

President's Message

Busy month ahead across LWVGP

February looks to be a busy month for our League, with candidate forums scheduled and LWVIL Issues Briefing on Feb. 24, as well as preparing Budget for 2024-2025 year. Check out the candidate forum information and plan to attend one or volunteer to be a greeter or timer. The Voter Services Committee has been reaching out to candidates in contested races and confirming candidates' participation.

Thank you to all who participated in the Program Planning meeting on Jan. 27. The information collected will be sent to LWVIL before March 1, in preparation for identifying issues of focus for LWVUS convention in June. No topics for study identified at this time.

You will find information on the LWVIL Issues Briefing in this newsletter; it will be held both in person and virtually. This has always been a valuable program and this year's topics are very timely in our current political climate. Think about getting a carpool together to attend in person or register for virtual attendance.

Jim Runyon has agreed to Chair the Observer Corps Program. Thank you to Jim for accepting this role. We have recently received LWV Observer buttons for Local Government Observers to wear when attending a public meeting they are monitoring. We have several members interested in LOGO training and hope to have some dates on this soon.

The Nominating Committee will be meeting this month as well to finalize selection of new board members for positions that will be open for term beginning July 1.

February is Black History Month. Check out some of the events sponsored by the Peoria Public Library and other organizations in your community.

———— Connie Romanus, LWVGP president

Important Dates:

THROUGHOUT FEBRUARY: Candidate Forums – see Voter Services report for full info on dates

7:50 a.m. – 3 p.m., Mon., Feb. 12: Public Interest Group (PIG) Fair, Pekin Community High School, contact Connie Romanus for more details on volunteering for part of the day

4 p.m., Mon., Feb. 12: LWVGP Executive Board via Zoom

8:45 a.m. – 3:45 p.m., Sat., Feb. 24: LWVIL Issues Briefing in Naperville – more info below

1:30 – 3:30 p.m., Sat., March 16: ACLU program on Open Meetings Act at Peoria Public Library North Branch

5:30 p.m. social; 6-7 p.m. program, Wed., March 20: Drinks and Dialogue at Lariat Steakhouse, Topic: Rank Choice Voting

REMEMBERING LWVUS PRESIDENT DR. DEBORAH TURNER

WASHINGTON — It is with profound sadness that the League of Women Voters announces the passing of our esteemed president, Dr. Deborah Ann Turner, who passed away on Sunday, Jan. 28, from complications from a pulmonary embolism.

A fearless advocate for voting rights and women’s rights, Dr. Turner devoted her life’s work to impacting meaningful changes in the lives of voters across the nation. As the 20th president of the 103-year-old voting rights organization, Dr. Turner played a pivotal role in fighting for a more fair and representative union, while uplifting racial equity in the League’s mission work.

The League of Women Voters staff, board, and Leagues from across the country mourn this loss, and our thoughts are with Dr. Turner’s family during this difficult time. We are committed to honoring her legacy by continuing to uphold our values to empower voters and build a stronger, more inclusive democracy.

UPCOMING EVENTS: DRINKS & DIALOGUE

After a very informative Drinks and Dialogue meeting in January, D&D will take a break in February due to the LWVGP's very busy Candidate Forum schedule ahead of the upcoming primary election.



Our January program was an update on the mechanics of local elections. John Ackerman, the Tazewell County Clerk, and Elizabeth Gannon, the Executive Director of the Peoria County Election Commission, told us about their efforts to make it as easy as possible to vote and, equally important, why we can have confidence in the integrity of the vote counting process. Over 10% of our

LWVGP members attended the session and the discussion was lively.

I came away from the meeting with three main points.

1. Our election officials are well-motivated, fair and competent people who are doing everything they can to make our representative democracy work effectively and efficiently.
2. The way that citizens choose to vote continues to shift. More people are voting by mail and the number of polling stations continues to decline, accordingly.
3. The level of transparency and accountability in our local election processes should inspire confidence that the “will of the people” is fairly expressed.

I should add that our election officials are always in need of more election judges.

For March, we have invited Sheldon Schafer to talk about supporting a referendum on Rank Choice Voting.

