



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEBRASKA

## NEBRASKA VOTER

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### LWVNE prepares for 2024 elections, legislative session

*By Janelle Stevenson and MaryLee Moulton, co-presidents*

It’s hard to believe that the 2024 election is only a year away – on Nov. 5 – with the statewide primary election on May 14. The 2024 primary will be Nebraska’s first election requiring photo voter ID. The League of Women Voters of Nebraska needs help from its members to provide the education necessary to make this transition smooth and to ensure that all Nebraskans get to cast their ballots.

Carolyn Thiele, director of voter services for the LWVNE, is working with our partner organizations, local Leagues and members-at-large to make sure they have the tools necessary to educate voters about the new voting requirements. Flyers and rack cards have been developed by the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table, Civic Nebraska, Heartland Workers Center, Common Cause Nebraska and the LWVNE. The materials explaining the new requirements to vote will be delivered at the beginning of November to the state and local Leagues for distribution, including at public places such as libraries. Members-at-large of the LWVNE can request this educational information by emailing [office@lwwnebraska.org](mailto:office@lwwnebraska.org).

In other election news, the Nebraska Secretary of State’s office confirmed on Oct. 10 that Support Our Schools Nebraska had submitted more than enough valid signatures – 91,861 with 61,308 needed – to place the repeal of LB753, “Adopt the Opportunity Scholarships Act and Provide Tax Credits” on the Nov. 5, 2024, election ballot.

Thanks to all the LWVNE members who gathered signatures and spoke out in favor of the repeal of LB753. Nebraska voters will now have the final say on whether they agree with diverting public funds to private schools. It is likely that out-of-state money will be coming to Nebraska to try to defeat the repeal of LB753.

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The LWVNE has created an educational presentation, “Schools 101,” that covers tax credit vouchers in its discussion of how schools in Nebraska are funded. The presentation also provides information on the students who attend Nebraska’s public schools; their teachers, staff and administrators; and school curriculum. Groups interested in this presentation should contact [office@lwnvnebraska.org](mailto:office@lwnvnebraska.org).

The LWVNE is also preparing for the second session of the 108<sup>th</sup> Unicameral that begins on Jan. 3, 2024. Rachael Gibson, action vice president for the LWVNE, is working with our state policy directors to prepare for the upcoming legislative session. Many LWVNE members worked on action teams and responded to action alerts during the 2023 legislative session. Let’s make sure the Unicameral continues to hear from us. Encourage your family and friends to pay attention to the Nebraska Legislature, whose actions touch their lives. Although we realize that the vitriol surrounding politics sometimes gets us down, it is important that we stay involved. Remember that in Nebraska the people are the second house.

Enjoy the upcoming holidays, and we look forward to working with you in 2024 on the elections and the legislative session.

## **LWVNE offers action alerts, action teams for 2024 legislative session**

*By Rachel Gibson, action vice president*

As many of you know, spring is the time for state legislative action. Last spring, the Nebraska Legislature passed a number of laws that had major impacts: a law restricting abortion; restrictions on gender affirming medical care; allowing tax credits for contributions to private school scholarships; removing training and registration requirements for concealed-carry firearms; economic stimulus and middle income housing funds; and funding for water quality projects.



In 2023, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska saw a huge increase in people interested in getting involved with our state Legislature, and we hope to continue that momentum into spring 2024. We know that everyone's time, interest and availability differ. But if you have an interest in staying updated or getting involved, the LWVNE has several options for you.

If you are looking for a way to get quick, timely information and suggestions for concrete actions you can take during the legislative session, consider signing up for LWVNE Action Alerts. These are emails sent when something pressing is happening in the Legislature and include some ways to take action and get more information about the topic. Usually this takes the form of emailing or contacting state senators, testifying at hearings or attending events at the State Capitol. There is absolutely no obligation. Signing up would just put you on the list to get these emails so that you can choose how and when to get involved.

If you'd like to be a bit more involved and focused, consider joining one of the LWVNE's six action teams. These are topic-focused groups that review and follow specific legislation throughout the session. Team members research policy, write position statements, testify at hearings and help mobilize people as legislation moves forward. We have action teams in six different policy areas: education, health care, government and voter services, mental and behavioral health, natural resources and energy, and social policy.

To sign up for either or both of these action options, please fill out this form:

<https://forms.gle/Z67Q6yEppPMftVwh6>

However you choose to be involved with our state government is fantastic. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [rachel@lwnvnebraska.org](mailto:rachel@lwnvnebraska.org) with any questions or concerns or if you just want to hear more about the type of work we do and how you fit in.

## **Nov. 2 program to summarize Lincoln, Lancaster County comprehensive plan**

The 2050 comprehensive plan for Lincoln and Lancaster County will be the focus of the Thursday, Nov. 2, Lunch and Learn program sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County.

The program – which is free and open to the public – will be presented from noon to 1 p.m. throughout Nebraska via Zoom. League membership is not required to attend. Use this link to attend:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87113124202#success>

David Cary, director of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Department, will provide a summary of the 2050 comprehensive plan. Adopted in 2021, the plan provides vision for the future out to the horizon year of 2050. It includes various aspects of what the city and county strives to become, including a physical growth plan, priorities for public infrastructure and services, resiliency efforts, building a sense of belonging for all members of the community and economic well-being.

For more than 100 years, the League of Women Voters – a nonpartisan political organization – has encouraged informed and active participation in government, worked to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influenced public policy through education and advocacy. Membership is open to all. More information about the LWVLL is available [here](#).



## **Free advocacy workshop set for Nov. 4 in Lincoln**

A workshop focusing on advocacy will be held in Lincoln on Saturday, Nov. 4, with the League of Women Voters of Nebraska and LWV of Lincoln-Lancaster County among several co-sponsoring organizations.

“Advocacy: Action that Leads to Hope” will meet from 9:30 to 11 a.m. in the Pilgrim Hall of the First-Plymouth Congregational Church, located at 2000 D Street in Lincoln. Participants in the workshop, which is free and open to the public, will learn how to make a difference through advocacy.

The workshop will cover the basics of advocacy and provide a brief overview of how aspects of the Farm Bill affect food insecurity, the environment and the effects of climate change. The program also will give participants advice on how to practice active hope by telling policymakers what they think about issues that matter to them.

Speakers include former Nebraska State Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks; Eric Gerrard of the American Communications Group, Inc; Michaella Kumke, president and CEO of Food Bank of Lincoln; and John Hansen, president of the Nebraska Farmers Union.

Those attending the workshop should use the west entrance to the building, go up the stairs or take the elevator, and then turn to the right to Pilgrim Hall. Coffee and a snack will be provided. No registration is required.

Organizers of the workshop are the First-Plymouth Climate Action Team and Bread for the World Team and Nebraska Interfaith Power and Light. In addition to the state LWVNE and LWV of Lincoln-Lancaster County, co-sponsors of the workshop are Green@Heart at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Bethany Christian Church Green Chalice, Saint Paul United Methodist Church Climate Justice Team, Green Sanctuary Committee of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln, First Presbyterian Church, Lincoln Friends Meeting, South Gate United Methodist Church, Eastridge Presbyterian Church Outreach Committee, Lincoln Citizens Climate Lobby, Wachiska Audubon Society and Ecumenical Legislative Briefing Day.

## **LWVNE board votes to join student coalition, co-sponsor events**

At its meeting on Oct. 14, members of the state board of the League of Women Voters of Nebraska approved motions to join the Students Learn Students Vote coalition, fund an event sponsored by the LWW of Seward County and co-sponsor events in Lincoln.

The board approved a motion made by Carolyn Thiele, director of voter services for the LWVNE, that the state League join Students Learn Students Vote, the largest nonpartisan network in the United States dedicated to increasing student voter participation. The national LWV is a member of the coalition; there is no cost to join. Thiele will represent the LWVNE in the coalition. More information on SLSV can be found [here](#).

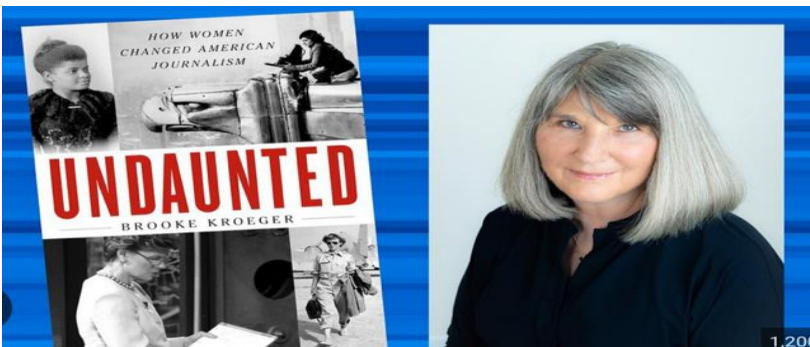
A request by the LWV of Seward County for \$159 to support advertising for its Sept. 24 “Women in Politics” event featuring state Sens. Danielle Conrad and Jana Hughes also was approved by the board on a motion by treasurer Terri Rittenburg. Carolyn Sedlacek, parliamentarian for the LWVNE, advised that in the future grants should be requested from the board prior to the event. An article on the event can be found on pages 15-16 of this issue of the Nebraska Voter.

The LWVNE board also approved co-sponsoring two events. At its Oct. 14 meeting, the board approved a motion made by Aimée Folker to co-sponsor an advocacy workshop being held in Lincoln on Saturday, Nov. 4. The workshop, “Advocacy: Action that Leads to Hope,” will meet from 9:30 to 11 a.m. at the First-Plymouth Congregational Church. It is free and open to the public. Workshop organizers are the church’s Climate Action and Bread for the World teams and Nebraska Interfaith Power and Light. More details on the workshop can be found on page 3 of this issue of the Nebraska Voter.

## **LWVGO to sponsor Dec. 2 event on book about women journalists**

A book about women journalists – “Undaunted: How Women Changed American Journalism” by Brooke Kroeger – will be discussed at an event sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha on Saturday, Dec. 2, at the Abrahams Branch of the Omaha Public Library.

