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**2021-2023 CO-PRESIDENTS OUTLINE GOALS FOR LWVNE**  
*By Toni Monette and MaryLee Moulton, Co-Presidents*

We are so excited to begin our term as co-presidents and look forward to working with all of you. First of all, we want to thank Dianne Bystrom and Linda Duckworth, outgoing co-presidents, for all their hard work during their term, which covered the demanding 2020 elections. They made our transition smooth, and both will be continuing on the board – Dianne as communications director and Linda as membership vice president. We look forward to expanding and growing the many programs and initiatives they began.

We want to talk about the goals we have for the LWVNE over the next two years. First, we hope to increase the number of local members working on state committees. There was a great deal of involvement of local members on the various committees headed by our legislative directors in the areas of education, fair maps/redistricting, government, health policy, mental and behavioral health, natural resources and energy, social policy and voter services. We are changing the names of these groups to *Action Teams* to better represent the approach to monitoring the legislature and taking action on bills. We hope more of you will be interested in engaging with the legislature under the leadership of these directors. It's never too early to sign up, and planning is already beginning for the next session. You can find director contact information [here](#).

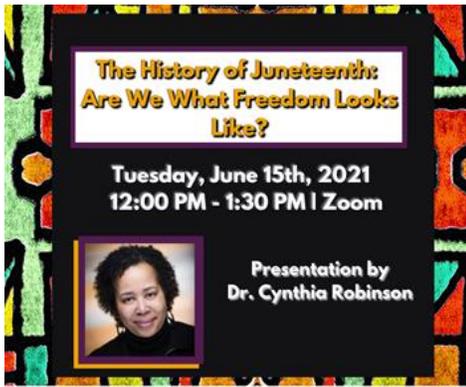
One of our major goals is to continue to build on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) statewide. This will mean more outreach to communities that can benefit from League voter registration and education, but also learning from communities across the state so we can better help serve their needs and create a more welcoming atmosphere at LWVNE. You will see a DEI survey from the LWVNE in the near future. We hope you will fill out the survey so we can better assess the current makeup of the state league.

We also hope to broaden membership in the League across the state. This means outreach to rural Nebraska, underserved communities and Native American reservations. Our strategy is to work at signing up *Members at Large* from these target groups to find out more about how the League can help their communities to expand membership.

To accomplish our goals, we will need your support and participation. We want to hear from you, so feel free to share your ideas with us at [tmonette@lwnnebraska.org](mailto:tmonette@lwnnebraska.org) and [marylee@lwnnebraska.org](mailto:marylee@lwnnebraska.org).

We look forward to working with you to create a stronger and more effective League of Women Voters of Nebraska.

**LWVNE, LOCAL LEAGUES CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH**  
*Register Now for June 15 Lunch Program*



Juneteenth, commemorated on June 19 annually, marks the official moment in time when Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, and the state’s residents finally learned that slavery had been abolished. This “emancipation” notice came two years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

This year, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska in collaboration with the League of Women Voters Greater Omaha will host a virtual “Listen and Learn” session titled, “*The History of Juneteenth: Are We What Freedom Looks Like?*” on June 15 from noon to 1:30 p.m. The event will highlight the history of Juneteenth, how it is commemorated in today’s climate and its significance to participating in civic engagement more broadly. The presentation will be given by Dr.

Cynthia Robinson, chair of Black Studies at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

Registration for the June 15 program is available at this [link](#).

In addition to this educationally enlightening discussion, local Leagues across the state will provide voter registration and other educational materials at various community events including a Juneteenth Celebration at the Malcolm X Memorial Center in Omaha.

“Overall, we hope that the League’s participation in celebrating Juneteenth will provide traction and a renewed effort to make Juneteenth a holiday in the state via the Legislature and that it will empower communities of color to be involved in civic engagement efforts and policy initiatives that prioritize freedom to participate in democracy for everyone,” said Toni Monette, LWVNE co-president.

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**LWVNE Board Meeting: Saturday, July 10**  
**10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Virtual Via Zoom**

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**ACTION REPORT**  
*By Sherry Miller, Vice President for Action*

On the last day of this year’s legislative session, the senators adopted LR 134, which lays out the guidelines for the 2021 redistricting process.

