



# THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF IOWA

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## YELLOW SUFFRAGETTE RIBBONS MAKE AN IMPACT ON LWVIA CAPITOL DAY

Thirteen Johnson County League members meet with Representative Mary Mascher (black dress) and Representative Vicki Lensing (turquoise jacket) on February 22 at LWVIA's Capitol Day. Many legislators asked Leaguers about their yellow ribbon sashes, symbolic of those suffragettes who fought long ago for enfranchisement for women. League members are still fighting, and this year, the 'Voter Integrity' bill from the Secretary of State's office and maintaining funding for family planning services - including those provided through Planned Parenthood of the Heartland - took center stage in our fight. Capitol Day was a great success! What a fabulous turnout of feisty, outspoken League women and men!

## LWVIA CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

May 13: LWVIA Board Meeting, Wikiup Learning Center, Toddville

June 9 - 10: LWVIA Convention, Grinnell College, Grinnell

June 22 - 25: LWVUS Council, National Conference Center, Leesburg, VA

August 12: LWVIA Board Meeting, Wikiup Learning Center, Toddville

September 9: LWVIA Leadership Training, Marshalltown Comm. College

October 14: LWVIA Issues Briefing, Marshalltown Community College

November 4: LWVIA Board Meeting, Wikiup Learning Center, Toddville

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**from Mary Rae Bragg, LWVIA President**

I received a very terse email one day last month. It read (in its entirety), "What is the League doing about voter ID?"

Well, I thought, nothing other than: letters to the editor; dozens of trips and hundreds of miles back and forth to legislative committee meetings; media interviews; phone calls, emails and letters. Oh, and don't forget the prayers.

Iowa's League of Women Voters have really rolled up their sleeves and come to the fore in the weeks since the Iowa Legislature opened its 2017 session, concentrating much of their attention on the various faces of Voter ID bills. But they've also appeared before committees handling bills that affect women's health, criminal justice and other issues among our organization's priorities.

I am so proud to be a part of this group of citizens who care passionately and act appropriately, showing up to let their very well-informed opinions be heard in a manner that does credit to them, the League and democracy. It is really hard to do the right thing when you know what you are doing may not, in the end, matter in the final outcome. But let me tell you, it does matter.

Ranting and raving by some may provide them momentary satisfaction, but here is what the League does better when its members show up to let lawmakers know they care, and why they care, and what the ramifications will be if certain laws are passed: It shows the world that dedicated resolve will not go away, will not succumb to hysteria and will, eventually prevail.

You may well ask how can I think we will prevail if a bill limiting voter access becomes law? Because we will do what we do best. We will overcome. We will not just persevere; we will make the system better.

Your state board has already begun discussing what we will do once the dust settles on this session of the Iowa Legislature and, yes, I am excited by both the challenge and the opportunity. We will redesign how we do our voter registration drives; we will create an outreach program that will not only address the needs of voters but take our efforts to a new level, making more Iowans aware of what the League of Women Voters means to us all.

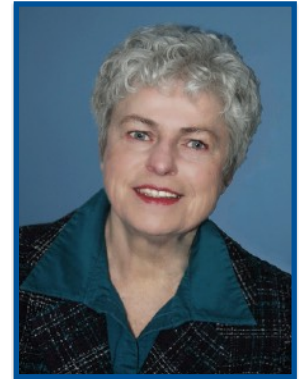
It's time to stop relying on word-of-mouth to get our message out. Letters to the editor were fine in their day, but they are not enough in this day of social media. Younger (and not-so-much younger) Iowans need to hear our message in new ways and become aware that "Democracy is not a spectator sport," and that elections have consequences so you'd better pay attention.

When was the last time you saw a bill board about the League of Women Voters, heard or watched a commercial about our group, or saw a Facebook posting celebrating our accomplishments? Never? Well, there you are. It's time things changed in how we do our business.

Yes, that means raising money by bringing supporters on board, supporters who may not be members but who like the idea of nonpartisan devotion to our democracy. We know they are out there and we need your help in finding them. Together, we will devise the program to take new energy out into our state and put it into action.

This may seem to some like a time to feel defeated, but a challenge can also prove our worth. Stay tuned. Our future is waiting!

*Yours in League,  
Mary Rae*





# GRINNELL LEAGUE GROWING WITH THE TIMES

by Mary Rae Bragg, LWVIA President

These are exciting times for the League of Women Voters of Iowa, and no more so than in Grinnell, where new members and new alliances are resulting in great outcomes! The home of Grinnell College, Grinnell has long shown a community proclivity for ideas and initiatives, with its League chapter often leading the way. But even for the LWV Grinnell, the last year has been extraordinary.

“People are wanting to get involved in so many things, and that includes joining the League,” said Grinnell League co-president Terese Grant. “Grinnell is a hotbed of activity!” An organization that had some 50 members a year ago, Grinnell League membership now stands at 72. Those new members include a mix of ages, including a few students from Grinnell College and husband-and-wife combos, bringing with them new vitality.



While some of that increase can be traced to renewed voter interest, it is also due to the Grinnell League’s efforts to work together with like-minded nonpartisan groups for the community’s benefit. One such group is “Grinnellians for Change,” which met on a Tuesday night earlier this year and drew about 200 people wanting to discuss issues. Later that week the League held its legislative coffee/forum before an audience twice their regular size and had 15 new members sign up.

Another new alliance was formed when the League agreed to partner with the local chapter of S.H.E. Counts to hold its second annual dinner on March 8, in honor of International Women’s Day. At the League’s first Women’s Day dinner in 2016, about 100 members of the community gathered to pay homage to the women in their lives. This year, working with S.H.E. Counts to raise money for scholarships, attendance grew to 150 as dinner guests wrote letters that shared their “words of wisdom” with those coming after them. Keynote speakers Maggie Tinsman and Jean Lloyd-Jones, co-founders of 50-50 in 2020, spoke of their initiative’s goal of bringing gender equity to Iowa’s Legislature and federal offices. As a result, three of the young women attending signed up to take part in 50-50’s “See Yourself Here” event at the Capitol.



Plans are already underway for next year’s Women’s Day dinner, with sponsors asking to be included. “We’re able to give the League more visibility while promoting common values,” Grant observed. With renewed interest in both national and state legislation, League members have been busy contacting lawmakers, forming carpools to get to federal lawmakers’ forums, attending legislative committee meetings at the state Capitol and keeping track of all those contacts. And then there is the LWVIA state convention that takes place this year, June 9-10, on – where else? – the Grinnell College campus.

Grant says some of those new members are already busy bringing their expertise to the convention preparations, along with advocating for issues of importance to them. Experts say the key to keeping members is to keep them busy with meaningful projects, and if so, Grinnell League looks set to keep growing for years to come!



# TIF (TAX INCREMENT FINANCING) STUDY

by Barbara Beaumont and the TIF Study Committee

The TIF study committee has concluded its work. Now it is up to the membership to read the materials and then the concurrence statement and see if everyone concurs; the vote will be taken at the annual meeting. Please read what we have written here and also check out the readings on the TIF page of the LWVIA website [HERE](#).

## LWVIA TIF Study /Propose Concurrence

The League of Women Voters of Iowa members voted to convene a statewide study of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) at its June 2015 Convention in Des Moines. Since that time League members representing Black Hawk, Johnson, Polk and Story counties have met to review TIF use in Iowa. The LWVIA TIF Study Committee has reviewed TIF background, timeline, history, expanding use, shifting tax burdens, school aid funding, new uses, reporting requirements, sunset dates, and concerns. In addition to reviewing numerous documents and newspaper clippings, committee members have interviewed nearly 20 professional experts.

The TIF Study will appear as an agenda item at the LWVIA State Convention agenda in Marshalltown in June 2017. League members are urged to familiarize themselves with the following information available online at [www.LWVIA.org](http://www.LWVIA.org):

- TIF Study Report
- Video presentation Dave Swenson “Understanding Iowa’s Economic Situation” (January 2017) / Community Use & School Impact
- League – TIF-Facts
- LWVIA TIF Study /Propose Concurrence

## TIF History:

The Iowa Legislature adopted Tax Increment Financing, a popular financing technique for Iowa cities and counties:

- 1957: Iowa Legislature authorized urban renewal to finance public improvements addressing slum and blight conditions (Iowa Code 403)
- 1969: Tax Increment Financing was added as a mechanism to finance urban renewal
- 1985: TIF law expanded to allowing economic development purposes
- 1995: Legislature created a 20-year sunset for economic development purposes for projects after 1995
- 1999: Legislature adopted reporting requirements (Amendments adopted in 2003, 2006, 2012)

**What is TIF:** Tax Increment Financing (TIF) practice permits the use of an anticipated increase in property tax revenues to finance infrastructure improvements, acquisitions, demolition, relocation and financial incentives, and environmental cleanup by an authorizing entity for two purposes: a) urban renewal to remove slum and blight and/or b) to attract economic development projects.

