



THE WEST VIRGINIA VOTER

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Euphemia Kallas, Esq.

On Friday, May 12 during the virtual Meet & Greet for our State Convention we enjoyed a guided discussion around this year's theme - 'Empowering Voters And Defending Democracy'. We discussed some of the biggest threats we face like gerrymandering, uncivil discourse, failing institutions, and social media/deep fakes. We considered how our League should respond to these threats like calling out public officials who intentionally mislead the public, informing citizens of how their legislators are voting on specific issues, or creating a weekly commentary during the legislative session.

After our meeting, it occurred to me that our League can empower voters and defend democracy not just through our collective efforts but also through our individual efforts. I'm not talking about running for office, or voting, or even becoming a poll worker - **which ALL League members should do anyway as a matter of course!** No, I'm talking about the heavy lifting that a strong democracy requires: volunteers at the local level for appointed position.

Nearly every municipality in this state has a Park & Recreation Commission, a Planning Commission, and a Board of Zoning Appeals. Nearly every county has a Utility Board, Transit Authority, Development Authority, Board of Health, Farmland Protection Board, Historic Landmarks Commission, and Solid Waste Authority. What's more, town hall bulletin boards and county commission websites generally post vacancies thereto asking simply for a letter of interest. I proffer to you that volunteering for an appointed position with your local government is where some of the most important work of defending our democracy and empowering voters lies, here's how.

On an individual level, sitting on a local board or authority will enable you to gain greater insight into the inner workings of government. Membership will also come with training on the state's Open Meeting Act (aka

sunshine laws) and the code of conduct for public servants. Both of these will further your understanding of the constraints of government. Consequently, you will be better equipped to spot and perhaps even prevent violations to your local democratic process. Finally, membership will also burgeon your opportunity to work, and network, with elected public officials.

From a community perspective, many public bodies have so many vacancies that they can scarcely fulfill their obligations. Some are even paralyzed for lack of required members. These bodies were created to address an issue in your community - many times at the request of your fellow citizens. Defending democracy must surely include working to ensure the success of the remedies brought about by the exercise of citizens right of redress.

As for the League, our work together will benefit from your "insider" experiences. Sharing your observations can help the League be more proactive in its work. Further, your enhanced access to, and working relationship with, public officials will help our League with one of its most challenging problems - balanced candidate forums. Attracting elected officials to our public forums is much easier when there is a prior connection and level of comfort. Hosting impactful candidate forums is unquestionably one of the best ways the League can empower voters.

This may all be preaching to the choir. But if not, I encourage you to seek out and volunteer for an appointed governmental position in your community. Let's set a challenge and review the results when next we meet in 2024 for State Council. Our League needs us to bring as much as we can to the table to help it Empower Voters and Defend Democracy.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Julie Archer

I am filled with mixed emotions, as we say farewell to several departing board members. When I agreed to take on a new leadership role with the League two years ago, I was extremely grateful that Effie Kallas agreed to join the board as my co-president to help steer the ship. In keeping with our goal of expanding our educational programs and activities, Effie was always willing to facilitate League events and her professionalism helped us put our best foot forward. Effie has also helped us forge new partnerships with other civic-minded organizations like Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., that I hope we can sustain and strengthen. I'm sad that Effie won't be staying on for another term to share her valuable insights and keep us on task.

In addition to Effie, we are also losing three other stellar board members. Betty Barrett has served as our Health Care director for the last four years, sharing her knowledge and expertise with our friends and partners in the WV Health Care for All coalition. Anyone who had been involved in the League for any length of time is likely aware of Betty's commitment, as a member for more than 50 years and a member of the Huntington Area board for many of those. Betty's dedication to service is an inspiration and I hope I can stay at it as long. We will miss you on the board, but you deserve a rest!

Two years ago, Nyoka Baker Chapman enthusiastically took on the Natural Resources portfolio, faithfully and passionately serving as our representative to the WV Climate Alliance as we work with our partners and allies to protect our planet and create a sustainable future for all West Virginians. The West Virginia Climate Time Capsule to be opened on Earth Day 2050 will carry our climate history into the future and serve as a fitting reminder of Nyoka's legacy and the League's role in the fight for climate justice. Nyoka also diligently chaired our Fair Maps Committee through the most recent redistricting compiling a wealth of resources and working to engage League members and others in the process. We will miss your creativity and your thoroughness at researching the issues at hand.

Last, but not least, Vicki Conner, has followed Tax & Finance issues for the League during a period when the flat budgets have resulted in decreased investment in critical areas like education, and created crisis-level staffing shortages across state agencies. Now the state is on the precipice of enacting a tax cut that overwhelmingly benefits the wealthy, and which will likely hamstring future budgets for years to come. Through her other volunteer work with Pantry Plus More in Monongalia County, Vicki understands first hand the lack of investment in our communities can impact vital services,

especially those that provide a safety net for our most vulnerable that has helped her approach her role on the League board with compassion and empathy. Absent a permanent Voter Service director, Vicki stepped up during the 2022 election to distribute our questionnaires to candidates and compile the responses for our voter's guides.

Thank you, all, for your service and contributions to the League!

I know Effie, Betty, Nyoka, and Vicki will stay involved with the League in other ways, and although their departures are bittersweet, they present opportunities for other members to become more engaged, especially in our issue advocacy and voter education efforts.

I'm humbled to serve as your president, and we have assembled a great leadership team for the coming term. I am grateful to all the board members who are staying on, and am excited to welcome Lyn Widmyer and Susan Pipes with the Jefferson County League to the team. However, our work benefits from more active participation from our members. As you read about our accomplishments over the past year, and learn more about our plans and priorities for the coming months and year, I hope you will be moved to get involved.

With gratitude,

Julie Archer, President
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NEW LWV WV WEBSITE

The LWV WV mobile friendly website (<https://lwvww.org>) went live on April 24, 2023 with a new user friendly theme and layout.

The website features prominent display of the "Join Us", "Take Action" and "Email List" to make it easier for people to join, receive communications and take action. Another feature is the [contact page](#) under the "About Us" menu item, as well as in the footer. This provides a way to contact various Board members via the contact form. Likewise, any local League, Committee or member who wants to be contacted via the form could be added.

The website also features a plugin that allows LWV WV members to post to the website through a simple email. Content can come from many sources including portfolio chairs, any member involved in any League effort, off-board committees.

For more information about how to post content or to add your name to the contact page, please contact Jonathan Rosenbaum at jr@lwvww.org.

**2023 LWWV State Convention Welcome
By Wendy D. Thomas, Co-President
LWV Huntington Area**

In her remarks as she introduced the Equal Rights Amendment in Seneca Falls in 1923, Alice Paul sounded a call that has great significance and implication for us 100 years later:

"If we keep on this way they will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the 1848 Convention without being much further advanced in equal rights than we are...If we had not concentrated on the Federal Amendment we should be working today for suffrage...We shall not be safe until the principle of equal rights is written into the framework of our government."

From the very beginning, the inequality of men and women under the Constitution has been an issue for advocacy. Thus, our convention theme: **The Fight for Women's Equality, It's Not Over!**

Voting is our voice and our constitutional right. As we explore this theme, it is our hope that each participant will be reminded of the importance of voting and its impact on our democracy. Let us be empowered to continue our unified efforts to strengthen our Democracy, safeguard our equal rights and create a sustainable future for those who will follow in our footsteps.

**The Fight for Women's Equality, It's Not Over! 2023 Convention Guest Speaker,
Elisabeth Griffith, PhD
By: Nyoka Baker Chapman**

In honor of our LWWV 2023 convention theme, 'The Fight for Women's Equality, It's Not Over!', we asked historian, author and activist Elisabeth Griffith (www.elisabethgriffith.com) to join us as guest speaker. We are very grateful that she accepted our invitation. Elisabeth's knowledge and experience in the struggle for women's rights was illuminating and inspiring! We realize that there is a problem of inequality not just for women but for so many people for different reasons. Standing on a platform of equal rights when faced with a growing portion of society that is not inclusive of diversity remains a dilemma. The Equal Rights Amendment resolution has failed to advance toward ratification and our next steps are unclear. We face rising forces in American politics that defy reason and bend the traditional ideals of a true democracy. We see our right to vote and the security in its counting being increasingly challenged. The LWV now finds itself as a nonpartisan organization with partisan problems. When there is political opposition at odds with our platform of organizational priorities, how

can our voices be heard? What can history teach us about advocacy strategies that work? What we do know at this crossroad in the 21st century is that we must stay true to our LWV mission: **'Empowering Voters and Defending Democracy.'**

You can view a recording of Dr. Griffith's presentation here: [LWWV 2023 Convention - Elisabeth Griffith, PhD - The Fight for Women's Equality, It's Not Over! - YouTube](#)

To order a copy of her book *Formidable: American Women and the Fight for Equality 1920-2020* from Four Season Books in Shepherdstown which will donate 15% of sales to the LWV WV go to: <https://www.fourseasonsbooks.com/store/p746/Formidable%20A%20American%20Women%20and%20the%20Fight%20for%20Equality%203A%201920-2020.html>

**2023 West Virginia Legislative Session
Education**

by Shirley Rosenbaum

Concealed weapon on college campus bill (SB 10) – The bill allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed deadly weapon on campus at a state institution of higher education. This bill was signed by the governor on March 1 and is effective from the date of passage.

Public employees and state teachers' retirement bill (SB 237) – The bill would provide a one-time \$1,500 bonus to those retirees age 70 or older making less than \$1,000 per month with 20 years of service. The bill would also set a \$1,000 minimum monthly amount for individuals age 70 or older with 25 years of service making less than \$1,000. This bill was signed by the governor on March 13 and goes into effect on July 1, 2023.

PEIA bill (SB 268) – The bill revises PEIA including coverage changes for employee spouses. The biggest changes proposed include spouses who are eligible for their own employer's health care plan will have to pay an additional fee if they choose to remain on PEIA and an estimated 25% premium increases for all PEIA participants to meet the 80/20 split. This bill was signed by the governor on March 17 and is effective from the date of passage.

State fire marshals bill (SB 275) – The bill adds state fire marshals to the statute that included law enforcement and first responders for receiving information on school safety requirements. This bill was approved by the governor and goes into effect on May 18, 2023.

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Education Continued from page 3**Educators and state police pay increase bill (SB 423) –**

The bill gives a \$2,300 across the board pay increase for education employees and state police. This bill was approved by the governor and goes into effect on July 1, 2023.

Income tax bill (HB 2526) –

The bill gives a 21.25% state income tax reduction and applies the rates retroactively to January 1, 2023. It also gives the amount paid on your car tax back to you in a tax credit. The bill gives a 50% corporate income tax reduction for small business machinery and inventory. It also gives veterans tax credits. This bill was signed by the governor on March 7 and is effective from the date of passage.

Nonresident student transfer bill (HB 2596) –

The bill allows superintendents to deny a transfer if the student committed a Level Three or Four violation. This bill was approved by the governor and goes into effect on May 23, 2023.

Teacher's aides' classification bill (HB 2602) –

The bill returns Aide V (special education) and Aide VI (behavior disorder) back to the statute, which were inadvertently deleted in a prior legislative session. This bill was signed by the governor February 22 and is effective from the date of passage.

Vocational math class bill (HB 3055) –

The bill creates a transitional math class for high school students interested in careers in the trades. This bill was approved by the governor and goes into effect on May 23, 2023.

Student suicide prevention bill (HB 3218) –

The bill will require suicide prevention resources to be printed on student identification card for students in grades 6-12 in public schools that issue student identification cards. It also requires suicide prevention resources to be printed on student identification cards for students in a public or private institution of higher education that issues student identification cards. This bill was signed by the governor on March 15 and goes into effect on May 30, 2023.

advance. Effective January 2024, it will set a cap on the price of insulin at \$35 a month. Because West Virginia has a high number of diabetics, this will be a big benefit. Some of the bills sound good, but may not be what we think they will be. For example, the bill related to the study of the homeless population is of great concern to service providers. It could result in limits of service to people from other states. Because we are a border state, with states that do not provide services to people who are homeless, it would result in more such people on our streets with no services. Another bill approved offers so-called crisis pregnancy assistance that is anti-abortion, and provides one-sided assistance and often medically incorrect information to pregnant women.

We will have to wait and see the effect of other bills passed. A major example is the split of the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) into three components. Another is the major changes in the Certificate of Need (CON) requirement that helps restrict over-expansion and duplication of services.

A bill that is a major concern limits what can be done to help transgender people, which was approved despite the advice and strong opposition from medical professionals.

The good bills that failed are many. Ending what is called the "Medicaid cliff" is at the top of the list. It means that when a client reaches a specific income, and it is low, the client is cut off from receiving service under Medicaid. It will be an emphasis for next year. Working people have to be concerned that receiving a raise or a better job now are at risk of losing or not being eligible for Medicaid by a few dollars. I had a secretary, for example, who turned down a raise because the extra few dollars she could use as a single mother with two children would cost her Medicaid (as well as her subsidized housing and childcare), and therefore she would have to quit her job.