Mr. Schafer describes the topic this way.

“A relatively obscure section of Illinois Code (60 ILCS1/30-205) allows township voters to place advisory questions of public policy on the ballot for the General Election (in that township)

In this application of direct democracy, we'll ask "if the State of Illinois should adopt ranked choice voting". (For statewide and federal elections). Discover how this process works."

Please join us in March, with social time at 5:30 p.m. and the discussion beginning at 6 p.m. at the Lariat.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ILLINOIS – ISSUES BRIEFING

Saturday, Feb. 24, 8:45 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Attend virtually or in person

Northern Illinois University, Naperville Conference Center, 1120 E Diehl Road, Naperville, IL 60563

Register here: lwvil.org/issues-briefing-2024

What is the Issues Briefing?

Each year, LWVIL provides an opportunity for all members to hear from experts, legislators, academics and others about important issues facing our state and nation. Held on Feb. 24, this hybrid event will highlight three issues that threaten the League's primary objective of defending democracy: corruption, poverty, and election interference through disinformation. There will also be a presentation on trauma and gun violence, which is of great interest to a majority of our members.

Each session will end with a review of relevant bills and budget items that the state legislature will be addressing during the Spring legislative session.

GET BRIEFED! Get educated! Get involved! Bring a friend!

Please plan to attend in person to network and meet speakers. A summary of sessions for this year's briefing is below:

Corruption in Government: Why enshrining government transparency and accountability into law are solutions that matter.

Leveraging Fiscal Policy to Address Basic Human Needs: How Illinois can rise to the challenge of meeting the basic needs of a growing low-income population while also ensuring the safety and well-being of new arrivals.

Freedom of Speech in the age of Mis- and Dis-Information: While the Constitution guarantees a right to free speech as a core tenet of democracy, mis- and disinformation pose an increasing threat to it. Navigating a balance between the two is critical to maintaining open elections and preserving democratic processes.

Trauma and Gun Violence: Two perspectives on reducing gun violence by addressing known risks. Speakers will look at gun violence through the lens of domestic violence and the social and economic circumstances that often lead to it.

If you have never attended, you don't know what you're missing. Learn more at lwvil.org/issues-briefing-2024.

ILLINOIS' OPEN MEETINGS ACT: WHAT CITIZENS SHOULD KNOW

On Saturday, March 16, the local chapter of the ACLU will be sponsoring a public meeting on the Illinois Open Meetings Act from 1:30–3:30 p.m. at the Peoria Public Library North Branch. A speaker from the Illinois ACLU will present information on this Act and someone from the Illinois Attorney General's office will speak to proposals to reform the Act.

In 1966, the federal government passed the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This defined what the public has a right to know, and how they can exercise that right to obtain government held information.

In 1976, Congress passed legislation, Sunshine Act, requiring open meetings of bodies that head federal governments agencies, mandating every portion of meeting of an agency will be open to public observation. Illinois passed its Sunshine Law in 1957.

The League of Women Voters Observer Corps members are trained on the Freedom of Information and Open Meetings acts and support education of the public on these issues. We encourage you to attend this meeting and learn about the current law in Illinois, as well as proposals for reform of the Act.

———— Connie Romanus, LWVGP president

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VOTER SERVICES

You can hear directly from the candidates running for office in Peoria and Tazewell counties and decide for yourself who you will support. Attendees will have the opportunity to submit questions for the candidates at the forums. The League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria (LWVGP) only hosts forums in contested races and unfortunately many of the races are not contested in the primary election on March 19. More will be contested in the general election in November. Early voting and submitting a vote by mail-in ballot starts on Feb. 8. All forums will be held in the month of February. The schedule follows:

37th Senate District – Republican Primary: 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 3, at the Dunlap Public Library. Co-sponsored by the Dunlap Public Library.

2nd District Tazewell County Board – Republican Primary: 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 7, at the Morton Public Library. Co-sponsored by the Morton Public Library and the Morton Area Chamber of Commerce.

53rd Senate District – Republican Primary: 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 17, at the Chillicothe Public Library. Co-sponsored by the Chillicothe Public Library.

All forums will be live streamed and available on the LWVGP YouTube channel. Search for either LWVGP or League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria on YouTube or just click on [League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria - YouTube](#).

We had hoped to have a forum for the 3rd District Tazewell County Board Republican race and the 105th Illinois House Republican race, but unfortunately some candidates chose not to participate. We are still hoping to do a forum in late February for the 17th Congressional Republican race, but we have not heard back from one of the two candidates at press time.

We can guarantee that Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford election authorities are still in need of **election judges**. If you have an interest in doing this, contact the Peoria County Election Commission, the Tazewell County Clerk's office, or the Woodford County Clerk's office depending upon the county in which you live.

————— Rob Parks and Eileen Steed, Voter Services Co-chairs

MEMBERSHIP

A big thank you to Theresa Koehler for updating the membership roster. Her list shows 135 current members for Greater Peoria League. Theresa has also revised membership form application to capture data on household memberships.

Consider joining the Membership Committee and being a greeter at League meetings. You can also help promote our forums and other meetings by sharing events posted on our [LWVGP Facebook page](#).

As the League of Women Voters US plans its transition to a unified system for memberships in 2025, we will begin sharing some of the components of that in March. Some information can be found on www.lwvus.org under title, “Framing the Future.”

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PEORIA COUNTY BOARD: Jan. 11

The Peoria County Board held its first 2024 meeting with all members present except Linda Daley and Brian Elsasser. The agenda was very light, resulting in a 15-minute meeting.

In regular business the board unanimously approved zoning requests in Limestone and Princeville townships.

Unanimously approved consent agenda items included:

- The Peoria County FY2024 legislative initiatives. Priorities include projects on Main Street, the Riverfront, Pioneer Parkway, MacArthur Highway, Laramie Avenue, Gale Avenue, Sheridan Road, Willow Knolls Road, Cameron Lane and Glasford Road. Policy priorities include website posting of property assessments, expanded code enforcement, and immunity from liability for cyberattacks.
- Acceptance of three grants for the 10th Judicial Circuit transportation assistance program, the supervised visitation program and the adult treatment court.

Links to the meeting agenda and video are here: [Agenda](#) & [Video](#)

————— Jim Runyon, Observer

PEORIA COUNTY ELECTION COMMISSION: Jan. 9

The Peoria County Board of Election Commissioners met Jan. 9, for its regular monthly meeting. All members were present. Approximately 6,000 courtesy letters were mailed to voters who had signed up for permanent Vote by Mail. The letters stated that they would not be receiving a primary ballot, since voters need to declare a party to vote in a primary. They were given options, including always receiving a particular party's primary ballot.

In summarizing the 2023 budget, Executive Director Elizabeth Gannon noted that after paying salaries for the last weeks of December and buying a battery backup, the Commission will have about \$10,000 left over for 2024.

Two interns have been chosen to work until after the primary. If they work out well and choose to do so, they can return to work for the general election in the fall. The public testing of election equipment has not yet been scheduled, but will take place before the next Commission meeting. Speakers have been requested by numerous groups, including the League of Women Voters at their upcoming Drinks & Dialogue.

———— Irene Pritzker, Observer

PEORIA CITY COUNCIL: Jan. 9

The meeting of Town of City of Peoria met prior to City Council meeting with Town Officials approving expenditures for December 2023 as well as the January 2024 anticipated expenditures. The minutes of the December Town meeting were approved.

The City Council approved consent agenda with three items pulled by Councilor John Kelly for discussion (items 24-002, 24-009, 24-012). All approved. Council reviewed regular business items, including approving 2024 Annual City Legislative Agenda. Some of the legislative agenda items included: public safety pension reform, public safety amendments, including amending Safe-T Act to require mandatory detention for Class 2, Class 1 and Class X felonies, as well as make Motor Vehicle Theft, Possession of Stolen Motor Vehicle Class 1 felonies and Vehicle Hijacking a Class X felony, and preserving home rule powers, as well as relocation of

State Street post office. For full list of legislative agenda, see minutes of meeting or video.