**Who May Use:** Cities and counties may establish TIF districts; Iowa Code also authorizes Rural Improvement Zones (RIZ) to use TIF.

**How TIF Operates:** A property tax “base” valuation is established prior to the TIF. Throughout the duration of the TIF, as property valuation increases, the increment of tax revenue increases are directed to a TIF fund of the establishing entity. Meanwhile other taxing entities continue to receive the “base” property tax revenues as they would have in the absence of a TIF. Other taxing entities receive the base revenues throughout the duration of the TIF (20 years or perpetuity). (An important exception is the property tax levies to repay general obligation debt of cities, counties or school districts. They may not be diverted for TIF, nor can the school physical plant and equipment levy.)

TIF also enables the establishing entity to incur debt to fund local improvements expected to remedy blight or spur economic development that will increase property tax valuations when the TIF expires. (Typically, debt incurred to make infrastructure improvements is paid during the time that taxes are diverted to the TIF.)

While reporting responsibilities are obligated by State Code, oversight is not a requirement.

continued on page 5

# TIF (TAX INCREMENT FINANCING) STUDY - PROPOSED CONCURRENCE

continued from page 4

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports efficient and economical government and believes State Code of Iowa allows governing bodies opportunities to utilize Tax Increment Financing tools for urban renewal and economic development purposes. The League further believes TIF is a positive tool for cities and counties and rural improvement zones to address issues of urban renewal and economic development, and that effective TIF use can work to improve tax valuation revenue collections.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa has identified areas of TIF use that could be improved. We, therefore support the following measures to strengthen responsible TIF use and transparency maximizing opportunities for public participation. The following actions will improve and benefit taxing entities, the State of Iowa and taxpayers:

1. Establish a category specific to windmill construction. The state of Iowa represents the third most productive state in the nation in the output of wind generation, and as a result the use of TIF for this purpose has grown exponentially without language explicit to use or a limit regarding the length of time tax revenue will be collected or diverted from other taxing entities.
2. Identify a comprehensive definition for TIF urban renewal slum and blight. The terminology must designate specific descriptors to prevent misuse, overuse or abuse of TIF funds.
3. The 20-year sunset, the equivalent of nearly two generations, is much too long of a period of time and is detrimental to school funding. Further TIFs for economic development established prior to 1995 do not sunset. A reasonable timeframe must be established for these projects creating a conclusion for tax diversions. An effective approach employed by some communities limits tax diversions to a reasonable percentage, and thereby allows schools to collect tax revenues, including a portion of the deferred increment, throughout the duration of the project.
4. Decertify TIF projects upon completion. While districts identified for urban renewal stay intact, entities wishing to use the TIF mechanism in the same district must complete a new certification process to proceed with a fresh proposal. Decertifying a completed project increases transparency and allows for public input to deter misuse, overuse or abuse of TIF.
5. Calculate TIF debt and include the debt in an entity's constitutional debt limit. The language relating to the annual debt payment must also include interest incurred against the debt. Inclusion in an entity's constitutional debt limit provides taxpayers a complete financial picture of their community's financial integrity.
6. Strengthen and clarify TIF authorization to disallow TIF to construct public buildings. In order to be informed and determine how their tax dollars are used, residents of an authorizing entity should be provided information and the opportunity to vote on proposed public building projects that would be constructed using TIF funds.
7. Require and encourage proactive communication between all affected parties (neighboring communities) and the public including an estimated return on a TIF investment to ensure transparency.
8. The collection of data and information by the Iowa Department of Management does not include or require a comprehensive evaluation process. Authorizing entities should establish an inclusive evaluation procedure which requires an assurance that communication and public participation has occurred throughout the project and reports the project's return on investment to the public before projects are reported to the county auditor, who in turn sends the reports to the Iowa Department of Management.

Click [HERE](#) to access the TIF Survey. Local League presidents will coordinate the responses to the survey.



# PROJECT VOTE SMART

by Mary Rae Bragg, President of League of Women Voters of Iowa

Vote Smart ([votesmart.org](http://votesmart.org)), founded by Presidents Carter, Ford, and other national leaders, is a non-profit national research center that collects accurate and factual information on over 40,000 political leaders. Their goal is to empower voters with access to a vast library of reliable, nonpartisan, factual political information.

Please join Vote Smart's board, staff, & interns, along with their partners at Drake, in celebrating Vote Smart's

relocation to Des Moines. Vote Smart President Richard Kimball & Drake President Marty Martin will be speaking, in addition to a ribbon cutting ceremony and a special appearance from Griff, the Drake bulldog!

Food and refreshments will be provided.

**Who: Vote Smart's Opening Celebration**  
**Where: 1153 24th St, Des Moines, IA 50311**  
**When: Monday, April 10, 2017, 5 - 7:00 pm**

To RSVP, please email [membership@votesmart.org](mailto:membership@votesmart.org) or call 515-989-6363

## IMAGES FROM LWVIA CAPITOL DAY 2017



On February 22, LWVIA held our "Capitol Day" - our day to lobby issues on the Hill. **Photo top left:** League members Shari Hawk, Judy Dirks, and Jane Odland speak with Representative Kevin Koester from Ankeny on the Voter ID bill. **Photo bottom left:** Jamie Burch-Elliott, with Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, shares why Iowa needs a full range of providers - including her organization - to deliver comprehensive family planning services. **Photo right:** Senator Jeff Danielson, Black Hawk County, presents on bills impacting voting in Iowa.

# CAPITOL DAY - SHOWING OUR COLORS!

by Mary Rae Bragg, President of League of Women Voters of Iowa

Capitol Day 2017, held on February 22, could not have come at a better time. A great turnout of 45 League members from across the state came together to get briefings on Voter ID and women's reproductive rights, then head up the stairs to the Capitol chambers to buttonhole lawmakers.

Black Hawk County State Sen. Jeff Danielson opened the briefing session with his assessment of bills being offered that impact voting rights for Iowans. He predicted that whatever bill makes it to the governor's desk won't be one that League will agree with. But he urged members to be respectful of lawmakers and officials, and to thank them for the opportunity to appear before committees, while continuing to speak out for those who will be disenfranchised by proposed changes to Iowa's voting laws.

Speaking for Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, Jamie Burch-Elliott emphasized the need for League

to continue supporting access to facilities and professionals devoted to women's health care. Current proposals to defund Planned Parenthood will only hurt those women who depend upon their service, she said. Burch-Elliott noted that Iowa already ranks 51st -- last among all the states -- in access to OBGYN care.

An avalanche of bills opposed by the League of Women Voters and being hurried through the legislative system contributed to the buzz, but so did the appearance of invigorated League members, filling the rotunda.

They could not be missed, thanks to the bright yellow sashes proudly draped across their chests! Those familiar with League history know that some 100 years ago our foremothers wore yellow sashes to identify themselves as they resolutely labored for women's right to vote. Thanks to past League President Bonnie Pitz for bringing that brilliant "dress" to life for us.



**More images from Capitol Day: Photo left:** Jamie Burch-Elliott shares that SF2 defunds Planned Parenthood family planning even though no tax money is used to fund abortions. **Photo upper right:** Johnson County LWV members meet with Senator Bob Dvorsky and Senator Kevin Kinney. **Photo bottom right:** Amy Campbell speaks to a full room regarding the process and rules of speaking with legislators. Many attendees were first timers!



The following article is reprinted from the Waterloo Cedar Falls Courier:

## LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS TAKE EXCEPTION TO LAWMAKER'S USE OF TESTIMONY

by Erin Murphy, [erin.murphy@lee.net](mailto:erin.murphy@lee.net) March 14, 2017 Updated March 15, 2017

DES MOINES — A local leader with the League of Women Voters in Iowa is upset a state lawmaker is using her written testimony to justify legislation that would make changes to the state's election systems, including requiring an identification card to vote.

Rep. Ken Rizer, R-Marion, says a bill under consideration in the Iowa Legislature that would add safeguards to Iowa's election systems, including the voter ID requirement, is necessary in part because many Iowans do not have confidence in clean, fair elections.

There has been no evidence of significant voter fraud in Iowa, which typically has one of the highest voter turnout rates in the nation.

The bill was proposed by Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate.

To help justify the changes proposed in the legislation, Rizer has — in multiple media interviews, including with the Lee-Gazette Des Moines Bureau — referenced written testimony submitted to state lawmakers by a member of the Iowa chapter of the League of Women Voters.



**Myrna Loehrlein, president of the Linn County LWV and chair of LWV Voting Rights Committee**

That testimony was submitted by Myrna Loehrlein, president of the Linn County chapter of the League of Women Voters, and reads in part, "There is a deeply pervasive, gut-level intuition that voter impersonation occurs and may be rampant. This has repeatedly been demonstrated to be untrue, but the perception remains."

Rizer said that supports his argument the legislation is needed to strengthen Iowans' confidence in elections.

Loehrlein, however, said Rizer's use of her testimony misconstrues the fact the league opposes both the bill and its voter ID requirement. Loehrlein said she agrees there is concern among voters that elections are not clean and fair, but she disagrees the solution is more safeguards. She said the rest of her written testimony says the league "is opposed to any unnecessary barrier, including Voter ID, that gets between the voter and the ballot."

"He's only representing part of (the testimony), and he's misrepresenting the league's position by only representing part of it," Loehrlein said. "A lot of people are having these conversations (about clean, fair elections). We don't need to build another barrier. We need to clear up the misconception."

Rizer said this week it was not his intention to suggest the league supports the bill or the voter ID requirement.

"I was not implying that the League of Women Voters supports this bill," Rizer said. "I was just saying that they reinforced the idea that there is a voter confidence problem."

Loehrlein said even that misconstrues the league's perspective on the issue. "That's not true. We never said there is a problem with voter confidence," Loehrlein said. "We have said there is a perception of voter impersonation (when an individual attempts to vote using another's name). But we have never said that Iowans are not confident in our election system."

The legislation has passed the Iowa House and now is eligible for consideration by the Senate.





## UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGION INTER-LEAGUE ORGANIZATION NEWS: COME TO LA CROSSE FOR UMRR'S ANNUAL MEETING - MAY 6

It will be a good meeting! **Howard Learner** from the **Environmental Law and Policy Center** is our keynote speaker. The title of his talk is "***Playing to Win: Achieving Environmental Progress at the State and Local Levels When U.S. EPA Is Stepping Back***". With all the push to roll back environmental protections now, we will talk about what matters most and where (and how!) pressure can be applied to keep moving ahead with Mississippi River clean-ups and enhancements. [Online registration now open - click here!](#) Each member League should strongly consider sending a delegate - all are needed!

## FRIDAY NIGHT'S CONVENTION SPECIAL

LWVIA convention-goers who make a point of arriving Friday, June 9, will have a special treat waiting for them.

Two of Iowa Public Television's favorite news ladies, Des Moines Register political columnist **Kathie Obradovich** (bottom left photo) and Radio Iowa News Director **O. Kay Henderson** (upper right photo), will be on hand for a "Chat with Kathie and Kay."



Iowans who enjoy all things political know Kathie and Kay from their many appearances as panelists on IPTV's Iowa Press, as well as reading and hearing their reports in print and on the air. What viewers may not realize is both ladies' home-grown senses of humor, which will no doubt be in play when they sit down to have a conversation with the League of Women Voters.

Plan to drive in Friday, have dinner at one of Grinnell's fine restaurants, then settle in for an evening's in-person "interview" with two women who really do make the news.



# LWVIA 2017 CONVENTION

*"We're Not There Yet"*

**June 9 & 10, 2017**

**Grinnell College. Hosted by Grinnell LWV**

Mark your calendars for this year's LWVIA State Convention that will be held June 9 - 10 on the campus of Grinnell College. Friday night will feature a Q & A with Kathie Obradovich, a political columnist with the Des Moines Register, and O. Kay Henderson, Radio Iowa news director. In addition to the League business on Saturday, the keynote speaker will be Secretary of State Paul Pate. We hope to see many League members from all over the state in Grinnell!

**League of Women Voters of Iowa - [lwvia.org](http://lwvia.org)**

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