

# The Voter

August 2021

## CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

Dear members,

We hope you have been enjoying the summer! The board took July off from our monthly meeting, but we've been busy planning for the fall and continuing to make organizational changes. We hired Jenn Urban of Legal for Good to help us close out the 501(c)4 and that work is underway. We also applied for and were awarded a \$6,000 grant from Ramsey County to do voter registration and education work this fall!



Heidi Kloempken

At our June meeting, we updated our Nonpartisan Policy to include chairs of the Youth Vote committee. Previously, Youth Vote fell under the voter service umbrella, but in February of this year the board voted to create a standalone committee. Our Nonpartisan Policy lays out rules for board members while representing the League and places stricter rules on presidents, voter service and Youth Vote chairs, and action committees. The League is proud to be nonpartisan, neither opposing nor supporting candidates or political parties. Our allegiance is to the voters of St. Paul. To learn more, read [“Remaining Nonpartisan in Hyper-Partisan Times,”](#) an article by Virginia Kase Solomon, LWV CEO.

Unfortunately, we have seen voter suppression and threats to U.S. voting rights grow over the years. That is especially true this year. The Brennan Center reports that, as of June 21, 17 states

enacted 28 laws that restrict the right to vote. LWV is committed to ensuring that elections are free and fair for all.

If you missed our June event, Who Gets to Vote?, read Cheryl Bailey’s article on page 5 or [watch the program on YouTube](#).



Amy Perna

LWVSP is busy planning voter registration & education events for the fall. If you would like to be involved in registration work, contact [Joann Ellis](#) (eastsidemom16@hotmail.com).

As always, we’d love to hear from you. Reach out anytime with thoughts, ideas and feedback! Email [Heidi](#) (heidi.kloempken@gmail.com) and [Amy](#) (pernalwvstp@gmail.com)

Warmly,

Amy and Heidi

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## St. Paul Voters to Decide on Rent Stabilization

This fall, St. Paul residents will vote on a proposed rent stabilization ordinance that would put a 3% annual cap on rent increases. Housing advocates gathered enough signatures of the city's registered voters to get the ordinance proposal on the ballot for the November 2 election.

More than half the city's residents live in rental housing. Tram Hoang, campaign manager for the [Housing Equity Now St. Paul](#) (HENS) coalition, which led the petition effort, said the ordinance would benefit all renters, but especially low-income residents and people of color. According to HENS research, five states and more than 182 cities have some form of rent stabilization policy in place.

The group's effort was based in part on an in-depth [study on rent stabilization policies](#), commissioned by the city of Minneapolis and completed in February by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). The full text of the proposed ordinance can be found [here](#).

The [Minnesota Multi Housing Association](#) (MMHA), which represents about 2,000 property owners, developers, and management companies, has said that the proposed policy would discourage investment in rental properties in St. Paul and thus could worsen the city's affordable housing shortage.

The proposed process allows landlords to seek single-year exceptions due to major changes in

property taxes, unexpected capital improvements, and other factors. The 3% cap is intended to prevent such practices as overnight rent increases without punishing landlords with legitimate price increases.

Ballot initiatives in Saint Paul are not new. Chapter 8 of the Saint Paul City Charter reads: "The people shall have the right to propose ordinances, to require ordinances to be submitted to a vote," and explains that a referendum:

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**A ballot petition must be signed by registered voters equal in number to 8 percent of those who voted in the previous mayoral election.**

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"shall be initiated by a petition ... signed by registered voters of the city equal in number to eight (8) percent of those who voted for the office of mayor in the last preceding city election ..."

At least 5,000 valid signatures of registered Saint Paul voters were needed for a successful petition. More than 9,100 signatures, gathered by coalition organizations and volunteers, were submitted to the Ramsey County Elections Office on June 15.

After reviewing each signature and certifying that enough valid signatures were obtained, Elections Office staff returned the ballot measure to the city. As of this writing, the City Attorney's Office was reviewing and editing the final ballot language, so the city can submit it to the Ramsey County Elections Office by the August 20 deadline.



**Tweetable, Likable, or Grammable?**



Visit us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or Instagram.



Follow us: [@LWVStPaul](#)



## Celebrating Barb Burleigh

LWVSP members, along with other colleagues and friends of Barb Burleigh, gathered in Woodbury on June 16 to celebrate her 80th birthday. Barb (back row, third from left) has been a steadfast member of the League since 1970.

"In 2020, Barb was the first to volunteer to register voters," says Heidi Kloempken. "Her enthusiasm for voter registration in the uncertain times of a pandemic, and constantly updating voting information, was an inspiration during a complicated year." Thank you, Barb!

