



THE NASHVILLE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Nashville

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<http://www.LWVnashville.org>

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April 2020

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 22, 2020, 11 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Stand Against Racism: Justice in the Time of Crisis. Register [here](#). Sponsored by YWCA.

May 1, 2020. Hot Topics Meeting Cancelled Due to Covid-19 Virus Precautions. Please stay tuned for information about the June meetings.

May 6, 2020. The Big Payback. A Community Day of giving in support of area non-profits. www.thebigpayback.org.

May 13, 2020. Hot Topics Meeting Cancelled Due to Covid-19 Virus Precautions. Please stay tuned for information about the June meetings.

May 23, 2020. "We Count: First Time Voters" Exhibit. Frist Art Museum, 919 Broadway, Nashville, 37203.



Presidents' Message



I hope all our members are well and finding a silver lining in the "stay at home" order to stop the spread of the deadly corona virus. The **Nashville League Board** had our regular meeting on March 12th. Our next meeting will be on April 16th, at 3:00 pm by Zoom, moved in honor of Passover and Holy Week. We will be reviewing our slate of officers, annual budget, and strategic focus in preparation for member approval at our **Annual Meeting on Tuesday, June 2nd**. We plan to have it at the home of Susan Mattson, who was such a gracious hostess last year, but we may determine it is safer to have a virtual meeting.

We also had planned to have an historical reenactment of the first **League of Women Voters of Nashville** speech given by **J. Frankie Pierce**, the first woman to speak in the state capitol's House of Representatives as well as the first African American, on May 15th. This event is **canceled** at this time. The state **LWV** was planning to have our spring council meeting that day as well. Delegates must approve the annual state budget. This will now be a virtual event on **Saturday, May 16th**.

The pandemic has focused a spotlight on our fractured health care system. Since the Tennessee legislature has refused to expand Medicaid or TNCare, twelve rural hospitals have closed in the state, the most per capita of any state. We have lost millions of federal dollars that could have helped Tennesseans. The **League** will continue to advocate for improved health care for all.

Another issue that is of great concern for the **League** is fair and equal voting. Many states have taken steps to make voting easier with same day registration and mail in ballots. In Tennessee, the state **League** is hoping to convince the legislature to allow "no excuse" absentee ballots for **everyone** instead of just for citizens **over 60**. Absentee ballots require extra postage, an issue that may not be clear to voters.

We have an important **primary in August** as well as the **November Presidential election**, both at a time that Covid19 may still be a safety concern. The **US League** is asking members to **contact** their state Senators to vote to include funds in the next bill for the states to improve voter access as well as social distancing. Go to the **US League** website for details. See a report below on the Davidson County Election Commission thanks to Debby Gould.

Please stay healthy and safe. We hope to see you soon at our usual meetings once they can be held safely.

Barbara Gay & Madeline Garr



In Memoriam

The **League of Women Voters** sends sincere condolences to League member, **Jack McFadden** and family, on the death of his wife and **League** member, **Nancy McFadden** Saturday, March 28. **Nancy** was a woman of deep convictions and passionately committed to justice in all its forms. She was a proud and active volunteer member of the **League**, as well as of Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light, the Sierra Club, Climate Nashville and other groups. She was a major force in persuading Metro schools to adopt a safe pesticide policy and persuading Metro to close the incinerator and focus on composting and recycling. A member of the Bhai faith, she was guided by the teaching that “the best beloved of all things is justice.”

Nancy’s family will hold a memorial service at a later date when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, please let **Jack McFadden** know if you would wish to speak at the service or share any written observations. In lieu of flowers, the family requests a donation in her name to <https://lwvnashville.org/>



State Action Committee News **By State Advocacy Co-Chair Debby Gould**

When the **Davidson County Election Commission (DCEC)** met by conference call on April 9, most of their meeting centered on the potential impact of the corona virus pandemic on the **upcoming** August primary and November federal election. They have already taken, or are considering, a number of steps that will mitigate its impact.

Jeff Roberts, Administrator of Elections, estimated that 50% of Davidson County voters will vote absentee in 2020 — possibly 120,000 absentee ballots in November 2020!

Current law in Tennessee requires that voters must meet [specific criteria](#) in order to apply for an absentee ballot. **Beginning May 8**, eligible individuals can request absentee ballots. This year, DCEC will be actively promoting **early** identification of absentee voters as part of their planning process. They are

especially focused on building public awareness of **two** eligibility categories: **voters over age 60** and **voters who “are hospitalized, ill, or physically disabled”**.