The in-person book discussion is scheduled for 2-3:30 p.m. at the library, located at 5111 N. 90<sup>th</sup> St. in Omaha. You do not need to be a member of the LWV to attend. Refreshments will be provided with attendees encouraged to bring homemade baked goods if they wish.



The event is part of LWVGO’s Books After Dark, a monthly online book club dedicated to bringing League members together who are interested in exploring social issues and history through reading. Books After Dark, which is open to League members and non-members alike, encourages “vibrant dialogue and building community,” said Aimée Folker, facilitator of the program.

“While it’s helpful to be familiar with the month’s topic and book selection, completing or even reading the book is not required. What we are interested in building is a community of inquisitive thought, sharing a love of reading, and educating ourselves on the multitude of different social and political facets that affect our communities.”

In the future, Folker hopes to expand the Books After Dark club and create a committee that would help choose books for the year and help lead discussions on topics that League members are passionate about. “In this way, we can really engage a multitude of voices sharing knowledge and educating other members while creating a brave space for dialogue and perspective,” she said.

The focus of the Dec. 2 in-person discussion, Kroeger’s “Undaunted” was called a “tour de force that should be in every library and school in the country” by Kirkus Reviews. Kroeger is a journalist, writer and professor emerita at New York University. She has written six books, including works on reporter Nellie Bly and novelist Fannie Hurst as well as “The Suffragents: How Women Used Men to Get the Vote.”

Kroeger’s latest work, “Undaunted,” published in 2023, has been featured in The New York Times (twice), NPR (twice), The Guardian (twice), Los Angeles Times (twice), The Wall Street Journal, People, Lit Hub (twice), PBS, Kirkus Reviews (starred), Publishers Weekly, Booklist and the National Book Review and on NPR’s Weekend Edition, New Books Network, and other podcasts and public radio programs.

The Dec. 2 discussion of “Undaunted” will be led by Dianne Bystrom, director of communications for the League of Women Voters of Nebraska. She served as co-president of the LWVNE in 2019-2021. Bystrom, who directed the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics at Iowa State University for 22 years before retiring in 2018, has contributed to 27 books on political communication, women and politics, and political campaigns as a co-author, co-editor and chapter author. She began her career as a newspaper reporter in Nebraska. Since retiring as director emerita of the Catt Center, Bystrom continues to serve as a speaker and commentator about women’s issues, leadership and politics for community groups, professional organizations and the media.

## **Member spotlight: Hendrickson’s varied interests lead to League**

*By Charlyne Berens, associate editor*

When Tari Hendrickson graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, her mother gave her advice she still appreciates: “Do something you’re really interested in.” It’s advice that has carried her through a variety of rewarding jobs and community service positions, including her current post as chair of the League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County’s Lunch and Learn Committee.

Hendrickson’s degree was in human development, but she couldn’t find a job she wanted in that field right out of school. Following her mother’s advice, she realized that she really liked jewelry, so she went to Sartor Hamann Jewelers in Lincoln and found work she loved. She became the downtown store’s top salesperson and decided her next step could capitalize on that strength.

About that time, Lincoln’s Haymarket was developing, and Hendrickson opened her first Paper Parade shop there. Eventually that expanded to two other Paper Parades and one Letter Perfect store in Lincoln. It was another job she loved.

“I was female and young and didn’t feel like I had any barriers,” Hendrickson said. She joined the Haymarket Development Corporation and other community boards.

But things changed: “Three kids and four stores later, the big box stores came into town,” she said. Hendrickson closed her small specialty stores one by one.



*Tari Hendrickson*

Her next step was as dual career director at UNL, where she helped find appropriate jobs in the community for partners and spouses of faculty being recruited to the campus. Hendrickson followed that job with fundraising positions at the YWCA Lincoln and several arts organizations. Then Planned Parenthood recruited her to be head of major and planned gifts for a four-state region.

Even before that, though, Hendrickson said, she had begun to be really frustrated with politics and policy. She joined the League to find a way to put her frustration to use.

LWVLL member Karen Dienstbier saw someone who could be a leader and asked Hendrickson to serve as president. “At that time, she was a single mom with three small children,” Dienstbier said. “But she was organized and fully capable to fulfill her duties as LWVLL president.”

Hendrickson served as president of the Lincoln-Lancaster County League from 2005-07, was chair of the nominating committee after that and became chair of the Lunch and Learn program two years ago, once again at Dienstbier’s urging.

As Dienstbier was stepping down after many years as chair of the group, she said Hendrickson “eagerly stepped up to the challenge of leading the committee,” a committee and program that continues to thrive.

Hendrickson’s career continues at the Eastmont Towers community in Lincoln where she works with seniors and their families as a senior living counselor. She also is a Stephen Minister at First-Plymouth Congregational Church and loves spending time with her husband, Clay Naff, and their children and grandchildren, many of whom live in Lincoln.

Hendrickson remains loyal to the League. “It feels good to put energy into things that help make democracy work,” she said, adding, “Registering voters fills my bucket.”

In her job and in her volunteer roles, Hendrickson continues to follow her mother’s advice. Between her professional career, her volunteer work and her family, she is still finding plenty that interests her.