The redistricting process occurs every 10 years following the federal Census and is based upon changing population data. The decisions made will shape congressional and legislative districts for the next 10 years and can have a significant impact on the political makeup of those districts and subsequent representation. District boundaries are supposed to be drawn in a way that does not favor any political party, but this does not stop actors on all sides from trying to use the process to their advantage – so the details around redistricting can be understandably contentious. Expect lots of heated debate on this next year.

Because of the delay caused by COVID in gathering U.S. Census data, final figures will not be available until late August, at which time the Legislature’s Redistricting Committee will meet to begin initial plans. The full body will reconvene sometime in September to advance the plans. As details emerge, they will be shared with League members.

Many resolutions for interim studies/hearings were introduced. Below are several that should interest League members, based on our positions. I encourage you to read through this list and be prepared to follow the hearings as they are scheduled. I will try to alert Leaguers prior to each hearing.

#### INTERIM STUDIES

LR 23	Erdman	Natural Resources	Examine progress of NRDs in fulfilling originally intended purpose
LR 69	Wayne	Urban Affairs	Reports and public input regarding housing density and missing middle housing
LR 124/126	Wayne	Urban Affairs	Examine issues regarding designation of blighted areas and extremely blighted areas under Community Development Law
LR 129	Wishart	Judiciary	Review staffing at Department of Correctional Services
LR 131	Hansen, M.	Urban Affairs	Examine lack of affordable housing
LR 141	DeBoer	Executive Board	Create a select interim committee of Legislature known as School Finance Study Committee
LR 143	Stinner	Health & Human Services	Examine mental and behavioral health needs of Nebraskans, assess shortage of providers and determine what is needed to ensure adequate services
LR 152	Bostelman	Natural Resources	Evaluate need for laws to allow Department of Energy and Environment to respond to emergency situations regarding pesticide-treated seed or grain
LR 156	Pansing Brooks	Judiciary	Examine mental health and addiction issues within Nebraska criminal justice system
LR 171	McKinney	Government	Examine rights, roles and responsibilities of election officials, and relevant court and corrections personnel in carrying out state law regarding voting rights for former felons
LR 188	Cavanaugh, J.	Natural Resources	Examine issues regarding adopting reward-based conservation programs (30x30 implications?)
LR 193	DeBoer	Transportation & Telecommunications	Examine broadband mapping and speed testing in Nebraska

LR 194	DeBoer	Judiciary	Examine methods of ending domestic and sexual violence in Nebraska
LR 203	Flood	Health & Human Services	Medicaid expansion & behavioral health
LR 210	McKinney	Appropriations	Examine poverty and incarceration and appropriations to reduce both
LR 213	Day	Education	Examine mental and behavioral health needs of students and role of school psychologists

**HIGHLIGHTS\* FROM THE 8<sup>TH</sup> LWVNE ANNUAL MEETING**  
*Held Virtually on April 24, 2021*

LWVNE Co-President Dianne Bystrom noted that being a co-president during the celebrations of the 100th Anniversaries of the 19th Amendment and of the establishment of the League of Women Voters had been a privilege. Major accomplishments during the 2019–2021 term of office that she shared with Co-President Linda Duckworth included the establishment of the Communications Committee with the new website and the use of MailChimp for communication with members. She also commented on increased fundraising efforts and grants that supported LWVNE programming, especially our DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) activities, Get Out the Vote work and Centennial Celebration events.

LWVNE Treasurer Lynne Elwood cited eight grants as sources of income to the LWVNE and noted that the LWVNE had awarded two grants to local Leagues this fiscal year.

Vice President of Action Sherry Miller acknowledged the important work of the LWVNE directors and their committees. More than 60 letters of written testimony in either support for or opposition to bills were sent during the 2021 Unicameral session. Natural Resources and Energy Co-Directors Megan York Lyons and Janelle Stevenson alerted members to the environmental catastrophe at the AltEn ethanol plant and surrounding area in Mead, NE, which is an issue of particular concern.

The bylaws were amended to change the title of local League liaison to local League representative in reference to members who are selected to serve on the LWVNE board by their local League. Two other amendments specify that members or local Leagues may take action in the name of the LWVNE only after receiving requested authorization to do so by the LWVNE president or their designee.

Members unanimously adopted the 2021–2022 Program with updated content to the Energy and Mental and Behavioral Health positions to more closely align with the LWVUS positions. A new study, Soil Health in Nebraska, was adopted, and members also voted to continue the Money in Politics and Reimagining Public Safety studies.

The 2021–2023 Board of Directors, led by Toni Monette and MaryLee Moulton as co-presidents, was elected and installed. The board listing appears at the end of this Nebraska Voter.

Celina Stewart, LWVUS chief counsel and senior director of advocacy and litigation, spoke on “Protecting the Vote and Expanding Access: Advocacy, Litigation, and Redistricting.” Her talk focused on the LWV in the 2020 election; the response to election 2020; federal and state advocacy; and LWVUS’ People Powered Fair Maps, which addresses redistricting.

Marilyn Bechtel, secretary of the League of Women Voters of Seward County, invited the membership to the Ninth Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Nebraska to be held in person in Seward in 2022. The exact date will be determined.

*\*Based on the minutes from the meeting provided by Mary Ann Sturek, LWVNE Secretary*

## COMMITTEE DEVELOPS REDISTRICTING PRESENTATION

*By Sheri St. Clair, Chair, LWVNE Fair Maps Committee*

The LWVNE's Redistricting Working Committee has prepared a presentation on redistricting 2021 with a focus on Nebraska titled ***Meant to Represent***. The purpose of the presentation is to motivate people to take action on community redistricting. We have the opportunity now to impact the next 10 years.

The program is in two parts: informational and interactive. Part 1 is a 40-minute presentation in which LWVNE speakers provide an overview of redistricting, how the process occurs in Nebraska, and how to get involved to ensure fair maps, and hence, fair representation. Topics include the Census, apportionment, redistricting, gerrymandering, precincts, voting districts, communities of interest, and relevant Nebraska-specific data and maps.

Part 2 is optional but fun: a 15-minute interactive community map drawing activity using [DistrictR software](#). This activity allows participants to see how lawmakers use data to inform where they set voting district boundaries. Participants draw their own community; defining communities of interest; and citing such landmarks as parks, schools, restaurants, and businesses.

We can provide either completely prerecorded videos for both parts, a hybrid of Part 1 recorded and Part 2 live, or both parts live. This presentation can be tailored for neighborhood gatherings, community organizations, civic groups, libraries or schools.

To request additional information, email [info@lwnvnebraska.org](mailto:info@lwnvnebraska.org).



We would love to work with Members at Large and local Leagues to bring this presentation to your area. The Fair Maps team includes Sheri St. Clair, Rachel Gibson, Carol Dennison, Sara Lee and Lynn Perry.

We have offered the program to government teachers within Omaha Public Schools as well as social studies teachers through the Nebraska Department of Education’s social studies statewide newsletter. Invitations are being extended to Omaha Together One Community, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, and several neighborhood and advocacy groups and libraries statewide.

St. Clair testified in support of LR 134, a resolution that will set guidelines for the redistricting process beyond those specified in the Rules of the Legislature. This resolution was introduced following the failure of LB 107, the Redistricting Bill, to advance from the Government Committee. This resolution was subsequently amended (AM 1472) to include text that will “preserve communities of interest and allow for the preservation of the cores of prior districts.” (NOTE: The original phrase was “preserve communities of interest and preserve the cores of prior districts.”)

The Nebraska State Legislature’s [Redistricting Committee](#) was urged by several groups to conduct the process in as transparent a way as possible to ensure public trust. Members of the committee are state senators Lou Ann Linehan, chair; Carol Blood, Tom Briese, Tom Brewer, Suzanne Geist, Steve Lathrop, John Lowe, Adam Morfeld and Justin Wayne.

## **MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: ELLEN BECK SERVES LOCAL, STATE LEAGUES**

*By Dianne Bystrom, Communications Director*



Shortly after moving to Seward in 2008, Ellen Beck joined the local League of Women Voters as an opportunity to serve the community while not conflicting with her career in journalism.

“I was looking for a way to contribute to the Seward community, and the larger state community, that did not conflict with journalism,” she said. “Journalism often is called the Fourth Estate because of its watchdog function in democracy and in reference to its relationship to the three branches of government – legislative, executive, and judicial. The League’s mission to educate voters and its nonpartisan structure to fit within that framework,” said Beck, who has been a professional journalist for more than 40 years.