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## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

### Which Committee is For You?

Following two virtual annual meetings, we want to make sure you, our members, are in the loop on our committees. As you review the descriptions below, perhaps you'll envision where you could fit in. Watch your email for sign-up opportunities in August or reach out anytime to [info@lwwsp.org](mailto:info@lwwsp.org) and we'll have a committee chair contact you.

#### Program Committee

Co-chairs: Bridget Adams and Beatrice Owen

Meetings: First Tuesday of the month.

Description: This committee plans and hosts monthly education programs for LWVSP members and the public. We discuss new ideas for programs and support each other in making these events happen, both in person and on Zoom.

#### Membership Committee

Chair: Nona Beining

Meetings: TBD

Description: Our work includes outreach, welcoming new members, and performing enrollment duties, such as updating our roster and submitting forms to the state and national Leagues. We also organize a December luncheon and new member meetups. Our goal: to create a fun environment for our members to meet and thrive.

#### Voter Service

Chair: Joann Ellis

Meetings: TBD

Description: We organize and help publicize voter registration events—coordinating volunteers, staffing events, performing clerical work, and tracking results. This committee is critical to one of our core missions: getting out the vote.

#### Youth Vote

Co-chairs: Lia Pak and Grace Reardon

Meetings: Second Saturday of the month

Description: We organize and develop the Student Leader Program, which empowers students to promote civic engagement among their peers. Our support includes assisting high-school and college students with outreach and education projects and voter registration events at their schools.

#### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Chair: Open

Meetings: TBD

Description: This emerging committee will work toward incorporating the LWVUS position on diversity, equity, and inclusion into our work. Help us explore ways to promote a diverse and inclusive organization in our communications, committee work, and programming.

# ORAL HISTORY SPOTLIGHT

In 2015, LWVSP received grants from the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Legacy Amendment's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund to gather oral histories from nine longtime members. In the months to come, we'll be publishing highlights from these interviews.

Below are summaries and excerpts from a May 2016 interview by oral historian Kate Cavett.

## Sigrid "Sig" Tracht Johnson

Sig has served as newsletter editor, secretary, and president of LWVSP. She has worked on studies and volunteered on voter registration and education efforts. "I love the League," she said, "and I think it's kind of the gold standard of any other organization I have belonged to."

"I was a political science major in [Carleton College]. The Dean of Women gave everybody a letter of introduction to the AAUW, the American Association of University Women. And they have a lovely big house over on Summit Avenue. But their dues were \$25, and a new graduate in the '50s is practically penniless. The League of Women Voters' dues were only \$5."

"My mother was a League member. And I can remember boxes under her bed full of newspaper clippings from topics that the League was studying. She didn't really press the issues, but I know that her vote cancelled out my father's vote. So, she was an independent voter."

### Candidate Forums

The LWVSP has long held candidate forums, often co-sponsored with community councils or other non-partisan groups. Generally, the League provides the moderator and facilitates questions from the audience. Sig said the facilitators learned to never hand a microphone to an audience member.

"I was doing a school board candidate forum one time, and one man got up, and he had an issue

about abortion. And he wondered what the school board was going to do about that. And really, the school board has nothing to do about anything [like that]. So, I said, 'Well, thank you, sir. I'm sure the candidates have understood your problem.' And he wouldn't sit down, and he wouldn't sit down. And I said, 'Thank you. Time's up.'

"So, now, we hand out three-by-five cards and ask people to write down their questions. And we



have ushers who collect the questions and League members who look through the cards and group them into similar topics.

The process works well but isn't without flaws, as Sig explained:

"At the end of one forum there were leftover questions. We figured that an hour to an hour-and-a-half is about as long as people are going to sit still and listen to a panel. So, at the end . . . I announced that 'I'm going to read these questions so that you know that the candidates have heard your concerns.' And so I was reading them—and there were quite a lot of them—I read through them really fast. And there was one in there about one candidate's personal life that was very, very rude. And I just read it off; it went through my mouth before it went through my brain."

"It was very embarrassing. It made the papers, even the Minneapolis [Star Tribune]. And [then columnist] Doug Grow came over to visit me, and he said, 'You know, it might have been very

*continued on page 6*

# LEARNING WITH THE LEAGUE: PROGRAM RECAP

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## Who Gets to Vote?

### *Experts speak on U.S. voting history and current voting laws and trends*

*This program was broadcast June 29 by Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) and Suburban Community Channels (SCCTV), with support from the White Bear Lake and Roseville Leagues. It's available to [view on YouTube](#).*

*Speakers: David Schultz, professor of political science at Hamline University and professor of law at the University of Minnesota, and Tammy Patrick, senior advisor to the Elections program at the Democracy Fund and adjunct faculty member at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs.*

Moderator Heidi Kloempken, LWVSP co-president, brought the topic to life by citing the Brennan Center for Justice statistics: In 2021, 389 bills in 48 states have aimed to restrict voting, and 28 new laws had been enacted as of June 21. There have also been 880 bills written to expand voting rights, with 28 having passed in 14 states.

The speakers split the hourlong program, beginning with David Schultz's perspective on the past.

#### **Historical overview**

Since the writing of the Constitution in 1787, said David Schultz, the federal government—Congress and the Supreme Court—has gradually expanded voting. Yet there has always been a partisan battle over voting rights, and we are in a second great wave of restriction attempts.

As a young country, Schultz explained, the U.S. was truly an experiment in representative government, with prominent fears and compromises. Rifts between states—slave owning vs. free, populous vs. less populous—were fear-driven. Negotiations led to slaves being designated as three-fifths of a person, so even though they could not vote, they counted toward representation in south states. The Connecticut Compromise was an agreement by large and small states that established the bicameral legislature, and the

combination of equal representation in the Senate and proportional representation in the House.

But who got to vote? The framers did not define this in the Constitution, leaving it to the states to decide. What that meant in 1787: You could vote if you were a wealthy, white male taxpayer (that is, a landowner) over age 21.

It took laws (such as the Civil Right Act of 1866), Constitutional amendments (14th and 15th), and the Civil War to start the arc of voting rights toward inclusion. Notice the role of federal leg-

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**There has always been a partisan battle over voting rights, and we are in a second great wave of restriction attempts.**

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islation, which continued with the 17th amendment (direct election of U.S. Senators), 19th amendment (granting women the vote), and 26th amendment (lowering the voting age to 18). Those, along with various Supreme Court decisions, expanded voting to all. States, when left to their own, did not.

Schultz recounted a relevant event after the bitter 1876 presidential election. Democrat Samuel Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes disputed electoral vote counting. The Democrats agreed to concede the election on one condition: that federal troops, which were enforcing the civil and voting rights of the Reconstruction, be withdrawn. This was the start of the racist Jim Crow era, in which poll taxes, lynchings, felon disenfranchisement, literacy tests, and other intimi-

*Continued on page 7*

## Sig Johnson continued from page 4

upsetting to you, but you did more for the League of Women Voters in that one faux pas than you know.’”

### Studies

The League of Women Voters takes positions on issues only after members have gathered, examined, and vetted information and come to consensus. In-depth studies, which may last several years, inform the process of approving a position, whether at the national, state, or local level.

“The League members have a meeting and brainstorm topics of interest. And then, whatever comes out on top, the League forms a study committee. And through the years, I’ve always been impressed that a League study is as high quality as a master’s thesis. It’s well researched and documented and printed. It’s very impressive.

“The [study on] selection of judges was particularly interesting— on whether judges should be elected or whether they have a conflict of interest if they have to declare a party or if they have to raise money. Then they’re beholden to their contributors.”

### Fundraising efforts

Over the years Sig has been involved in a variety of fundraising activities, including one that brought together the St. Paul business community.

“In the late 1990s, the League organized annual luncheons called Circle of Leadership, where downtown businesses sponsored \$500 tables for their staff. I have the program from the February 12, 1998, event at the Minnesota Club. The topic was St. Paul’s Community Development Agenda 1996 to 2001. A panel of business and government executives was moderated by Kalley King of KSTP-TV. After the bills were paid, the net income was \$11,198.”

Sig also recalled a non-traditional event:



Sig Johnson, right, stands next to state Senator Fong Hawj at registration event.

“Another fundraiser we produced was a reader’s theater event called *The Cabinet Meeting*. It was written by our executive director, Madeline Hansen in 1993, and was about what might have happened if women were in charge of the government. Susan B. Anthony had been elected President and she appointed the cabinet (I was Frances Perkins).”

Highlights of that fictional cabinet:

- Secretary of Agriculture Rep Coya Knutson (1912–1996, Minnesota’s first Congresswoman)
- Surgeon General Dr. Susan Picotte (1865–1915, the first Native American female M.D.)
- Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. Mary Walker (1832–1919, a Civil War surgeon)
- Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins (1882–1965, labor reformer, “mother” of Social Security)

### What is Your League Story?

How have you been inspired to engage in your community on issues of civic importance? What is your favorite thing about League or how would you like to contribute? The LWVSP membership committee wants to hear from you! Email your story to [Nona](mailto:nbeining@gmail.com) (nbeining@gmail.com).

