



THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF IOWA

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League Members: This is your day to visit with Legislators!

LWVIA 2016 Capitol Day



Visit the League Table on First Floor
Rotunda with LWVIA Priorities

Thursday, March 10, 9:30 a.m.

Capitol, Room 15, Legislative Dining Room, ground floor

Agenda:

9:30: Coffee & networking

10 - 11:00: Lobbyists update on issues and strategizing

11- Noon: Talk with Legislators or attend hearings

Noon: Lunch on you own. Ask your Local Legislators to join you!

12:30 - 2:00: Talk with Legislators or attend hearings

Pre-Register with Bonnie, dbpitz@iowatelecom.net

This event is free, but we would appreciate your name & Local League

LWVIA CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS:

February 1, 7 pm, Iowa Caucuses

March 5, 10 am, LWVIA Board Meeting, Des Moines, location TBA

March 10, 9:30 am, Capitol Day, Des Moines, IA

April 30, 10 am, LWVIA Board Meeting, Grinnell, IA

June 7, 2016, Iowa Primary Election Day

June 11, 9 am LWVIA Council, Marshalltown, IA

June 16 - 19, LWVUS Convention, Washington, D.C.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2015: A VERY GOOD YEAR

from Dr. Deborah Ann Turner, LWVIA Co-President

As we move into 2016 we must reflect on the successes of 2015 for LWVIA:

OLVR - The League worked with the Secretary of State with the assistance of the Brennan Law Center to take a major step forward in voter access by seeing the first phrase in On Line Voter Registration instituted. We are all aware that the system is not perfect but the SOS has pledged to continue improving the system.

UMRR ILO - The Iowa League was a moving force in the founding of the Upper Mississippi River Region Inter-League Organization. The ILO brings 35 local leagues in four states - Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota together to work toward improving water quality and land loss. This partnership will help us become better stewards of our environment not only for Iowa but for all the states that Iowa's practices impact.

Restoration of Voting Rights for Felons - LWVIA filed an Amicus Brief in support of the ACLU case for restoration of Felon Voting Rights restoration. We at this time are awaiting the first review and planning for next steps.

Local Leagues: It was a thumbs up year for Our Local Leagues. They engaged in many exciting and informative educational programs and served their communities in true League fashion with well organized candidate forums. Above all Local Leagues have had a record year in voter registration activities!

In 2016 the state board pledges to continue to support all the local leagues by setting these goals and actions for the year:

Vote 411 - assist all local leagues in using Vote 411 to list their state senate and representative candidates.

Action Alert - each week there will be a legislative Action Alert from our lobbyist that will be posted on both our LWVIA Website and our LWVIA Facebook for members to respond to. It will alert us to immediate happenings in the legislature and actions to take.

Goal setting - the Board is encouraging each local Board to set goals and track them throughout the year - examples such as developing a unique fundraiser or planning all education programs with another organization.

Program Development and Cost - the State will continue to support local league programming by offering grants from the state education fund.

MLD - the Board seeks to strengthen your MLD activities by supporting our state coaches who are working directly with their National Liaison and assigned local leagues.

Engagement Not Recruitment - finally, the Board would like to help all League members to embrace this new philosophy of LWVUS - meaning all contacts are valuable to us and we shall strive to promote our programs and messages to all whether they are members, potential members or simply "in League" with one of our positions.



On MLK Day, Deb met with LWV Greater Omaha for a pancake breakfast by a youth group, P4K-Partnership for Kids, where there was a discussion on human trafficking, an issue impacting both Iowa and Nebraska.

In League, Deb

ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION IS EASY

by **Bonnie Pitz and Dr. Deb Turner, Co-presidents, LWVIA**

OpEd Reprinted from Mason City Globe Gazette, January 21, 2016

The League of Women Voters of Iowa is delighted to be able to use the new online voter registration.

Using the new system from the secretary of state website, www.sos.iowa.gov, is a breeze. The League proudly registers hundreds of Iowa citizens every year and until now had to use paper and pen and then hand-deliver the registration forms to the county auditor's office. It was often very difficult to read handwriting and make sure all the information was legible.

With Secretary of State Paul Pate's new online voter registration system, this process will be a joy. The neat part is that newly registered voters get an email immediately to confirm they are registered and will receive a voter registration card from their auditor within two weeks.

Pate is to be commended for making this major step forward. In the first week nearly a thousand people have registered in the new system.

The secretary is not done yet. He and his staff "are working to expand electronic voter registration so that it is available for even more Iowans as technology and resources become available," said Carol Olson, deputy secretary of state.

The League can register citizens who have a driver's license number or a non-operator identification card from the DOT.

As the Secretary Pate moves forward with OVR, all Iowans can be registered using the SOS website. The League anticipates helping to register the 7 percent without DOT identification in the near future.

The League urges all Iowa citizens to participate in the upcoming caucus, and if you need to update your voter registration after moving to a new home address, go to the SOS website and do so.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION ITEM OF THE WEEK:

LWVIA Lobbyists Amy Campbell & Craig Patterson will be providing weekly suggests to members to keep us up to speed. They will be posted on the home page of our website, lwvia.org, or click on the League's Facebook page:



LEAGUE LEGISLATIVE FORUMS AROUND IOWA:



Local leagues around Iowa are holding legislative forums where community members ask questions on a broad range of topics. Pictured, **League of Women Voters of Linn County** holding a forum on January 16 where 10 of 11 invited legislators attended - great turnout! This is the first of four forums planned during this legislative session by LWV Linn County.

GRIFFIN V. PATE

Reprinted from the Brennan Center for Justice at NY School of Law, December 9, 2015

Griffin v. Pate is a state constitutional challenge to an Iowa law that permanently denies the voting rights of people with past felony convictions. The plaintiff, