



THE NASHVILLE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Nashville
PO Box 158369, Nashville TN 37215 | 615-297-7134
www.LWVnashville.org

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February 2017

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 18, 2017, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Engaging the New American Majority and Making the Ballot More Accessible to Voters, First Amendment Center, 1207 18th Avenue South, Nashville, TN. Speaker: **State Representative Stacey Y. Abrams**, Georgia. Cost \$20.00. Sponsored by the Women's Political Collaborative of Tennessee. Reception to follow.

February 22, 2017, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. Protect My Care – Healthcare Rally, Centennial Park, 2500 West End Ave., Nashville, TN. Sponsored by ProtectMyCare.org.

March 3, 2017, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. First Friday Hot Topics- District 1 & 3 Gas Compressor Stations and Pipeline: What It Means for the Environment in Middle Tennessee, Second Harvest Food Bank – Metro Center, 331 Great Circle Rd., Nashville, TN 37228. Guest Speaker: **Sharon Fulton**, Communications Director for CCSE (Concerned Citizens for a Safe Environment). Open to the public.

March 30, 2017, 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Athena Awards, OZ Arts Nashville, 6172 Cockrill Bend Circle, Nashville, 37209. Support Hasina Mohyuddin, LWVN's Athena Nominees 2017. Sponsored by CABLE.



President's Message Debby Gould

Happy 97th anniversary to the League of Women Voters -- founded on February 14, 1920 -- a full 6 months before women gained the right to vote! We remain inspired by the valiant Tennessee women who led the way. Continuing in their fine tradition, marches and rallies in Nashville community have energized our community and brought many new voices to the streets. Some of those participants are now looking for ways to channel their energy into more sustained approaches to impact policy change.

In response, we reprised our annual session with LWVN lobbyists, **Stewart Clifton**, in two standing-room only programs of "The How and Why of State Legislative Advocacy". Over 300 community members attended. Stewart's pragmatic advice was greatly enhanced by engaging and informative presentations by **Rep. Harold Love** and LWVN member **Rep. Brenda Gilmore**. Thanks to our many volunteers for their assistance at both these events: **Madeline Garr, Anne-Marie Farmer, Michelle Steele, Melissa Holden, Lynn Questell, Debbie Meredith, Tracy Smith, Barbara Gay and Reba Holmes**.

Based on the increased level of interest, we will be expanding our evening programming in the community this year. Please send your suggestions for both topics and locations to lwvnash@gmail.com.

We have already plunged into the Tennessee legislative session. You should be receiving periodic action alerts about our priority issues so that you can communicate with our legislators about specific bills. If you have not received any this month, please contact lwvnash@gmail.com so that we can update our lists.



(First Row) Melissa Holden, Judy Raines, Cindee Gold, Hazel Thornton, Barbara Gay with Debby Gould above



Melissa Holden with Chris Coleman, Staff Attorney with Tennessee Justice Center

February First Friday Follow Up – The State of the ACA as We Knew It

By 1st Vice President – Melissa Holden

Close to 50 people attended our February First Friday to get an update on the precarious position of the **Affordable Care Act (ACA)** in the face of an Executive Order to “promptly repeal” the Act, a Congressional Budget Resolution to defund certain requirements, and almost assured non-support from the proposed nominee for Secretary of HHS, **Rep. Tom Price**. And all this in only two weeks. **Chris Coleman**, staff attorney for the **Tennessee Justice Center (TJC)**, came laden with facts and action items to share with our rapt audience on what it all means and what citizens can still do.

First, an explanation of the dismantling process: Congress has already passed a Budget Resolution that is the foundation for repealing significant parts of the ACA by defunding the Act’s requirements that affect the federal budget. So, some purely regulatory parts stay for now for example, rules that prohibit discrimination against those with a pre-existing condition, while parts that require money to be allocated through the federal budget begin to evaporate. In terms of strategy, although 60 votes in the Senate would be required to repeal the Act outright, only 50 are necessary to carry the House’s budget resolution forward and this action will begin to impact the Act to the point of its ability to function.

The very real imminent threat exists that insurance companies, in the face of extreme uncertainty, will be covering their risk by increasing premiums when they set their rates in **May 2017** for next year. **TJC** estimates that if a replacement plan is not in place before the ACA crumbles, “*526,000 Tennesseans could lose their health care coverage because of the double whammy of loss of subsidy and increased premiums.*” Nearly a quarter million Tennesseans receive financial assistance averaging around \$290 per month to afford the plan right now.

The organization also notes “*According to the most recent Reconciliation Bill, Tennessee’s economy stands to lose \$27 billion in federal funding for programs like TennCare, CHIP and financial assistance for the Marketplace over the next 9 years. Additionally, 2 million Tennesseans with pre-existing conditions such as asthma, diabetes and cancer, could be denied affordable, comprehensive coverage.*”

Just as importantly, in terms of the state’s failure to expand Medicaid, **TJC** estimates that even more “*rural hospitals will likely close because of the reductions in federal funding. Tennessee has already seen 4 rural counties lose their only hospital, and there are over 40 other hospitals at risk of closing. This means lost jobs, diminished care, and the inability to recruit and retain other industries.*”

Recent talk of block grants as a mainstay of a GOP replacement plan for the **ACA and Medicaid funding** has created additional concerns. For instance:

½ of the state’s children are Medicaid recipients

½ of the state’s pregnant women are Medicaid recipients

Over ½ of the state’s nursing home residents are Medicaid recipients.

If you would like to continue to receive more status updates from **Tennessee Justice Center** on the trials and tribulation of the ACA, please visit www.tnjustice.org. On the evenings of the first and third Mondays of every month at 7:30 CST, join the **Tennessee Justice Center** and advocates across the state to discuss updates, strategies, and action items around making sure all Tennesseans have access to affordable, quality health care

coverage. [Get your unique PIN for the calls here!](#)

You might also be interested in the weekly “We Are Watching” citizen advocacy group meet up on Monday nights as they gather at the State Capitol from 4:00-7:00 p.m. when the Tennessee General Assembly meets.

The League of Women Voters of Nashville
Presents
FIRST FRIDAY
HOT TOPICS & LUNCH

Friday, March 3, 2017— 11:30 am to 1:00 pm

District 1 & 3 Gas Compressor Stations and Pipeline: What It Means for the Environment in Middle Tennessee

Plan to join League members and guests at the March 3 session when **Sharon Felton, Communications Director for the Concerned Citizens for a Safe Environment (CCSE)**, will discuss the status of the gas compressor station projects slated for construction in Joelton and Cane Ridge. If completed, the stations will be among the top 3% largest in the country and could potentially impact health and safety for a large portion of middle Tennessee.

The proposed project intersects with local zoning regulations, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) and the State Air Pollution Control Board, the US Fish and Wildlife Department, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Clean Air Act and the EPA’s National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Second Harvest Martin Distribution Center in Metro Center
331 Great Circle Road, Nashville 37228
Parking is Easy & Free!

Enjoy the Second Harvest Friday Lunch Buffet at \$12/person or byo brown bag.

For additional information about First Friday programs, contact Melissa Holden at meholden01@comcast.net or 217-257-5193.

FOOD DRIVE: *Second Harvest is always in need of food items. Together we can make a big difference by bringing one item per person to each meeting. The items most needed are Peanut Butter, Canned Meat (Chicken or Tuna), Canned Vegetables, Canned fruit, Pasta and Cereal.*

For additional information, contact LWVNash@gmail.com

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The LWVTN ACTION Committee Update

By 2nd Vice President – Barbara Gay

Your advocacy leaders are actively creating relationships with our legislators. **Marian Ott**, LWVTN President, **Debby Gould**, LWV Nashville President, and **Barbara Gay**, LWVTN Action Chair met with **Senator Jeff Yarbro**, Democratic Senate Caucus Chair. Senator Yarbro is dedicated to redistricting and has agreed to speak at our April Convention in Hendersonville on that topic.

Marian, Debby, Barbara, and **Clare Sullivan**, Co-Chair of the state Action Committee Health Care Reform Subcommittee, met with **House Speaker Beth Harwell** on Tuesday, February 7th. Marian expressed our concern about the state's policy for using voter inactivity as the sole reason for purging voter rolls. She explained the League supports an accurate, efficient process, and shared that she and **Hazel Thornton**, Action Election Subcommittee Co-Chair, had met with **Tre Hargett**, Secretary of State, and **Mark Goins**, Coordinator of Elections. Ohio has a similar process for purging inactive voters that was recently struck down by the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals. A bill, SB616/HB672, was introduced to modify this process, but it is not yet clear if **LWVTN** will support it. Marian also shared the League's mostly positive poll watching report.

Debby stressed the League's position against vouchers. **Speaker Harwell** explained she has mixed feelings about vouchers. She has seen successful outcomes for low-income students in Memphis' Catholic Schools. They provide wrap-around social services for which the state does not pay and these students are doing better. It is likely a voucher bill will pass this session.

Clare asked about the future of the **Three Star Health Task Force** and if the state will pursue a waiver to initiate the proposed pilot project. Speaker Harwell feels it is frozen until the federal government reveals their plans.

Barbara shared the League's support of the ethics bill that will require legislators to limit investment of campaign funds to federally backed accounts, as well as to report any dividends or interest earned. There is also a measure that would require lawmakers to disclose the amount and source of funding for travel or other expenses paid for by political activists. Speaker Harwell said this was her bill and was promoting its passage.

Marian and Debby met with Lt. Governor Randy McNally, the longest serving lawmaker in Tennessee. He did not indicate support for LWVTN legislative priorities.

Clare and Barbara met with **Senator Richard Briggs** and **Representative Cameron Sexton**, who are on the Three Star Health Task Force. Both legislators sincerely want to expand health care in our state and meet the needs of our citizens. They will know more about the direction of the federal government toward the end of February when the budget reconciliation process is completed. They still hope to be able to initiate the pilot project proposed by the Task Force.

We will continue to develop relationships with our lawmakers. We hope to have a coffee scheduled soon with **Senator Steve Dickerson**. The state Action Committee will meet next on Monday, February 20th at 11:30 a.m. LWV members please take time to read Stewart Clifton, our lobbyist's, weekly report or **join the Action Committee by calling or emailing Barbara Gay, 615-297-4145, barbara.b.gay@gmail.com.**





**Citizens from Middle Tennessee gather at an Education
on the Tennessee General Assembly**

Forum

On Monday, February 6, many interested citizens from Middle Tennessee joined the League of Women Voters Nashville, **Stewart Clifton**, LWVTN Lobbyist, and **Representative Brenda Gilmore** for an educational session on the Tennessee General Assembly. Over 100 people were in attendance. The LWVN plans to have more evening sessions like these in the future.



Representative Brenda Gilmore



From our Treasurer

By Treasurer Winnie Forrester

We've already received the bulk of our income this fiscal year through our fundraising events and membership drive, and we'll continue to have our usual expenses for the next few months.

Our budget planning process starts soon for our next fiscal year. We will be reviewing our income and expenses from past years and make future projections based on our needs. Stay tuned as our board has some special projects on the drawing board in keeping with our mission of educating and encouraging citizens to be active participants in political life.



Welcome New and Returning Members

By Membership Co-Director Reba Holmes

We have exciting news! It is with great delight that we announce and welcome our new and returning members that joined the Nashville League of Women Voters during the month of January. It is our privilege to welcome these individuals to the organization: **Heather Andrews, Kieren Bailey, Helen Brewster, Karen Davis, Cathy Deppen, Kara Gee, Lynn Leshner, Sherry Loller, Mary Mitchell, Diane Moore, Caitlin Powers, Shirley Russell, Taylor Schaedle, Joe & Judy Shank, Helen Tarleton, Janet Tuck, Irwin Venick & Jeanne Ballinger, Lara Webb, Kate Windgate, Diane Wyckoff.**

Many thanks to these members and to all our members. Your support and commitment will help us accomplish our goals to offer forums and education on issues in a non-partisan format, help individuals make informed decisions regarding public policies, enable all to be civically and politically active, and making democracy work for everyone.



Voter Services Update

By Voter Services Co-Directors Hazel Thornton and Lynn Questell

The **Davidson County Election Commission** met on Wednesday, February 8, 2017 at the main office on Murfreesboro Pike. **Hazel Thornton** observed the meeting.

Because there are no elections in 2017, this will be a year to focus on “housekeeping” issues at the commission. To that end, Administrator of Elections **Jeff Roberts** presented a list of projects that are currently underway.

The candidate filing system is being upgraded, and the voter registration card filing system is being expanded to accommodate the growing population and number of registered voters in Davidson County.

Mr. Roberts is currently reviewing the Human Resources manual to ensure that it is up to date. The “whistleblowing” policy was highlighted as a specific area of concern.

During the budget portion of the agenda, Mr. Roberts announced that by dropping one position from the employment roster, he will be able to elevate all current part-time positions to full-time positions, which is a welcome development to the part-time staff, who will now be eligible for Metro benefits. The dropped position has been vacant for over a year, so this restructure does not entail a lay-off. The title of “**Election Commission Clerk**” will include these new full-time employees.

Mr. Roberts gave a general update on other election administration developments. **Online voter registration** is on schedule for the **July 1, 2017** rollout. An absentee ballot request system update will allow voters to request absentee ballots with only the last four digits of their social security numbers. This will protect voter privacy.

Mr. Roberts described the possibility of the commission receiving **Help America Vote Act (HAVA)** funds from the State Election Commission to pay for paper ballots in the future.

There was no mention of SB616, which, if passed, would overhaul voter list maintenance procedures, also known as “purging”. However, it would be highly unusual for the commission to discuss pending legislation at their regular meetings. LWVTN is currently evaluating SB616. For more information on the bill, go to www.legislature.state.tn.us.

The Public Comments section at the end of the meeting was highly unusual. **Chairman Jim DeLanis** recognized

former **Budget Director Bill Hayden**, who aired some personal grievances and procedural concerns surrounding his departure from the commission. Current **Finance Director Rick Brown** has replaced Mr. Hayden.



Issues Affecting Our Community

By **Human Needs Co-Director Hasina Akhtar Mohyuddin**

With the recent Executive Orders on immigration and the overturned travel ban, immigration issues will clearly be important this legislative session. The **Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)** held a State Legislative Policy Call on **Thursday, February 16th at 7pm CST** to discuss the immigrant and refugee bills filed in Tennessee for this legislative session.

In light of these issues, I would also like to share with you all more about **Faith and Culture Center's (FCC)** program called **A Seat at the Table (ASATT)**. ASATT brings together people of different backgrounds for a conversation over a shared meal, and are typically hosted in people's homes. The conversations at ASATT dinners are cross-faith, cross-racial, cross-ethnic, and cross-cultural. They seek to build community and combat stereotypes among Muslims and non-Muslims by helping initiate and develop meaningful relationships between participants, and by encouraging all to reach across the table in friendship. For more information about this program, please visit: <https://faithandculturecenter.org/> or <https://www.facebook.com/faithculturecenter/>.



Updates on Education

By **Education Co-director Anne-Marie Farmer**

The start of the Tennessee legislative session sometimes feels like the movie *Groundhog Day*, with voucher proponents bringing legislation every year to shift public dollars away from public school budgets and toward private schools. This year, voucher advocates are energized by the choice of **Besty DeVos** as federal Secretary of Education by President Donald Trump. Ms. DeVos, a longtime Republican donor and champion of vouchers and charter schools, was a highly controversial choice, and it remains to be seen whether she will use her new position to advance her belief that public school systems should be replaced with a market-driven educational model.

Last February, a voucher bill from **Rep. Dunn (R-Knoxville)** stalled when he realized there was not enough support in the House of Representative for it to pass. The bill failed to pass despite massive amounts of money and effort being poured into Tennessee to advance vouchers, by groups such as **Students First** and the **American Federation for Children**, of which Secretary DeVos is the former chairwoman. Rep. Dunn has again filed his voucher proposal (**HB336/SB380**), which will apply statewide and offer private school vouchers for students eligible for free and reduced lunch and zoned to a school scoring in the bottom 5% of the state on state-mandated assessments.

One of the ironies of voucher legislation is that many lawmakers who support the concept prefer to be assured that this supposed opportunity for students will **not** impact their own communities and the students and schools in them. Hence, **Sen. Kelsey (R-Germantown)**, one of the most vocal voucher advocates in the legislature, has introduced a new voucher concept that would purportedly be limited only to **Shelby County Schools**. SB161/HB126 would apply only to school systems with at least thirty schools scoring in the bottom 5% of the state on state-mandated assessments. This would eliminate smaller districts that have fewer than thirty schools in total. At present, **Shelby County Schools** is the only district that would be impacted. However, given the

history of our legislators to continually expand voucher and charter school legislation once enacted, it should be assumed that this “pilot program” would be expanded in the future to other urban districts such as **Metro Nashville Public Schools**.

As an example of the fact that any voucher program adopted is likely to be expanded, bills have already been filed to expand eligibility for the voucher system adopted last year, which gives private school vouchers to students with special needs whose parents agree to waive their child’s rights to special education services. The initial proposal that passed last year gained approval by limiting application to specifically designated disabilities and conditions. This year, **SB573/HB715** and **SB115/HB364** seek to drop some of these limitations, greatly expanding the impact of this voucher system. It’s rather startling how quickly this attempt to expand the reach of what was proposed as a closely monitored pilot program has come, long before any information is available to assess the initial law’s impact and track record.

No matter what initial limitations are placed on a voucher system, no matter how much it is couched in flowery language about opportunity and scholarship, the bottom line remains the same. Vouchers have been proven time and time again to be a failure at raising student achievement while also reducing the resources available to our public schools that serve the most vulnerable children. Vouchers shift scarce public money away from school systems that are required and committed to serve every child to private schools that retain the right to pick and choose which students they prefer to educate. They represent an abandonment of public education and of the ideal that school should be open to all children. Proponents of vouchers in Tennessee have stated that their ultimate goal is to have no limitations on voucher eligibility so that even high-income families would be eligible to receive money from the public school budget to send their children to private school. The **League of Women Voters** has long opposed voucher proposals. **Now** is the time to contact your legislator and let him or her know you are counting on the legislature to commit to the ideals of public education and reject all of these proposals.



Local, National, and Global Environmental News

By Environment Director Jennifer Westerholm

There is a lot of environmental news at the local, national, and global level. Here is a digest of high- (and low) lights.

First, the bad news...

2016 was the hottest year since 1880, when recordkeeping began. It barely beat out 2015, and those two years combined “blow away the rest of our record,” says **Deke Arndt**, chief of the monitoring group at **NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information**. More [here](#).

Reversing course from the Obama Administration, **President Trump** issued an executive order allowing the Dakota Access pipeline and the Keystone XL pipelines to move forward. More [here](#).

Scott Pruitt, attorney general of Oklahoma, has been nominated to head the **Environmental Protection Agency**. Pruitt has led or taken part in 14 lawsuits aimed at blocking EPA regulations, including Obama administration policies aimed at tackling climate change. More [here](#).

Second, on the local level, there is encouraging news!

Did you know that about 40% of food grown in the U.S. ends up in landfills? Mayor Barry issued the “**Food**

Saver Challenge” to Nashville restaurants, encouraging them to reduce food waste. More [here](#).

The Metro Parks Master Plan, dubbed “**Plan to Play**,” has been released and is now available for public comment. Find it [here](#).

Nashville’s plan for sidewalks and bikeways, “**WalknBike**” has been released and is available for comment. Find it [here](#).

Mayor Barry’s **Livable Nashville Committee** unveiled draft recommendations for a new municipal sustainability plan to address environmental, economic, and equity challenges in Nashville. The plan reflects the work of Metro’s 2009 Green Ribbon Committee, NashvilleNext, other related plans, and Mayor Barry’s priorities. The draft is available for public review and comment at the Mayor’s Office website [here](#).
Metro Transit Authority’s “**nMotion**” long-range transportation plan includes a call for public involvement in how mobility can be improved along Nashville’s major road corridors, or pikes. Upcoming community meetings are listed [here](#).



Stay Informed about Upcoming Calendar Events!

If you get the electronic version of the **Voter**, we want you to know that the upcoming calendar events are available on our wonderful, new website – www.lwvnnashville.org. On the right side of the home page the calendar scrolls on the events of the current and upcoming events thanks to **Tracy Depp**, who keeps the calendar current. If you haven’t taken a look, do so to make sure you mark **your** calendar so you won’t miss a thing!



THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

The League of Women Voters of Nashville gives a special shout out to the Nashville **YWCA** for continuing to welcome the LWVN Board for monthly meetings in their offices at 1608 Woodmont Boulevard, Nashville.



ATTENTION: *The Nashville Voter* is a digital publication. If you have received this copy of the *Voter* in the mail, it means LWVN does not have an e-mail address for you. Please help us by sending your e-mail address to LWVNNash@gmail.com. Inclusion on our e-mail database ensures your receipt of all LWVN newsletters, event invitations, meeting announcements, and Call to Action alerts. Thank you, *Nashville Voter* Editor **Madeline Garr** (mgarr2@gmail.com).



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