Other items:

- Approved purchase of infrastructure for Outdoor Dining Pilot program in Downtown Central Business District and Riverfront, not to exceed \$175,000. Presentation by Kimberly Richardson, assistant city manager.
- Accepted FY 2023 Dept. of Human Services Grant from Illinois Dept of Human Services in amount of \$500,000 for Youth-Related Violence Prevention Grant activities.
- Approved bid from J.C. Dillon for Storm Sewer Cleaning and Inspection Project in amount \$322,740 including contingencies; includes council districts 2, 3 and 4. Districts 1 and 5 planned for following year.
- Received and filed report back on policy session discussions on short-term rentals as First Reading. Corporation Counsel Patrick Hayes requested an amendment to strengthen tools to address concerns raised on specific properties. Staff will present recommendations to Planning and Zoning Commission to include following: reduction of cap from 3% to 1% in neighborhood association area, increase cap from .25 mile to .50 mile and require 1,500-foot separation between short term rentals (STR) and report back to Council.
- Under new business: Councilor Tim Riggerbach requested report back on little houses from Community Development Department. Also requested update on Social Services program through Peoria Police Department. Chief Eric Echevarria responded the Director of Social Services hire will start Jan. 22 for program based at Wisconsin Avenue sub-station. Focus will be aiding victims of crime.
- Councilor Denis Cyr requested future meeting to discuss recent business growth in city and ensure steps taken to attract and keep talented professionals, as well as provide housing solutions, and other related needs.

Peoria City Council meets second and fourth Tuesdays of month at 6:00 p.m. at Peoria City Hall. Agenda and minutes of meetings available: <https://peoriagov.civicweb.net/Portal/>. Meetings can be seen on Cable Access Channel 22, online at above website and heard on WCBU 89.9.

————— Connie Romanus, Observer

DUNLAP DISTRICT 323 SCHOOL BOARD: Jan. 18

The regular school board meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. on Jan. 18. All members were present.

The superintendent's report included:

A FOIA request concerning e-learning policy. Dr. Scott Dearman said that the district e-learning plan is in place. E-learning would be used on the fifth snow day if four snow days are used. So far no snow days have been used.

Also, he said that a referendum concerning building a new school in place of Wilder Waite Elementary will occur in November.

Another FOIA request was submitted.

Public participation:

President Abby Humbles read the board policy for public participation at a board meeting. The chairperson of the Social Studies department spoke regarding the board's rejection of the "History Through Sports" class proposal. During the last board meeting objections to the class were in reference to the author of the textbook to be used. It was incorrectly stated that he was Howard Zinn, who had "socialist" leanings. Howard Zinn is not one of the authors. The department chair emphasized that social studies teachers do not have any political bias in their teaching and curriculum choices. He also said that it was disappointing to some students that this class would not be offered. It was intended to give an alternative to students who were not interested in taking AP. He explained that the class proposal and materials to be used were scrutinized very carefully by the committee.

There was no discussion concerning School Activity Reports.

Athletic Director Jason Holmes provided an update on current partnership, establishing reliable fundraising opportunities, facility upgrades, and enhanced scheduling.

December board meeting discussion about an additional high school entrance was continued. There is much concern about congestion at the beginning of the school day. Traffic is backed up and students have difficulty getting to class on time. A new high school entrance is a possible solution. There is ongoing discussion with IDOT about this problem.

Purchase of District Vehicle:

Dr. Dearman submitted information about four vehicles as possible purchases for the district. He suggested that this purchase would alleviate the personal mileage expense of \$125,000 during the last four years. The vehicle would be used for school transportation by directors and teachers in place of their own vehicles, especially when driving from building to building or to conferences. President Humbles asked Dr. Dearman to present a formal proposal about the purchase.

There was unanimous approval for payment of bills, treasurer's report, district investment report and bank statements, tennis court renovation and out-of-state football clinic.

The open meeting was adjourned at 6:42 p.m. followed by a closed session.

———— Dottie Strickler, Observer



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of Greater Peoria

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