“Presenting both sides of an issue and letting people decide is important to me; it’s what I’ve done professionally for more than four decades. I have known for years that voting and voting rights are foundational to democracy, so it is a big issue for me,” she said.

Beck began her career in journalism in 1979 working freelance for the *Milwaukee Journal* covering the state Capitol while in college at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has worked in newspaper, radio, wire service, and online media throughout the years and, for a time, had her own company, Capital Health Care News, with a colleague in Washington, DC.

“I worked the longest in wire service, at United Press International in Pierre, SD; Milwaukee; Chicago; Miami; and Washington, DC, where I was a senior editor and covered federal agencies and the White House, mostly in the area of health care,” Beck said. “As we transitioned to Seward, where my husband was going to teach and finish a Ph.D., I began working for SmartBrief Inc. in Washington, DC, where I am now a health care editor.”

After moving to Seward and joining the League in 2008, she quickly became involved in its leadership. Beck was elected president of the League of Women Voters of Seward County in 2009 and served in that capacity through April 2021. She also has chaired the League of Women Voters of Nebraska’s Budget-Finance and

Endowment committees and served on the Education Fund Committee. Beck was the liaison to the LWNNE state board for the Seward League.

Beck said she is “proud of the accomplishments of the Seward League and that has to be shared with all of its members. Seward is a small League but it gets a lot done” – leading LWNNE member Peggy Adair to refer to the local League as “Mighty Seward.” The Seward LWV sponsors a “hugely successful” Candidates Night event during election cycles (now on Zoom as well as in person), Beck said, and has “tackled important issues, such as the Keystone pipeline.”

The Seward LWV also holds voter registration and informational events. As a nonprofit member of the Seward County Chamber and Development Partnership, it participates in community events, such as contributing to new Christmas decorations for the downtown business area. The Seward LWV also sponsors the Priscilla Lawin Memorial Scholarship that is awarded each year to a graduating high school senior to put toward college expenses.

Beck chose not to run again for Seward LWV president in 2021. “I look forward to the new ideas and inspiration that newly elected Seward LWV president Emily Hemphill will bring to the job,” she said.

“I will have more time to spend on League projects, such as the forums we are planning on the First Amendment and Journalism,” Beck added. “Now, more than ever, when democracy and voting rights are under attack, the League has a critical role to play in ensuring truth is known and accepted, that everyone is able to exercise their right to vote without fear or intimidation, and that people have a better understanding of the important issues of our time.”

### **LWNNE PLANS WEBINARS ON MEDIA LITERACY, JOURNALISM PROFESSION**

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska will present two virtual webinars related to journalism and the importance of the First Amendment in November 2021.

The first webinar, scheduled for Nov. 4, will focus on media literacy – how to determine if news is credible, how to improve the relationship between the press and the public, and the importance of First Amendment. The second webinar, scheduled for Nov. 11, will feature journalists from Nebraska and in Nebraska working at national and state media outlets. They will talk about their careers and important issues in the profession.

Both webinars will be free and open to the public. The Nov. 11 webinar is especially aimed toward high school and college students. The time for both webinars will be determined as the LWNNE Defending Journalism and the First Amendment Action Team continues to meet to plan the events. Participants in each program as well as the timeframes will be announced this summer.

The Defending Journalism and the First Amendment Action Team was created by the LWNNE in response to directions to the board made at the 2019 and 2020 LWNNE annual meetings. LWNNE members were concerned about attacks on the media as well as misinformation/ disinformation campaigns. The webinars will be designed to educate the public on the role of a free press as well as how to best evaluate information presented through traditional and social media channels.

Members of the action team are Sherry Miller, chair; Ellen Beck; Dianne Bystrom; Aimée Folker; Tony Herman of the *Hastings Tribune*; and Mary Ann Sturek. For more information, contact [communications@lwnnebraska.org](mailto:communications@lwnnebraska.org).

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY REPORT

*By Janelle Stevenson and Megan Lyons, Co-Directors*

Thank you for all of your efforts during our recent state legislative session. There is much more to do, but we have some win-win moments to take pride in and celebrate.

On July 1, we invite you to join us for a **panel discussion on climate change and racial justice** with Lincoln leaders and 17 bicyclists who will ride 3,737 miles cross country to support sustainable climate solutions. Nebraskans for Peace, Sustain UNL, Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light, the Nebraska Sierra Club and the LWVNE are co-sponsoring the event. Anyone is invited to attend this conversation outside of the First Mennonite Church of Lincoln at 7:30 p.m. on July 1.

Updates on **AltEn Ethanol**: Legislative Resolution 159 requested the Executive Board to appoint an “AltEn LLC, Ethanol Plant Special Investigative and Oversight Committee.” LB 507, a bill to ban the use of treated seed corn in ethanol production in the wake of the disaster in Mead, passed unanimously. Stay tuned for media updates on remediation, health impacts and public town hall events.

Our Natural Resources Committee – consisting of Jeanne Miller, Claudia Stevenson, Megan Lyons and Janelle Stevenson – plans to prepare educational opportunities for members to learn more about **soil health over the next year**. We want to provide a basic overview of the current state of soil health in Nebraska and resources for citizens’ use at local levels. We are developing a position as a basis for testimony at local and state government levels. LR 5, a resolution to recommend the findings of the Healthy Soils Task Force to the Nebraska Legislature, passed without opposition.

Another legislative win is LB 396, a bill to create a state **Farm to School Network**, which passed unanimously. The bill funds a new position with the Department of Education to coordinate the growth of programs in the state as well as establishing new markets for local farmers. Through the partnerships, school children will have increased access to healthy, fresh foods and education on their food sources.

A national bipartisan bill, **The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act** (HR 2773), is co-sponsored by Nebraska Congressman Jeff Fortenberry. Nationwide, the bill hopes to create tens of thousands of jobs restoring habitats, combating invasive species, addressing wildlife diseases, restoring grasslands and wetlands, and reducing water pollution. Investing in wildlife is an investment in our economic future.

Also in Congress, the **Growing Climate Solutions Act** of 2021 is a nonpartisan bill to encourage sustainable, climate-friendly farming and forestry practices by providing farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners with access to private-sector capital in carbon credit markets. In other words, the bill provides the option of a third-party vendor that will assist the U.S. Department of Agriculture in consulting with landowners on how to reap the benefits of storing carbon in the ground. The current version of the bill appears to be compatible with our LWV program positions on climate, water and land use. Similarly, the **Energy Innovation Act** has been updated, is bipartisan and shows unity on non-partisan environmental issues with market-driven solutions.

**Let's communicate with our representatives and continue making positive changes in our democracy.**

## VOTER SERVICES REPORT

*By Walta Sue Dodd and Claudia Stevenson, Co-Directors*

The new co-directors of the Voter Services have met and established goals for the 2021-2023 program. The co-directors are Walta Sue Dodd and Claudia Stevenson.

Dodd has been a member of LWVGO since August 1993. She is from Omaha. Dodd is a retired high school guidance director in Omaha and currently serves as Omaha Education Association retired president, OEA Foundation vice president, Nebraska State Education Association retired board member representing the metro district, NSEA metro district liaison, internal audit chair for a public service organization, and LWV activist.

Stevenson is a new member of the LWV. She lives in Ogallala. Her daughter, Janelle Stevenson, asked her to join and since she retired at the end of January, it was perfect timing. In addition to serving as the co-director of Voter Services, Stevenson is a member of the LWNNE Natural Resources Committee. She recently retired from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Stevenson worked with farmers and ranchers on their private land. Her emphasis was working with farmers on soil health projects and wetland conservation projects.

Our goals for 2021-2023 are to:

- Update the Know Your Voting Rights brochure and make it available to organizations upon request and digitally;
- Update VOTE 411.org and make it available to all 93 counties in Nebraska for federal, state and local races in 2022;
- Inform and coordinate LWNUS and LWNNE positions in their programs to members and the community on voting issues;
- Survey LWNNE Members at Large using SurveyMonkey to select topics for Lunch and Learn events;
- Establish a committee to study voting related issues addressed in League programs; and
- Assist in Candidate and Issues Forums.

Please contact [claudia@lwnnebraska.org](mailto:claudia@lwnnebraska.org) (Ogallala) or [walta@lwnnebraska.org](mailto:walta@lwnnebraska.org) (Omaha) if you are interested in serving on our committee.





**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEBRASKA**

**2021–2023 (preliminary)**

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