Another bill that failed would provide free feminine hygiene products in certain grades in school, as needed. Another would pay for transportation for substance abuse patients.

It was a good year for some League-supported legislation, and for some bad bills, as is always the case. We will be back next year trying again to pass the good bills and defeat the bad ones.

2023 West Virginia Legislative Session Health Care by Betty Barrett

Health issues were active in the 2023 Legislative session. The League worked with our partner advocacy group Health Care for All with its West Virginia coordinator Kim Jones.

Some issues we were especially interested in were approved and, as usual, some good ones failed, and some bad ones (by LWV standards) failed. A major victory was passage of the cap on insulin monthly expenditures, a great

Calendar

Oct 14, 2023	LWVWV Board Meeting
Dec. 9, 2023	LWVWV Board Meeting
Feb. 10, 2024	LWVWV Board Meeting

League Legislative Action Workgroup (LLAW) One Year In Judy Ball, Chair LLAW

In the last issue of *The Voter*, we reported that the League of Women Voters of West Virginia (LWVWV) had launched a new initiative: the League Legislative Action Workgroup (LLAW, pronounced “L-law”). LLAW was founded in recognition that the League’s legislative advocacy was not achieving its goals, possibly due to dispersed responsibilities across Board members and action concentrated just prior to and during the legislative session. The LLAW solution was to assemble a cadre of League members from across the state and extend advocacy and educational efforts to year-round coverage with a dedicated team.

LLAW operates on one fundamental assumption, which is relevant also to everything the League does: **Everyone is good at something; rarely, is anyone good at everything.**

In other words, League members working in concert can combine their different skill sets and become a force multiplier, a tool that amplifies individual efforts to produce more together.

What did LLAW accomplish in its first year?

LLAW began by agreeing on a limited set of legislative priorities for year 1. These focused on voting/voter registration and voter information.

1. Voting/Voter Registration, beginning with “good” bills introduced in the 2022 Legislature
 - Permit universal absentee voting
 - Remove felonies as disqualifier for voting after sentence served
 - Online voters’ guide
 - Same-day voter registration
 - Mandate SOS to implement Electronic Voter Registration
2. Voter information
 - Expand voter information efforts
 - Highlight votes by legislator

Our initial voter information efforts kicked off just prior to the 2022 General Election. We prepared materials for seniors and homebound voters to explain in plain language

how to request an absentee ballot and vote at home. For distribution, we collaborated with Meals on Wheels and Senior Centers in a few WV counties. The intent of this pilot was to lay the foundation for more extensive outreach for the next major election. Already, the materials have been shared with the Morgantown-Monongalia County League for their Spring 2023 municipal election. Finally, we contacted all WV county clerks with voter turnout over 50% in November 2022 to recognize and learn about their efforts.

Were we successful in terms of our legislative priorities?

Yes, if success can be measured in terms of bad things not happening. During this year’s legislative session, some bad things did happen, but more bad things were averted. On balance, that counts as success. And some LLAW efforts to highlight votes by legislator are ongoing.

Here some highlights from the 2023 legislative session:

- We worked directly with one member of the Senate Judiciary Committee to introduce a universal absentee voting bill (**SB 156**) identical to the House bill (**HB 2855**) that was unlikely to move.
- When **SB 235**, a bill to restore voting rights for formerly incarcerated citizens, came up on the agenda for a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee, we proposed specific amendments to the primary Senate sponsors and the Subcommittee. That bill was ultimately tabled, and **HB 2803** (a bill with similar intent) was never considered at all.
- We advocated against **SB 620**, which would have altered the rules for drawing voting precinct boundaries and made polling places less accessible in urban areas. After passing the Senate, **SB 620** died in the House.
- We tracked election- and voting-related bills and committee agendas daily in preparation for action. Among 8 priority bills, none passed. However, among 15 bills we opposed or would have opposed, none passed.

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Finally, to further enable action from League members across the state, we developed an enhanced LWVWV roster to link members with their Senatorial and Delegate districts. With that information, LLAW members can more easily contact League members in particular parts of the state and request their intervention on specific bills with their legislators.

And so we carry on. LLAW is already planning for the coming year and the 2024 legislative session. The first step, as usual, is developing priorities. Priorities for 2023-2024 will differ from those adopted in LLAW's inaugural year. Year 1 proved a need to:

- Recognize explicitly that the Legislature throws curveballs. In other words, it is impossible to predict exactly what bills will get the most attention, so we must be ready to respond as such bills are introduced. The attention the Legislature gave to **HB 2007** (the anti-transgender healthcare bill from 2022) proved this point.
- Expand policy priorities beyond voting and voter registration.
- Propose alignment of LWVWV and LLAW priorities.

