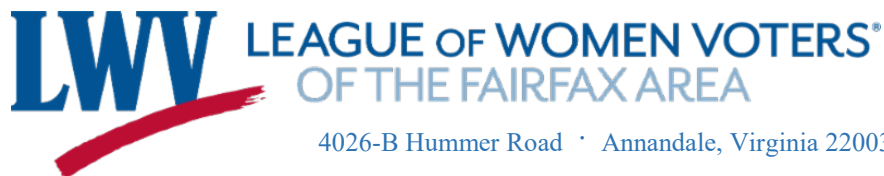
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/economic-success/>

Human Rights Ordinance- Fairfax County

https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/humanrights/sites/humanrights/files/migration/docs/human_rights_ordinance.pdf

Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs (OHREP)

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/humanrights/>



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September 15, 2020

To the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors;

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors has the opportunity and legal authority to pass an Ordinance prohibiting the carrying of firearms into county-owned or operated parks, buildings, recreation centers and on streets adjacent to permitted events. Fairfax County can, and should, join local communities across the Commonwealth, from Newport News to Alexandria, and enact an Ordinance protecting the welfare and safety of its residents.

The League of Women Voters of Fairfax Area supports such an Ordinance. We believe that public libraries, parks and government buildings should, now and forever, be safe spaces that allow for and encourage open discourse and sharing of ideas without threat or intimidation by gun carrying citizens. We support allocation of funds for this purpose. Our members stand in solidarity with the vast majority of Virginians who support gun safety laws.

- Polls consistently show Virginians support stronger gun safety laws along a range of policies. (86% for background checks, 73% for extreme risk protection order)¹

Our League's advocacy on gun violence prevention goes back many years. The Pohick Public Library hosted the League's educational forum on gun use in domestic violence matters and suicide back on March 22, 2015.² The library was filled with parents and their children and senior citizens. This peaceful and productive day was disrupted by 12-armed attendees, wearing guns on their hips, and coming from as far away as Richmond in response to a last-minute solicitation by gun advocates. The League withstood the armed citizens' intimidation tactics and held the forum. Make no mistake, the gun carrying activists, without just cause, had a chilling effect on the speakers and the members of the public who already feared for their safety from domestic violence.

The League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area supports quick passage of an Ordinance prohibiting the carrying of firearms into county-owned or operated parks, buildings, recreation centers and on streets adjacent to permitted events.

Respectfully submitted,
Anu Sahai, Co-President
League of Women Voters Fairfax Area

¹ https://richmond.com/news/virginia/poll-virginians-favor-stricter-gun-laws-oppose-local-control-over-confederate-monuments/article_9cf19af7-66ed-587d-b1eb-7c7900f72817.html
<https://www.13newsnow.com/article/news/local/virginia/cnu-poll-virginia-voters-strongly-back-gun-control-laws/291-66141928-68c9-4e1b-838b-bfede8374c44>
https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/new-poll-finds-virginia-voters-focused-on-gun-policy-ahead-of-pivotal-election/2019/10/03/db034922-e472-11e9-a331-2df12d56a80b_story.html

² <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2015/mar/26/league-women-voters-hosts-forum-firearms-domestic/>

Spotlight on Voter Services

By Cindy Kalkwarf, Voter Services Chair

The Voter Services volunteer team focuses on providing educational and informational public services, registering people to vote, getting out the vote, and initiating outreach programs to groups of potential voters. Interested in joining our team? Contact cindy.kalkwarf@lwv-fairfax.org.

Wow! What an unprecedented election year. Voter education was especially critical given the significant changes in Virginia election laws and processes this year, and of course, the pandemic. The pandemic prevented us from many of our traditional voter education and registration activities, but we adopted the old adage “necessity is the mother of invention.” We developed contact-less methods of registration and outreach, put a significant amount of voting information on our website, and developed and held voter education events and candidate forums virtually. We developed a new outreach program to target underserved communities. See the Outreach to Underserved Communities article below.

The General Registrars had to adapt many of the voting processes to ensure safe elections and ensure their election officers were adequately trained. See the article on page 8.

The High School Voter Registration team continued their registration and education activities despite the virtual school environment. The team sent over 1,000 reminder-to-vote postcards to students they had helped register. In conjunction with one of the schools, we organized the Constitution Day Roundtable with Senator Kaine. Eight high school seniors from around FCPS participated. We have six high school interns who have been producing social media posts, which are very popular. We worked with several high schools to support teacher-led voter registration drives.

And it takes a village – thank you to the close to 300 volunteers who served to help register voters, develop educational materials, deliver materials, educate voters, organize the postcard campaign, write postcards, lead candidate forums, and make our website a source of tremendous voter information.

Outreach to Underserved Communities

By Sherri Gillam

The LWV’s mission is to empower voters and defend democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate in the voting process. With this in mind, we undertook a Voter Outreach project focusing on segments of the population which may be overlooked and underserved as potential voters, particularly in the challenging environment of a pandemic which limits the ability to otherwise reach these voters.

Our team forged important partnerships with over 23 organizations throughout the County who sponsor food banks or pantries on a regular basis. These organizations agreed to distribute our bi-lingual Quick Reference Guide when their program participants picked up food donations. In addition, some organizations invited us to be on-site to interact with potential voters.



This outreach project proved to be successful, with close to 14,000 guides distributed. Staff from the partnering organizations expressed gratitude that our League recognized this need and put forth the energy to reach potential voters who may be experiencing current difficulties in their lives and may need encouragement to participate in the voting process. Thank you to the outreach team: Bob Meredith cultivated partnerships and oversaw delivery of flyers throughout the County; Arina van Breda reached out to form partnerships with eight organizations in Alexandria and Lorton; Sidney Johnson initiated this project, served as consultant and source of wisdom throughout, and worked with organizations in Reston and Herndon; and Sherri Gillam formed partnerships with multiple organizations and guided the project. We hope this project serves as a template for our League to continue our work of providing voter education to the underserved.

Election Officers: Making Democracy Work

By Beth Henson Tudan,
LWVFA Executive Director

Election officers are called “to ensure fair and accessible elections for all voters and to protect the integrity of the election process,” fitting perfectly with the League’s mission statement of “Empowering voters. Defending democracy.” Thus, it’s no surprise that many League members serve as Election Officers from beginner officers to Precinct Chief.

In 2012, League member Wendy Fox-Grage invited me to split an officer shift with her. Our children were young, and she suggested that we watch each other’s children for the other half of the shift. Sixteen elections later, I am now the chief of the South Lakes High School precinct, which is one of Fairfax County’s mega precincts with over 5,000 voters.

Since Virginia holds elections every year, our election officers gain experience, giving us the opportunity of using the equipment and being familiar with the procedures. I often serve in primaries and special elections, averaging three per year. Compare that to election officers in most other states that only have even-year elections. They have to spend more time re-learning the complex processes and getting familiar with the election equipment. In addition, our ballots in Virginia tend to be shorter than elsewhere because we vote so often.

An election officer’s day is busy. We set up as much as possible the day before in order to make a smooth election. We arrive by 5 a.m., swear in, open up all the election equipment, count out ballots, and get ready to open by 6 a.m. There are several different types of machines to set up, including the poll iPads, the Express Vote, the ones for visually impaired, and the scanners. Signs have to go up in very specific places. We add extra signs because South Lakes is large and voters can get lost. We also have two entrances, adding to the signage needed.

Since South Lakes is a mega precinct and Restonians take their citizenship duty to vote seriously, we usually have a steady flow of voters most of the day. During the day, we are constantly opening up and counting (and double counting) packs of ballots. We guard them carefully. Throughout the day, we also check the scanner’s odometer against the numbers of check-ins and the numbers of ballots issued.

Running an election during a pandemic adds challenges. Fairfax County provides PPE Kits for each polling place, including face masks, face shields, gloves, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant. Officers may also wear their own face masks. There will also be clear acrylic “sneeze guards” at each precinct for use at the check-in tables and other locations. We will mark the floor at six-foot intervals to ensure social distancing. In lieu of “I Voted” stickers, voters will receive Fairfax County Voter pens instead.

There are also two new positions to deal with the pandemic, a PPE Specialist and a Non-Routine Specialist. The first will help maintain safety in the precinct and the latter will be trained specifically to help with more complicated issues that can affect voters.

We will also have drop boxes at all the precincts this year. Normally voters must vote in their own precinct. They will, however, be able to return their completed mail-in ballots to any precinct. An election officer will guard the drop box all day. Voters returning mail-in ballots can skip the regular line and drop it off.

After running the election all day, we close at 7 p.m. That’s when the fun begins! All the officers get to work following specific guidelines and jobs. We close the machines and begin to print the reports. We carefully package and seal the ballots. We collect all the signs. We seal this and account for that. We sign, sign, sign, and then sign some more. Many of the items go back in different bins and carts in which they arrived, so we have to pay special attention. We have to write specific reports on all the machines and account for all the ballots and whether voters voted curbside or in person.

Finally, we calculate the results in triplicate and call in the results to a special line in Fairfax County. The officers pack up the equipment and put much of it in the chief’s car to return it to the Fairfax County Government Center. No officer can leave until the chief’s car is packed and has left. We are basically in a media blackout all day, so we only hear about the news of the election after we leave. It’s only then that the impact of our dedication hits us. We have contributed to a well-run election – making our democracy work.

Some statistics in Fairfax County as of October, 2020:
Over 775,000 registered voters,
244 precincts open County-wide on Election Day,
Over 3,800 election officers serving County-wide,
More than 220,000 mail-in ballots requested.

Special CEDV Meeting to Consider Equity in Leadership

By Theresa M. Brion,

LWVFA Representative to CEDV

As noted in the October issue of the *Voter*, the Fairfax County Council to End Domestic Violence (CEDV) voted at its July 23, 2020, meeting to postpone election of a new chairperson, due to concerns members had expressed about the lack of diversity reflected in its leadership. Chair John Cook appointed an Equity Workgroup and called a special meeting of the full CEDV for September 17 to receive and consider recommendations based on a review of similar bodies' efforts.

After dispensing with procedural actions for the CEDV to meet virtually, Chair Cook called on the Chair of the Nominations Committee, Joe Meyer, to report on the Committee's process in bringing forth names to the full Council for consideration. Meyer reported that the Committee met twice and brought forth the names of those nominated, after determining both to be eligible for consideration.

Cook then called on Razen Fayez, an Equity Workgroup member, who reported that the Workgroup recommends the CEDV move forward with the election of the same candidates at the CEDV's next quarterly meeting (scheduled October 22, 2020). It determined that a full examination of the process using the proper equity lenses was not possible within the 30- to 60-day period allotted, taking into account that Chair Cook had tendered his resignation. There had been a fair opportunity to collect nominations, and the Workgroup did not believe it appropriate to reapproach the nominations and election process seeking additional candidates to achieve greater diversity in CEDV leadership.

When asked about the possibility of voting for a one-year term in lieu of three years, Workgroup members responded that the bylaws did not allow for an interim chair, although either of the individuals running could agree voluntarily to serve a shorter period.

Toni Zollicoffer, a Council member, reported on the Workgroup's second recommendation, that an ad hoc Equity Workgroup be created to advise on how to proceed, with the Workgroup converting to an Equity Committee (with bylaws amendment) dedicated to integrating equity and racial justice into all areas of CEDV work. The recommendation included a list of proposed members for this group.

A majority of those present, with one dissent, approved the

recommendations. The election of the new chairperson, along with other regular business, will occur at the October 22, meeting of the CEDV (to be held electronically).

The annual meeting of the Department of Family Services and Domestic and Sexual Violence Services and the DV Community, when the Department celebrates its work, will occur on Friday, Oct. 16, 2020 (to be held virtually).

Environmental Update: Park Politics Dominate

By Elizabeth Lonoff

The quadrennial parks bond referendum on this year's ballot is to authorize \$112 million in borrowing. Based on a 2016 Needs Assessment, the Fairfax County Parks Authority would use \$100 million to finance land acquisition to expand parks (7%), natural and cultural resource stewardship (12%), new park development (28%), and park renovations and upgrades (53%). Watch the park bond video for more specifics, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n1L_zXGpTc&feature=youtu.be. Also, as the County's share of the capital program, the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority would use the other \$12 million to expand public open space and trails, protect natural, cultural and historic resources, improve existing facilities, and provide additional recreational opportunities.

Also coming to fruition:

The Great American Outdoors Act became law in August. As the most historic investment in U.S. public lands in a generation, it will reduce the National Park Service's maintenance backlog on trails, buildings, and roads. The need stands at \$12 billion nationally and \$1.1 billion in Virginia, including the George Washington Memorial Parkway and Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts. The boost to Virginia's outdoor economy is expected to support 10,000 jobs.

Congress passed America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act on October 1. According to Collin O'Mara, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation, this bipartisan investment in restoring wildlife populations and conserving our outdoor heritage comes when one-third of wildlife face heightened risk of extinction. It will restore essential fish and wildlife habitat, eradicate wildlife disease, and address invasive species. The ACE Act reauthorizes the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program, which has been integral in protecting the Bay, its tributaries, and adjoining land since 1983. It authorizes \$90-92 million annually for

five years for the Program to coordinate scientific research, fund local restoration projects, and monitor progress under the Federal/State Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint. The ACE Act also establishes a program to provide grants to States and Indian tribes to compensate livestock producers for losses due to predation by federally-protected species such as wolves or grizzly bears, and the Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize for technological innovation to reduce human-predator conflict using non-lethal means.

Congratulations to the Voorhees Nature Preserve in Westmoreland County on joining the Old-Growth Forest Network with a dedication ceremony in October. Of the other seven protected remnants of the nation’s original forests in Virginia in the Network, the closest to us is Glencarlyn Park in Arlington. See <https://www.oldgrowthforest.net/va-glencarlyn-park>.

In February 2019, *BuzzFeed News* reported from London under the headline, “A Huge Climate Change Movement Led By Teenage Girls Is Sweeping Europe. And It’s Coming To The US Next.” That proved true last year, particularly among those too young to vote. Zero Hour was one of the groups that worked on the U.S. protest as part of an international day of action on March 15, 2019. Its founder and executive director, then-17-year-old Jamie Margolin, told *BuzzFeed* that climate activism has given young women like her a chance to be heard. Zero Hour is led largely by young women of color because people who already are vulnerable will be disproportionately impacted by climate change, as outlined by the World Health Organization.

..... Events

Plant NOVA Natives’ Foundational Planning, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeYRUq_mb_tKxGBFr4XbJyIR0XLYJlu4CPmnsQsHs17zs5Qw/viewform - Landscape Designer Adele Kuo will answer your questions about creating a good planting design with native plants, November 11.

DC Environmental Film Festival’s Fall Showcase, <https://dceff.org/fall-showcase/> – virtual film screenings with discussions, November 12-18.

National Geographic Museum’s Last Wild Places, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/tickets/events/event/last-wild-places-rewilding-the-americas/> – virtual screenings about the American Prairie Reserve in Montana and Iberá National Park in northeastern Argentina followed by a conversation about how conservationists are protecting these threatened landscapes, November 22.

LWVFA Interviews Lois Page

by Wendy Fox-Grage and Julie Jones

When and where were you born?

I was born in Washington, Iowa, in 1939. But I didn’t live there long and spent most of my life moving around. I continued to do that into my married life. It wasn’t that we were in the military or anything. We were growing up post-World War II and it was a restless time in the country and we were all just trying to find our way. Then when I got married, my husband (Ron) worked for the federal government and we lived in at least 9 different locations.

Describe your education and career path.

My husband and I met at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I was living with my family in Lancaster, PA. I got a Bachelors’ degree in English and then we both went to West Virginia University for graduate degrees. My degree was in British Literature, always a helpful degree! Also along the way, I was editor of my high school and college newspapers, and I was offered a job on the newspaper in Morgantown, but I decided to get a graduate degree. Ron was there for a degree in geology and WVU had a big geology department. The English department was not so big, but I muddled through and got my Masters’ degree.

Tell us about your family.

Ron was a geologist who worked for the Federal government in the US Department of Agriculture. After graduate school, we moved directly to Harrisburg and I actually got some jobs. I was teaching writing, but not British Literature. I taught English at Dickinson College and Harrisburg Community College for a while. They wanted low-level people to teach English composition classes. There I was grading papers and I continued to do that wherever I was.

We have three daughters, two were born in Harrisburg. Our next move after that was to Syracuse, NY, and daughter number three was born there. They are now raising their own children and for the most part are gainfully employed. We have seven grandchildren; six of them are in this area. One granddaughter is now teaching at Robinson High School where I taught for nineteen or twenty years. Two other grandchildren are now going there. Robinson is our school. It is so fun to have her teaching there.

We moved to Georgia when my youngest daughter was in fourth grade and I started teaching in middle school. I was always teaching English. I should mention that while at WVU, I was a graduate assistant and taught English 0, to a lot of West Virginia football players. They had a requirement to pass a test, so I also did some tutoring, things like

spelling rules and the like to “get out of jail.”

When and why did you want to join the League? What was happening politically that made you want to get involved?

I first joined the League in Syracuse. One of the first studies I remember was on the United Nations. It was a sharp memory I have of that time. From Syracuse, we moved to New Jersey and I joined the League there. I plunged into the League. It was an interesting experience. The town council cut back on funding for busing of children to school. My children would have to walk to school and cross several dangerous streets. I joined the League in this fight and realized the school board did not make this decision, but it was the town council who controlled the budget. So I decided to run for town council and I won. It was unfortunately cut short, because Ron got transferred to Michigan, so I had a pretty short-lived career as a politician. It was memorable and the whole campaign was exciting. It was fun and we won over a pretty entrenched opponent. My buddy and I ran together and I don't know if they ever solved the bus problem because we had to move on.

We moved to Lansing and I didn't join the League. I don't know if they even had a League or it wasn't apparent. They were in the midst of a resegregation problem and it would have been a good time to have been in the League. One of the solutions was to have all the students in one grade be in one school. I had one daughter in fourth grade and she was basically teaching herself math, so it wasn't working too well. Then we moved to Georgia and there definitely was not a League there. That was when I started teaching in middle school and I had a lot of learning to do since I had not taught that level before.

What roles have you held in the League?

We moved to Virginia in 1980 and I got the job at Robinson. I joined the League here and didn't do much for a while but paying my dues and just reading the “stuff.” I couldn't go to any daytime meetings because of work. Once I retired, I was immediately elected unit chair. It wasn't long before I was on the board. The first thing I did was program, I did that for a long time. Sometimes I had a partner, but they all went away. The program job, coming up with the monthly events and the studies, is a job. Finally I said I have had enough. I did that job for about five years. I think that they went for a year without a program chair. It wasn't one of our best years. I said that I would do secretary because it was a defined job. I knew what I had to do. I think I did that for five years, and then got talked into being on the State board. I said that I would do that if Ron would come too. We were going to do communications and Ron had more technical expertise than I did. Ron has done the local newsletter for at least ten years. Then I got talked into

being Co-President and I did that for two years. Now I am Secretary for our League and am back to my defined job.

What activity are you most proud of?

I love registering voters. I went to Centreville High School to watch Beth do her program. Some of the students really perked up. Even some of the students who were not citizens wanted to see the registration form. Hopefully it will become a time when they can vote. My eighteen-year-old granddaughter in college asked me how to vote absentee and is helping other students at her college. I also am very involved with Turning Point.

What is the main reason that you have been a member for 50+ years?

Partly it was my journalism background that drew me to the League. Especially on the college level, you had a sense of how power works. We took on issues that Dickinson didn't especially want. When we were in Syracuse with its long winters and with little kids underfoot, it was a chance to talk to adults once in a while and use your brain. I didn't just want to do bake sales stuff. It is a sense of idealism, you can make a difference, a role to play that is valuable and a chance to challenge power if it needs to be challenged. One study on redistricting issues stands out which we did while while I was program chairman. I have lots of material on my computer about this still.

What issues really speak to you? What keeps you up at night?

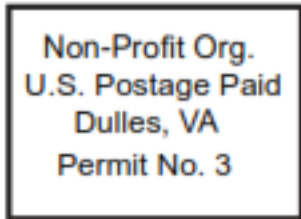
Well, I got involved with a study on funding for education. I am pretty much horrified about how much public funds go for private education. We have a voucher system. I can see some funds for a student that is not getting what he needs in the public system. To me, the funds should go to the system to fix the problem and not send funds to private schools. I was down in Montgomery County and they have much untaxed land, especially with Virginia Tech.

A lot has changed for women in the past 50 years. How has this affected you? What barriers have you faced — any glass ceilings?

There were basically two ways to go when I graduated. You could be some sort of secretary or a teacher or an office worker. I don't know that it affected me, I just sort of powered on. Sometimes I think that I may have been naive. That I become the editor of the college paper didn't surprise me because I worked hard. My mother was a teacher. My mother-in-law was also a teacher and became executive director of the New Jersey School Board so she was a good role model. If we hadn't moved, I might have continued in a political role. But with the move and the death of my mother things just didn't work out.



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Anu Sahai, Co-President
 Nancy Roodberg, Co-President
 Katherine Ingmanson, Editor

The League of Women Voters® is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the public to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, regional and national levels the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Any person at least 16 years old, male or female, may become a member.

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I am interested in becoming involved in (please indicate by circling the appropriate bullet(s)):

- Providing organization support (graphic design, website development/maintenance, fundraising/grant writing)
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- Representing the League in governmental fora (e.g., serving as LWVFA representative on Fairfax County citizens’ committees and agencies, such as affordable housing, or Fairfax County Public Schools).

Other _____