## **LWVNE officers meet with northeast Nebraska group**

*By Marilyn Bechtel, membership vice president*

At the request of members-at-large of the League of Women Voters of Nebraska, three state officers traveled to northeast Nebraska on Oct. 11 to provide information about the organization.

MaryLee Moulton, co-president, Rachel Gibson, action vice president, and I talked with members of a group that has been meeting informally to discuss issues important to the state and their area. Members-at-large living in northeast Nebraska were interested in gaining more information from the LWVNE because of its recent involvement with the petition drive to place LB753, “Adopt the Opportunity Scholarships Act and Provide Tax Credits,” on the Nov. 5, 2024, general election ballot for repeal.

The LWVNE team presented information about the League’s structure and activities, how it interacts with the Nebraska Legislature and the impact of the recently enacted voter photo ID requirement. The group also was informed on how members-at-large can organize to form a unit.

Members of the group were knowledgeable in their questions and enthusiastic in their planning. We look forward to working with them as they continue their involvement in their communities and with the LWVNE.

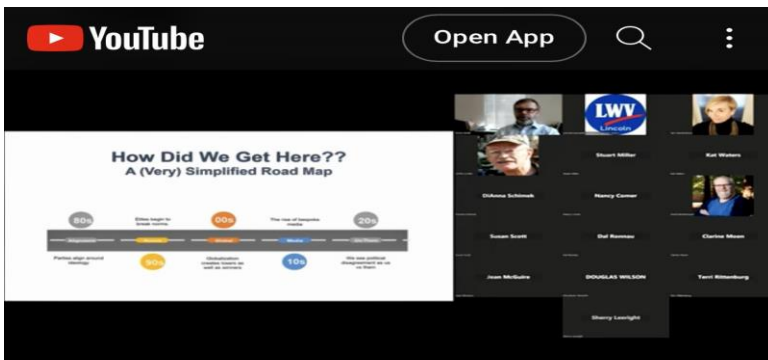
## LWVLL program helps participants learn about civic life

*By Charlyne Berens, associate editor*

An enlightening speaker or speakers every month. A chance to learn more about the community, the state and the nation. An opportunity to connect with the mission of the League of Women Voters.

The heart of the League of Women Voters' mission is to empower women – and men – to participate fully in democracy through education, advocacy and organizing. The Lunch and Learn program of the LWV of Lincoln-Lancaster County supports that mission.

Karen Dienstbier, chair of the Lunch and Learn Committee from 2010 until 2021, said the goal of the monthly Lunch and Learn events has always been to help people learn more about government and civic life and how it affects them.



*Pictured above is a screen shot from the May 2023 Lunch and Learn program. Presentations are taped and available on the LWVLL's [YouTube channel](#).*

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down in-person gatherings, the “lunch” part of the practice went away, but the committee refused to give up on the learning and soon began delivering programs virtually via Zoom.

Instead of weakening the educational project, the shutdown actually helped build the audience.

Dienstbier said Lunch and Learn met at the Nebraska Club in the early 2000s before moving to the Holiday Inn (now the Graduate Hotel) in 2010.

About that time, several committee members had moved on to other responsibilities, and Dienstbier worked to reorganize the group. Some of the program topics that year were health care reform, child welfare, tax credits and Medicare reform.

The committee has always consisted of six to 10 members who meet to brainstorm ideas for interesting programs. Then each person takes responsibility to line up a speaker for the monthly event.

Tari Hendrickson took over as chair in 2021, but Dienstbier was still the group's leader when the COVID pandemic put an end to in-person meetings and gatherings in March 2020. The spring programs were canceled, but when the committee met in the summer, they decided to try to present a full slate of programs in 2021-22 via Zoom.

Topics that year included voting rights, redistricting and the Electoral College. Perhaps the biggest event was a Zoom presentation by Dr. Deborah Turner, president of the national League of Women Voters.

After a successful year of Zooming, the committee decided to continue the practice for the foreseeable future. It has allowed the local group to hear from speakers like Turner, who do not live in the area, and also to attract a larger audience from Lincoln-Lancaster County and elsewhere. And it has made it inexpensive and convenient for working people to attend.

“We used to have about 25 to 35 people at the lunches and programs at the hotel,” Dienstbier said. “Now we’re drawing about 50 on a regular basis and many more for particular programs.”

From the start, the committee decided to make the programs as accessible as possible. Once someone registers for one program, their name and email is automatically added to a list to be notified for the next program. Committee member Kate High publicizes the programs – which are free and open to the public – in newspapers in Lincoln and surrounding communities, which has drawn additional participation.

The November program will be about the City of Lincoln’s 50-year plan. In December, participants will hear from the Citizen’s Climate Lobby. Lunch and Learn continues to meet the first Thursday of each month from noon to 1 p.m. September through May.

To learn more and to register for future programs, go to <https://lincolnleague.org/lunch-and-learn-schedule/>

## **LWVNE report summarizes state senators’ 2023 actions, service**

*By Dianne Bystrom, director of communications*

Through the leadership of Rachel Gibson, action vice president for the League of Women Voters of Nebraska, the LWVNE has prepared a report on the votes of state senators on key issues as well as the committees on which they serve and the bills and legislative studies they introduced in 2023.

“The tumultuous 2023 Nebraska legislative session took up several high profile and controversial topics,” Gibson said. “In 2023, the 49 senators in our state Legislature passed bills that loosened gun laws, restricted access to abortion and reproductive health care, and blocked access to gender-affirming care. The state League thought it was important to provide Nebraskans with information about how their senators voted in 2023.”

The LWVNE’s Senator Summary report is available at this [link](#). Senators are listed alphabetically. In addition to their votes on some of the most contentious issues before the 2023 Nebraska Legislature, the report includes the bills and legislative studies introduced by state senators and on which committees they served. If you are not sure who your senator is, you can use the Nebraska Legislature’s “Find Your Senator” tool [here](#).

“The information included in the LWVNE’s Senator Summary report was taken directly from the Nebraska Legislature website, and no information has been abridged, edited or omitted,” said Gibson, who led the research and writing of the report. “No opinion or commentary is provided. The LWVNE is a nonpartisan organization aimed at helping educate the public without endorsing candidates or parties.”



The LWVNE encourages Nebraskans to review the report and consider whether their senator is prioritizing the issues they care most about. “Before the next legislative session starts in January 2024, let your senator know by emailing or calling them via the contact information listed on the Senator Summary sheet or on their senator homepage,” Gibson said. “Your senator is meant to represent their constituents. Make sure they know what is important to you.”



## Treasurer’s Report: LWVNE financial situation ‘solid’

*By Terri Rittenburg, treasurer*

The recent financial activity of the League of Women Voters of Nebraska includes renewing its Zoom subscription, board liability insurance and dues to the national League.

The LWVNE also had ongoing costs for its website and its usual monthly expenses for the office administrator and Verizon phone app. The LWVNE received dues for one renewing member-at-large in September. Donations to the LWVNE’s Endowment Fund flow in monthly.

League of Women Voters of Nebraska Statement of Net Worth	
Checking account total (10/11/23)	\$ 51,422.99
PayPal balance	\$ -
Endowment (10/11/23)	\$ 61,471.71
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 112,894.70</b>

Our financial situation is solid. All bills are up to date, and per-member payments have been made from all Nebraska local Leagues and for members-at-large.

## Action team advocates standing up for environmental policies

*By Megan York Lyons and Claudia Stevenson, co-directors of natural resources and energy*

While the League of Women Voters of Nebraska is involved with many public policy issues facing our state, we dare not let up on our environmental program and positions. The state’s water quality is good in some places and deadly in others. The dialogue about climate keeps changing. The League must stand up for the well-being of children ill from nitrates related to contamination of some rural well water and our aquifers.



## GUARDIANS OF THE AQUIFER

A lobby group advocating for healthy, safe drinking water with no chlorine added

A Sept. 16 event, “What’s in Our Water, Nebraska,” promoted by the League of Women Voters of Nebraska, highlighted these concerns. The Guardians of the Aquifer, a Lincoln-based environmental group, sponsored the three-hour program to encourage local action to protect Nebraska’s water resources amid growing concerns about nitrates and other contaminants. The group was founded in 2010 to oppose the Keystone XL pipeline.

An [article](#) in the Nebraska Examiner further explains how people of different ages can be affected by nitrates. The Flatwater Free Press also has published several investigative stories about nitrates in Nebraska, including [Our Dirty Water](#) and [Pillen’s Water](#).

The LWVNE and its Natural Resources and Energy Action Team have solid program positions and knowledgeable members familiar with environmental policy. However, environmental policies often end up being the last thing anyone wants to talk about. This has to change. We can do this.

In a highly politicized time with upcoming presidential elections, we urge all League members to keep doing the right thing for our communities. Stand up for environmental policy no matter where you live. Don't stop. We are on the right side of history if we stand up for our land and our people. Environmental issues are nonpartisan. When are we going to stand up if we don't do it now?

## **LWVNE continues work on voter rights, engagement**

*By Carolyn Thiele, director of voter services*

Through collaborations with other state and national nonprofit organizations, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska is continuing its work on voter rights and engagement.

Representing the LWVNE, I recently participated in a meeting of the Voter ID Work Committee. The committee has created a rack card that member organizations can order at no cost, thanks to funding by the Nebraska Civic Engagement Table. Rack cards will be distributed at locations such as libraries and other public places.

The Nebraska Secretary of State's office also has developed an [informational brochure](#) on voter ID and created a [page](#) with answers to frequently asked questions about voter ID. The page also provides access to English and Spanish versions of the brochure. In the next few months, the Secretary of State's office will train election officials across the state on the voter ID law.

LWVNE's voter services has created an email chat group for members working on voter education, registration and getting out the vote across the state. Our goal is that this chat group will serve as a vehicle to share successes, ideas, needs and resources.



At NCET's first annual member summit meeting on Aug. 30-31, the associate director for partnerships of the Students Learn Students Vote national coalition gave a presentation on getting involved in the organization. Founded in 2016, SLSV is the largest nonpartisan network dedicated to increasing the student vote. Its work focuses on registering and engaging young voters on college and university campuses. The group supports campuses by facilitating collaborations across national, state and local organizations, coordinating national programs and campaigns, and distributing resources that go directly to local leaders in their communities.