CALLING ALL [LEAGUE] POLICY NERDS

LLAW is seeking additional members. With an expanded policy portfolio and recalcitrant Legislature, we have even more to do in the coming year.

Remember our mantra: **Everyone is good at something; rarely, is anyone good at everything.**

Bring your passion – and whatever you're good at – and join us. The pace is fast, but the rewards are unexpectedly satisfying. Yes, it is a lot of work. We meet every two weeks (with excused absences for holidays). The pace picks up during the legislative session, 60 days every year. Nonetheless, one LLAW member has been heard exclaiming, "I'm just having so much FUN!"

If you are an interested League member or just have questions, contact Lyn Widmyer (lynwidmyer@gmail.com) or Judy Ball (balljk@aol.com).

No Energy Source Left Behind

By Nyoka Baker Chapman

On May 2, US Senator Joe Manchin introduced the **Building American Energy Security Act of 2023**, a revival of the text of the National Defense Authorization Act amendment that was previously supported in a floor vote in December of 2022. Talks now will go forward around reforming energy permitting to ensure American energy security and independence. The bill would *accelerate* permitting of all types of American energy and mineral infrastructure needed to achieve security and climate objectives without bypassing environmental laws or community input.

The bill implies that there is functional technology to produce cleaner energy faster from fossil fuels, but as to whether there will be lower costs for consumers is unknown. Potential compromises to the health and welfare of WV Citizens living in proximity to fossil fuel industries remain at issue, as well as a problematic path ahead of imminent domain for the sake of energy security.

You may read a summary of the *Building American Energy Security Act of 2023* [here](#).

**WV Natural Resources
New Legislation Passed in 2023**

By Nyoka Baker Chapman

SB 188 the Grid Stabilization and Security Act of 2023 defines requirements to identify economically viable sites for *natural gas electric generation projects* and requires the Secretary of the Dept of Economic Development to notify the Dept of Environmental protection and the Public Service Commission of the viable sites. Applications for a siting certificate would be made to the PSC with a final order to follow upon approval to permit. Though provision is made for expedited consideration of permit application, the process requires that an administrative review board hold hearings and issue a decision on natural gas electric generation facility permit appeals within a given time frame.

HB 3110 Relating to funding the Office of Oil and Gas in the Dept of Environmental Protection passed and will add 10 more inspectors to double the number of DEP employees responsible for oversight of around 75,000 existing wells and 20,000 tanks. This is good news, but the number still seems inadequate to provide enough oversight to monitor WV's natural gas industry.

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Natural Resources Continued from Page 6

HB 2814 to create a Hydrogen Power Task Force passed. The details reveal that the word 'clean' was removed. Currently 95% of all hydrogen is steam formed from natural gas. This task force will be responsible for reviewing all aspects of this emerging energy transition.

HB 3189 the PFAS Protection Act added new articles to WV Code relating to identifying the sources of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances discharged into source waters used for public drinking water and require the Department of Environmental Protection to begin identifying PFAS in water sources and address sources of PFAS in certain public water systems with action plans. This bill was a major victory for WV's clean water activists, particularly WV Rivers Coalition whose relentless advocacy helped to move the bill.

HB 3482 the Coal Fired Grid Stabilization and Security Act of 2023 will keep coal a priority resource in the future of electricity generation in WV. The Act will require designation of suitable sites for coal electric generation and reporting to the Division of Air Quality of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and the West Virginia Public Service Commission. Construction and operating permits for coal electric generation facilities will be given expedited consideration and will require prompt consideration of appeals by the Air Quality Board concerning a permit being issued or denied. The bill honors the advancement of existing and emerging technologies as well as finding solutions to current regulatory limitations.

SB 583 Creating a program to further development of renewable energy resources will further the development of renewable energy resources and facilities for solar energy by modifying the powers and duties of the WV Public Service Commission. The bill will provide for legislative findings, an application process and program for multi year comprehensive renewable energy facilities as defined, to plan, design, construct, purchase, own and operate renewable energy generating facilities for electric utilities.

HB 3303 Clarifying and expanding the powers and duties of the director of the Coalfield Community Development Office completed legislation. The director shall report quarterly to the energy and finance committees of the legislature on projects funded by the office. The report shall include the amount, the recipient and a

description of each project funded. The office would coordinate meetings as needed to be held among participating parties and develop a means to answer questions, concerns and complaints related to surface mining. The office would also coordinate the expenditure of grants issued by the US Dept of Energy and the US Dept of Commerce's Economic Development Administration for coalfield economic development or coalfield revitalization projects. This office will identify coal related assets and coal-based manufacturing or steelmaking facilities into this mix of community coalfield development.

SB 609 Obtaining approval for decommissioning or deconstructing of an existing power plant was passed. An existing coal, oil, or natural gas fueled power plant must obtain approval by submission of petition to the WV Public Energy Authority before beginning decommissioning or deconstructing activities. Rules and exemptions are clarified.

SB 162 Authorizing director of DNR to lease state-owned pore spaces in certain areas for carbon sequestration. This bill will allow the Division of Natural Resources to lease state-owned pore spaces underlying state forests, natural and scenic areas, and management areas, and other lands under the jurisdiction and control of the director for carbon sequestration; but *would prohibit the leasing of pore spaces underlying state parks*. A bidding process would be established with procedures and requirements. The bill authorizes the director to award a pore space under certain circumstances for an economic development project. (HB 4491 set the groundwork for sequestration requirements in 2022).

SB 4 Adopt-A-Trail volunteer programs for public land under DNR jurisdiction also passed the legislature and will establish an Adopt-A-Trail program for paths and trails under the guidance of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. The program will allow volunteer groups to assist in maintaining and enhancing trails on state-owned land as approved.

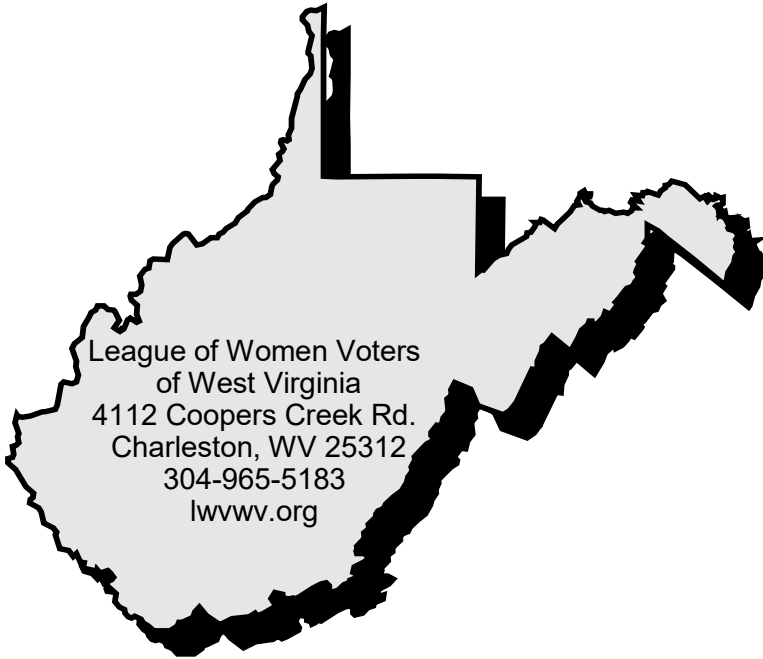
SB 143 Relating to Adopt-A-Stream Program has been signed into law. As with the Adopt-A-Highway Program, individuals, families, churches, businesses, schools, civic organizations, government agencies, scouting groups, fraternities, and communities may participate in an Adopt-A-Stream Program. *In West Virginia there are currently 25,000 volunteers who regularly pick up litter on 4,000 miles of highway. They have been responsible for removing more than 40 million pounds of litter since the program began.*

Four Seasons Books—Shepherdstown WV-15% donation of sales to
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Teresa Koon
 Editor

JOIN THE LEAGUE! The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. **If you live in Cabell, Jefferson, Monongalia, or Wood County, please contact the local League in those counties.** To join at the state level, send a check or money order payable to LWVWV to: Teresa Koon, Treasurer, LWVWV, 4112 Coopers Creek Rd., Charleston WV 25312. Dues are \$40 for individuals, \$60 for a household, and \$20 for students. Because we are a lobbying organization, membership dues are not tax-deductible.

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The League Board currently has 3 vacancies. If you are a member in good standing and interested in participating as a board member, please contact Julie Archer, President.