Many **eligible** Tennessee voters are unaware of these options. Currently only 2.5% of voters across the state are absentee voters. **LWVTN** has also begun a public awareness campaign of this option, beginning with an on-line [membership survey](#).

In response to questions by the commission members about voting during the threat of a pandemic, **Administrator Roberts** stated that they were not health experts and would instead be **relying** on the CDC guidelines to define “ill” for purposes of applying for an absentee ballot. Their staff will depend **exclusively** on self-reporting from voters who select this reason on their form.

Administrator Roberts also identified a range of other pandemic related concerns:

- Staffing early and election day polling sites will be difficult. He anticipates a 50% loss of trained poll workers because of pandemic fears.
- Keeping the administrative offices for the DCEC virus free is essential. Staffing on-site at the Murfreesboro Rd. office has been severely restricted and social distancing has been implemented in the office among staff members.
- **All** poll worker training will be done online.
- The DCEC is seeking hand sanitizer, face masks, and other physical barriers to minimize contagion at polling sites. They are hopeful that the newly authorized federal funds that will pass through the Secretary of State’s office can be used for this purpose.
- They are developing a plan for maintaining social distancing at polling sites and contingency plans for alternate sites if some sites are quarantined.
- Discussions of additional plans are **ongoing** including the possibility of expanding early voting hours or locations in order to spread out voters even further.

Given these concerns, it is clear that **broad** use of absentee balloting in 2020 is **essential**. **LWVN** will be actively promoting and informing the public about this issue. We **need** volunteers who can assist in developing a range of communication strategies. Please respond to contact@lwvnashville.org if you can help.



Third Quarter Financial Report **By Treasurer Susan Mattson**

The **League of Women Voters of Nashville** remains in good financial condition. As of **March 31, 2020**, the LWVN accounts totaled \$47,253. Income through the third quarter FY2019-20 stands at \$20,736 and expenses are at \$21,293. Primarily, third quarter expenses were for the technology needed for the **new LWVN website**, **LWV** member buttons for advocacy and voter events, new Voter services pamphlets in Spanish and Arabic, and our regular administrator expenses to keep members informed.

The **LWVN Board** approved a **FY2020-21** budget on March 12, 2020 to be presented to a full membership vote in June. Projected income is budgeted at \$24,200, which assumes continuing membership and donations levels from FY 2019-20. Expenses are budgeted at \$30,184, which includes on-going administrative and communication expenses, plus adding advertising promotion for the **November VOTE411** voter guide, potential community forums for the November election, and the purchase of tablet computers to assist with on-line voter registration. Additional expenses over expected

income will come from the dedicated **LWVN Education Fund**. The fund's balance is budgeted to remain over \$40,000. Members will receive a full budget to review prior to the June voting.

The League continues to use its resources to promote its mission to “**encourage informed and active participation of citizens in government.**”

One More Way You Can Continue to Support the League of Women Voters Tennessee Education Fund By Treasurer Susan Mattson

Let your Amazon purchases benefit The League of Women Voters of Tennessee Education Fund. Sign up at <https://org.amazon.com/>. Then use the **Amazon Smile** website to make your purchases.

AmazonSmile is a website operated by **Amazon** with the same products, prices, and shopping features as **Amazon.com**. The difference is that when you shop on **AmazonSmile**, the **AmazonSmile** Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to the LWVTN Education Fund for use by the Nashville League. These donations can add up and are no additional cost to you.



May Hot Topics: CANCELLED!!!

Because of the Covid-19 Virus, both of May's "Hot Topics" meetings have been cancelled. Please stay tuned for information about the June meetings.



April Voter Services Update By Voter Services Co-Chairs Kristin Hightower and Perry MacDonald

"The vote is a power, a weapon of offense and defense, a prayer. Use it intelligently, conscientiously, prayerfully. Progress is calling to you to make no pause. Act!"

Carrie Chapman Catt, written upon her return home after the successful campaign to ratify the 19th Amendment

While the "pause" in our work is not of our own making...and indeed is one that we **must** support in every respect, we are mindful that the **call to action** is as crucial and compelling as it has ever been. Free and fair elections across the country **are** at risk. As the worldwide pandemic challenges us to broaden the scope of our knowledge and understanding, we are reminded of the slogan that inspired the worldwide environmental movement, '**Think globally, act locally**'.

The **League** has urged Congress to **protect** voting rights by requiring that states adopt a number of practices, including:

- An **extended** early in-person voting period;

- **No-excuse** absentee voting by mail (including options for request and return of these ballots);
- **Expanded** voter registration options;
- **Prohibition** of polling place adjustments that disproportionately impact vulnerable populations;
- Voter **education**, informing the public of new practices and immediately quashing disinformation as it arises.

Voting rights experts have determined that providing states with the resources to assure these **basic policies** will necessitate an appropriation of at least \$2 billion. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act recently passed by Congress provided only \$400 million. The shortfall must be addressed and provided in the next Congressional action, or states will simply have too little time to safeguard citizens' rights. Please take **every** opportunity to address this foundational issue with your Representative and our Senators.

Tennessee's **only** option for **mail-in voting** is the absentee ballot. See **Debby Gould's** report on the last Davidson County Election Commission meeting elsewhere in this newsletter and please familiarize yourself with both the current process and the important changes under consideration. If your neighbors and friends are anything like ours, they will have questions and we want **all League members** to be able to help them find answers.

If you have **not** completed your **2020 Census**, now is this time! Once you're a 'veteran' of this very simple process, you're in a perfect position to (electronically, by social media, by phone survey) to **encourage** those in your community and beyond to **accomplish** this critical task, a true building block for citizen engagement and government accountability. **Absolutely essential work, no mask required.**

While these are grave and deeply discouraging times, we are reminded that we, all of us, stand on the shoulders of extraordinary Americans such as **Carrie Chapman Catt**, whose words remind us to carry on the work of democracy with **reverence, intelligence, and integrity**. It is both our privilege and our duty to do so.



What is the Corona Virus Showing Us?

By Health Care Co-Chair Constance Caldwell and Clare Sullivan

For the last year, your Health Care Team has been trying to give you a picture of the **status** of health care in Tennessee. This has included the **lack** of accessible services in some counties, the **closing** and **dismantling** of rural hospitals, the **high** maternal morbidity and mortality rates, the **high** infant mortality rates, the **lack** of insurance coverage for thousands due to the state's choosing not to extend Medicaid coverage, the **defunding** of reproductive health and then the **widespread** disparities in health care.

It should not be surprising that statistics are showing that COVID-19 is affecting minority citizens at a greater rate than other ethnicities. Throughout the states, this is apparent. The virus is highlighting an issue which our country has been demonstrating for years-**RACIAL DISPARITY**. **Poor** housing, **crowded** living spaces, **chronic** health conditions, **absence** of decent paying jobs, **poor** or **no** health care coverage, food **deserts**, a **discriminatory** judicial system, and **weak** educational systems have plagued, and continue to do so, the nation.

Tennessee has not adequately dealt with the '**major drivers of health**' which are a complex combination of factors. Until these areas are addressed and the social conditions/leverage of minorities is improved, Tennesseans will consistently be on the negative side of attacks such as COVID -19.

Many of these drivers will need to be addressed through longer-term investment in educational equity, housing, and community economic development, but **access to health care** can be addressed through **new emergency options available to states NOW**. Minorities are **over-represented** among low-income Tennesseans who have long found themselves in the health care coverage gap.

The governor has submitted a request to **CMS** to allow Tennessee's TennCare Program to pay hospitals and providers who are treating or have treated uninsured COVID-19 patients by allowing Tennessee to use TennCare's funding to be matched with CARES federal funds to pay for the care provided uninsured patients. This request is **not seeking an expansion of TennCare** to the uninsured but rather is a waiver request to allow Tennessee to use TennCare matching payment to be used to pay providers. Under this current proposal, physicians, hospitals, and labs must agree to accept the payment they receive through the state's safety net as payment **in full** for the service, and **not** send a bill to the uninsured patient for any of the remaining balance.

As of **4/10/2020**, the state has **not** heard back about this proposal to the federal government.

The Governor can also **propose that** the General Assembly conduct a full discussion and debate on the merits of expanding TennCare through **Insure Tennessee** or through another approach when it reconvenes. This would enable low-income Tennesseans to receive long-overdue and ongoing care for any medical and mental health conditions, including those that intensify their risk from COVID-19. **Please give the Governor's office a call to urge him to make such a proposal to the General Assembly.**



Celebrating Earth Day in 2020 **By Environment Chair Barbara Futter**

Please Note!!!! **Nashville's Earth Day on April 18th** has been postponed. Let's hope the weather is nice again since there are still things you can do or learn about. If the weather is cold or rainy or even if it is not, please tune into the Earth Optimism summit. (**see below**)

Did you know that this is the **50th anniversary** of Earth Day?

The first Earth Day was held **April 22, 1970**. It was organized by Wisconsin's US Senator **Gaylord Nelson** and sparked a 50-year movement to raise environment awareness across the US. Earth Day began a movement that led to the **Clean Air Act**, the **Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts** as well as the creation of the **Environment Protection Agency**. These are laws that we take for granted but we are learning that their great power can be reduced.

If you are interested in learning about the **Smithsonian's** influential work, it will be hosting the digital **Earth Optimism Summit 2020**. This Summit will showcase what **is** working in conservation science right now. There will be stories from experts and visionary leaders as well as lectures, a film festival, fashion show, and more. It will be from **April 22-25**. Go to <https://earthoptimism.si.edu/> to tune in.

What are some exciting initiatives I can learn about on Earth Day?

- **Vote Earth:** This is a **global** initiative that mobilizes millions of people to demonstrate their concern for our planet by rejecting inaction and demanding change at the polls. www.earthday.org/campaign/vote-earth
- **The Canopy Project:** Trees filter the air and stave off the effects of climate change. Trees also reverse the impacts of land degradation and provide food, energy and income to communities. www.earthday.org/campaign/the-canopy-project/
- **Artists for the Earth:** Create art to educate and inspire action to protect the earth. If you go to their [website](#) you can see beautiful global art that can reach people and help develop an emotional connection to our earth.
- **End Plastic Pollution:** This campaign helps people to see how their everyday actions can lessen the problem of plastics. <https://www.earthday.org/campaign/end-plastic-pollution/>
- **Great Global Clean up:** Although we cannot do any group activities, we can do our own clean up as we walk along streams or on trails. These are just a few. Go to www.earthday.org and look for other campaigns to learn about projects that can excite your own ideas.

Another way to celebrate Earth Day 2020 is to do a **green** act. Here are some ideas:

- **Recycle;**
- **Compost;**
- **Pick up** trash throughout your day;
- **Invite** a speaker from Belmont or Lipscomb to come to your home or online for a discussion of what is happening and learn about how to talk to private companies;
- **Change** out single-use and plastic products such as paper towels, q-tips, cotton balls, plastic bags, plastic containers, and single-use dish and bathroom scrubbies with reusable products;
- **Re-use** plastics at home in a garden using milk bottles with the neck cut-out for plants;
- **Call, text, and message** your friends to encourage them to contact their district representatives and state representatives and tell them you care about the environment;
- **Plant** trees and flowers;
- **Buy** and use sustainable products;
- **Support** local farms;
- **Visit** your local and state parks as often as you can.

Staying at home hasn't been easy but has helped the environment and given us time to enjoy it. Here is what we have been experiencing:

- **Fewer** cars and trucks resulting in much less smog and air pollution, clearer skies, and cleaner rivers;
- **Less** travel as a result of video conferencing and working at home;
- **More** time to be with family;
- **Fewer** weekly trips to the grocery store;
- **Fewer** plastic tops on to-go cups of coffee
- **Meeting** more neighbors
- **Using** more local parks in our areas.

Not all bad. We've adjusted to these changes. Let's hope we can continue to **travel less, recreate locally** and **shop closer** to home. Even if we maintain only a few of these changes, we will cut gas emissions and make our air healthier. We **can** improve our environmental impact!



May Membership Drive is Approaching **By Membership Co-Chairs Reba Holmes and Tracy Smith**

Be on the lookout for the May Membership letter to appear in your mailbox **next** month. Yes, it is time to renew your membership. This coming year it is **especially** important that our membership is visible and heard in our advocacy and support of the importance of the **right to vote** in our democracy. Election integrity and free and fair elections are the **lifeblood** of any democracy. So, continue to be a part of the solution and renew your membership. Join with those brave men and women who struggled for **72 years** to **achieve** the legal right to vote and with those who have continue to struggle to **maintain** and **access** their voting rights!

Membership allows you to share a year's worth of experiences **promoting** democracy, **educating** others in the community, **participating** in political discourse, **registering** new voters, just to name a few. Plus, the annual membership includes membership to the national, state, and local LWV organizations.

Details regarding the various support levels may be found on our website <http://lwvnashville.org/join/>



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