—Nona Beining

## Who Gets to Vote? continued from page 5

dation tactics worked to prevent Black Americans from voting.

Schultz notes that the parties have now switched roles, with the GOP writing most voter restriction laws, in the name of election security, and the Democratic Party writing laws intended to make voting easier for all U.S. citizens eligible to vote.

### Current trends

Tammy Patrick began by discussing absentee voting, vote by mail, and vote at home—inter-changeable terms for a process that has worked for millions of U.S. citizens for decades. It's been key for armed services personnel overseas, and the American West has embraced mail-in voting for some time.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many states to use expanded mail-in voting for primaries. This was enabled by executive orders, temporary legislation, and administrative decrees, all of which could be used again to streamline processes and help forge permanent laws. Hundreds of thousands of primary ballots were rejected due to signature issues, ballots returned too late, and incorrect use of privacy sleeves—issues that had to be addressed with the help of state leaders and groups like the League educating the public.

Patrick noted an erratic response to the massive primary turnout by state elected officials: Some states observed the successes yet blocked the measures for the November election while others retained them. Will the embrace of in-home voting hold, or will the public crave a return to in-person voting on Election Day?

Many states need to modify laws encourage a successful vote, said Patrick. Minnesota is among states that allow ballots to be requested by mail the day before the election, even though the U.S. Postal Service says completed ballots should be mailed at least a week before the due date.

She's observed a new spin on voter suppression

legislation following the 2020 election. The new bills often:

- favor state authority over local election officials
- criminalize the acts of elected officials who make mistakes due to imperfect systems
- increase legislative oversight of presidential electors

Innumerable bills using familiar techniques—targeting ballot boxes, ballot collection, poll watcher rights, voter ID, and disabled voter access—have gained attention and sponsors.

Patrick reminded the audience that all elections undergo routine audits and random recounts to confirm accuracy. She saw danger in Arizona turning over official election equipment to an uncertified company with no experience auditing an election. Her data shows that 38% of Arizonans believed that former President Trump won the 2020 election, despite it having been the most secure, observed, transparent and audited election in history. She noted numerous reports of election officials enduring personal insults, hostile social media comments and even threats to family members.

Both speakers admitted there is no magic wand to fix our broken, conspiracy-driven society, but urged us all to educate friends, refute obviously false social media, and support federal intervention. Patrick recommended the resource Election-line.org, a nonpartisan clearinghouse for election reform news sponsored by Democracy Fund.

—Cheryl Bailey

### Stay Tuned for Our Next Event

At publication, we were still finalizing topic and speakers for August 24. Watch [our website](#) for details.

# BOOK CLUB NEWS

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## Morning Book Club

Meetings are the second Wednesday of each month at 10 a.m., with the location announced in advance. [Email Mary](mailto:mgp22@msn.com) (mgp22@msn.com) for info.

**August 11:** Choose books for the upcoming season.

**September 8:** *America for Americans, A History of Xenophobia in the United States*, by Erika Lee. Irrational fear, hatred and hostility toward immigrants is a defining feature of our nation from the colonial times to the Trump era. Margie will lead.

**October 13:** *The Girl with Seven Names*, by Hyeonseo Lee. As a child growing up in North Korea,

she was one of millions trapped by a secretive and brutal communist regime. The story of one woman's terrifying struggle to avoid capture and guide her family to freedom. Sharon will lead.

## Evening Book Club

Meetings are the first Monday of each month at 6 p.m. If you have suggestions or want to join the discussion, [email Heidi](mailto:heidi.kloempken@gmail.com) (heidi.kloempken@gmail.com). We usually read nonfiction related to current events, Minnesota, and other topics of interest to League members

**August 2:** Choose books for fall.

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## Newsletter Seeks Topics, Articles, Photos

*The Voter* is always on the lookout for nonpartisan news, resources, history, and events for publication. We also love photos of LWVSP volunteers in action.

Are you a writer with a little time every other month? Or just have an idea you'd like to propose? [Contact Diane Hellekson](mailto:dianereally@hotmail.com) (dianereally@hotmail.com) anytime. The deadline for submitting to our October issue is September 17.

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The Voter is published every other month by the League of Women Voters St. Paul. To submit suggestions or news, [contact Diane Hellekson](mailto:dianereally@hotmail.com) (dianereally@hotmail.com).