At the Oct. 14 board meeting of the LWVNE, members approved a motion for the state League to join SLSV. As a partner, LWVNE members will have access to resources, connections, strategic direction and funding (as available) to support its student vote efforts.

SLSV is currently working with some 2,000 college and university campuses in all 50 states, including the University of Nebraska-Omaha and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Both campuses saw an increase in student voter turnout in 2020. Because both NCET and Civic Nebraska have staff members involved with SLSV, the LWVNE is exploring a partnership with them to establish an SLSV presence on other college campuses in Nebraska.

**MABHAT prepares for 2024 legislative session**  
*By Angela Gleason, co-director of mental and behavioral health*

The Mental and Behavioral Health Action Team recently met to prepare for the 2024 legislative session and plans to follow up on a recent interim study hearing investigating health care provider shortages in Nebraska.

Members reviewed information from action team leaders, including the number of bills we will focus on in 2024, and discussed expanding our scope to include legislation affecting intellectual and developmental disabilities. Because MABHAT had supported bills on intellectual and developmental disabilities in 2023, we decided to add this to our area of focus for 2024.



*Sen. John Frederickson*

Aimée Folker, MABHAT co-director, Rachel Gibson, action vice president for the League of Women Voters of Nebraska, and I plan to meet with Nebraska state Sen. John Frederickson about the results of his Sept. 20 interim study hearing investigating mental and behavioral health resources in Nebraska.

At the hearing, it was noted that Mental Health America this year ranked Nebraska 44<sup>th</sup> in the nation because of its higher prevalence of mental illness coupled with lower access to care. For specific populations, Nebraska ranked 34<sup>th</sup> for adults and 49<sup>th</sup> for children. The ranking includes all states and Washington, D.C.

Also at the hearing – which was covered by several media outlets, including the [Nebraska Examiner](#) – Dr. Marley Doyle, director of the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska, noted that 88 of the state's 93 counties are considered mental health professional shortage areas and that Nebraska has less than half of its needed behavioral health care providers. However, Doyle said, funding for workforce recruitment has brought more students into programs to help address these shortages.

It is also hoped that the creation of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics – included in a bill, LB276, introduced by Sen. Anna Wishart of Lincoln and passed by the Legislature in 2023 – will help address some of these shortages. However, it may take time for these centers to make an impact.

In meeting with Sen. Frederickson, we hope to learn what the LWVNE and its Mental and Behavioral Health Action Team can do to help further its goals to improve access to mental and behavioral health care in Nebraska.

**Government team reports on state, federal actions**  
*By Joanna Lindberg and Sheri St. Clair, co-directors of government*

At the Oct. 14 board meeting of the League of Women Voters of Nebraska, members were informed about actions taken at the state and federal levels that are of interest to the League.

On Aug. 16, Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers issued a 38-page advisory opinion stating that the oversight and investigatory powers of the Legislature's child welfare and corrections inspector generals are unconstitutional. The opinion was requested by the CEO of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, which handles child welfare cases, and the director of the Department of Correctional Services, which handles prisons.

Unlike a court ruling, the Attorney General’s opinion does not require that the Legislature change the laws creating the inspector general positions, but it leaves the future of the positions uncertain. In an interview with the Nebraska Examiner and in an op-ed published in the Lincoln Journal Star, State Sen. Danielle Conrad of Lincoln, who is an attorney, said the Legislature created the inspectors general offices because crises involving the state prison and child welfare systems weren’t being remedied by the attorney general or executive branch. State Sen. John Arch of La Vista, the speaker of the Legislature, said a strategy would be developed to continue oversight of the two agencies.

With primary and general elections taking place in 2024, LWVNE board members also were reminded of the provisions of Executive Order 14019, issued by President Biden on March 7, 2021, to expand access to voter registration and election information at post-secondary institutions. Under Section 487 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, eligible post-secondary institutions are required to “make a good faith effort to distribute a mail voter registration form, requested and received from the State, to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution.”

This outreach can happen through electronic messages as long as the message is devoted exclusively to voter registration and contains an acceptable voter registration form or an internet address where that form can be downloaded. Resources are available to students at these links: <https://vote.gov/> (voter registration) and <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/while-abroad/voting.html> (absentee voting for U.S. students studying abroad or in military service). College and university faculty, staff and students can volunteer to become poll workers at <https://www.eac.gov/voters/become-poll-worker>.

### **LWVLL increases visibility through advocacy, events** *By Cynthia Peterson, president, LWV of Lincoln-Lancaster County*

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County remains busy in the community while taking advantage of appropriate opportunities to increase its visibility and outreach through advocacy and events.

Recent examples of our advocacy efforts include a letter to the editor, published in the Lincoln Journal Star on Oct. 24, supporting the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners’ decision to add four more ballot drop boxes; a collaboration with the Collective Impact Lincoln on a proposed city ordinance that bans source-of-income discrimination in Lincoln; and work on behalf of a petition drive to place a bill that provides public funds to private schools on the November 2024 ballot.

On Oct. 10, 2023, the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners approved installing permanent ballot drop boxes at Lincoln City Library branches in four quadrants of the city over the vocal objections of a group that regularly appears before the board with election fraud concerns. At this time, Lancaster County has only one ballot drop box site, while Nebraska’s other large counties each have multiple sites.

Christa Yoakum, chair of the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners, asked the LWVLL to support this change through a letter to the editor, emails to the commissioners and asking our members to state their support as private citizens.



The LWVLL's letter to the editor supporting the county board's decision to install four more drop box locations was published Oct. 24 in the Lincoln Journal Star. The text of the letter as published in the newspaper is included at the end of this report on page 14.

The LWVLL and its members also are involved in several city and county policies. In September, the LWVLL board of directors voted to support and work with Collective Impact Lincoln on a proposed city ordinance that bans [source-of-income discrimination in Lincoln](#). Source-of-income discrimination allows the denial of housing based on tenants' income source, such as housing vouchers. This unjustly impacts low-income families, recipients of public housing assistance and others who rely on various forms of income including Social Security, disability benefits, Veterans Affairs housing vouchers, single parents depending on child support and hourly workers without a guaranteed monthly salary. The coalition includes a number of other community organizations.

Many LWVLL members were pleased to learn that sufficient valid/verified signatures had been gathered in the referendum petition drive to place LB753, the "Adopt the Opportunity Scholarships Act and Provide Tax Credits," on the Nov. 5, 2024, election ballot for potential repeal. Most of our members actively supported the petition drive in some way, and we are ready to move on to voter education efforts to combat the disinformation that is already percolating.

In September, the LWVLL's Voter Services Committee was busy with eight events, including four on National Voter Registration Day on Sept. 19, which resulted in at least 35 new voters. Fourteen different LWVLL members volunteered to register voters at these events. More voter registration events will be scheduled in 2024.

The LWVLL's Voter Services Committee is led by Kate Borchman, who was appointed by the board as co-chair, and Jane Witte, who will move out of her leadership role the first of next year. Witte will remain involved with voter services but with more time to focus on other interests. Another piece of good news is that the Lancaster County Election Commission renewed its contract with LWVLL for voter registration services.

The LWVLL is also working to better engage its members, which now number 113 with 26 new members. For example, in response to member requests for more opportunities to gather in person beyond the annual meeting, we will have mid-year in-person meeting on Thursday, Nov. 2, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. in the Walt Public Library. The meeting will include a presentation on voter ID education by the Lancaster County Deputy Election Commissioner with sufficient time for questions and answers. Voter ID education also will be the topic of a Lunch and Learn presentation early next year.

The popular Lunch and Learn series continues over the noon hour on the first Thursday of the month. The LWVLL is once again producing newsletters on a regular basis. We are also posting more frequently on Facebook. So if you're on Facebook, please follow, like and share the LWVLL.

On Sept. 28, Jean McGuire, the LWVLL's vice president of action, attended the Platte Institute's annual Legislative Summit. State Sen. John Arch of LaVista, speaker of the Nebraska Legislature, identified legislative priorities for 2024, including property assessment and valuation, procurement reform, tax incentives, the powers of inspector generals, tweaks to recently passed tax bills, workforce certification and licensing process, and legislative rules. McGuire and I also attended the OpenSky 2023 Fall Policy Symposium on Oct. 24 in Lincoln.

The LWVLL gave up its brick-and-mortar office on Sept. 27 as a money saving measure and because it just made sense. The LWVLL rented a climate controlled self-storage unit at Dino's, which also includes the use of a conference room where we held our October board of directors meeting. Our new mailing address is: P.O. Box 5054, Lincoln, NE 68505.

## **Letter: Better access to ballot box**

Lincoln Journal Star, Tuesday, Oct 24, 2023

Access to the ballot box ensures that all eligible voters in Lancaster County can exercise their right to vote. Casting a ballot is a process that must be accessible and secure for all voters. Currently, Lancaster County has only one ballot drop box located in central Lincoln, serving a population of 200,244 registered voters. While our elections are fair, safe and accurate, the presence of just one drop box in Lancaster County poses challenges for voters.

The League of Women Voters of Lincoln/Lancaster County strongly endorses the recent decision made by the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners to install an additional four secured ballot boxes for upcoming election cycles and beyond. This action holds the promise of increased voter participation by reducing the hurdles imposed by geographical constraints and personal circumstances. We would have welcomed an even more extensive distribution of ballot boxes throughout the city and county.

The County Board's 4 to 1 approval on Oct. 10, means the installation of a secure, standalone, concrete-anchored and locked ballot drop box at each of four public libraries in Lincoln's quadrants — Walt, Gere, Anderson and Eiseley.

Since our founding in 1920, the nonpartisan League of Women Voters has been a dedicated advocate for voter rights, registration, education and active participation in free, secure and fair elections. The League of Women Voters of Lincoln/Lancaster County firmly believes in the removal of voting barriers, not their creation. We commend the Lancaster County Board for their proactive action in this regard.

Cynthia Peterson, Lincoln, president, Kate Borchman, Lincoln, and Jane Witte, Lincoln, co-chairs voter services, League of Women Voters of Lincoln/Lancaster County

## **Hastings LWV hosts programs on community services, city projects**

*By Linda Rea, president, Hastings LWV*

In September, the Hastings League of Women Voters hosted programs about a community treatment center and current and upcoming projects planned by the city.

Because many members were unable to attend a summer tour of The Bridge, a substance abuse recovery facility for women and their families, its director and a resident presented a program about its treatments and support in September.

Also in September, the new Hastings city administrator presented a program on current and future city projects and plans; eight League members received voter registrar training; and a voter registration event was held at Central Community College.

Members of the Hastings LWV are currently discussing ways to increase membership and get more members involved in its action issues. Suggestions are appreciated.

Anticipating a busy election year in 2024, the Hastings LWV is also planning to host candidate forums and ballot issue programs.

## **LWVGO hosts annual meeting, voter registration events** *By Cat Henning and Sarah Smolen, co-presidents, LWV of Greater Omaha*

This fall, the League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha hosted its annual meeting, welcomed new board members, sponsored voter registrations events and produced two “Go Vote, Omaha!” television shows.

More than 50 members attended the LWVGO’s annual meeting on Sept. 24 at the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation in North Omaha. The meeting’s theme was “Our Voices Will Be Heard.” Laurie Ponce, director of the Coalition for a Strong Nebraska, was the keynote speaker.

At its annual meeting, LWVGO welcomed a new slate of board members. Four directors are changing roles, three are continuing and five – Carol Ebdon, Taylor Sterba, Jackie Prados, Jennifer Racine and Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek – are new to the LWVGO board. A board orientation was held in early October to discuss LWVGO’s mission and for members to get to know each other better.



*Cathy Lindermier and Uncle Sam helped register voters at Bellevue University on Sept. 19.*

LWVGO also has been busy with voter registration events in the community: Sept. 19 at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Bellevue University; Sept. 23 at the Homerun for Health event hosted by the American Red Cross; Oct. 13 at the Women of Color in Leadership and Legacy awards luncheon; and at naturalization ceremonies each month.

In September, LWVGO’s “Go Vote, Omaha!” produced two shows. The first show – moderated by LWVGO member Krystal Fox, who also serves as co-director of social policy for the League of Women Voters of Nebraska – invited students who attended the 2023 Face to Face with Black History Tour to talk about their experiences. The annual tour is hosted by Preston Love Jr. through Black Votes Matter.

The second show featured Kait Madsen, field director, and Cindy Meyer, volunteer community advocate, of Nebraska Appleseed to talk about the paid sick leave ballot initiative in Nebraska.

“Go Vote, Omaha!” shows can be viewed on LWVGO’s YouTube [channel](#).

## **Conrad, Hughes compare experiences during Seward County LWV program** *By Lori Shriner, president, Seward County LWV*

State Sen. Danielle Conrad of District 46 and Sen. Jana Hughes of District 24 spoke about their paths to the Nebraska Unicameral and their 2023 experiences as legislators during a Sept. 24 “Women in Politics” program sponsored by the Seward County League of Women Voters. About 40 people attended.

Both senators are from the Seward area and graduated from Seward High School. Conrad had served eight years (2007-2014) in the Legislature representing a Lincoln district before leaving due to term limits. She was re-elected to the position in 2022. Elected in 2022, Hughes is a first-year senator for the district that includes Seward County.



The senators spoke about the experiences that led them to the Legislature, running for office and the current state of the Nebraska Unicameral, including rules and procedures, learning about issues and the impact of term limits. Audience members also submitted questions in writing, which revolved around gun laws, proposed state constitutional amendments and the governor’s leadership.

Tobin Beck, a member of the Seward County LWV, moderated the discussion and question-and-answer session with Conrad and Hughes.

The Seward County LWV’s “Women in Politics” program was co-hosted by the Seward Memorial Library, which provided the venue and refreshments.

This was the first of two programs focusing on women leaders in Seward County this fall. A program on Sunday, Nov. 5, will feature historical research on women in leadership roles by former Concordia University student Victoria Perry. Current members of the Seward City Council, Seward County Board of Commissioners and Seward School Board have been invited to participate in an informal panel discussion.

*Above: Tobin Beck (left) moderated the “Women in Politics” program featuring Sen. Danielle Conrad (center) and Sen. Jana Hughes.*

*Right: Sen. Conrad (left) listens as Sen. Hughes responds to a question during the Sept. 24 program sponsored by the Seward County LWV.*



### **LWVNE announces 2023-2024 meeting dates**

At its July 15 board meeting, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska approved meeting dates for 2023-2024. All meetings are held on Zoom unless otherwise noted.

The remaining meeting dates for 2023 and 2024 are:

Dec. 9, 2023, preparation for 2024 legislative session.

Jan. 27, 2024, meeting to review bills and choose legislative priorities.

Feb. 10, 2024, training for Legislative Day.

Feb. 14, 2024, Legislative Day, in-person at the State Capitol in Lincoln.

March 16, 2024, final regular board meeting.

April 27, 2024, in-person annual meeting hosted by the League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha.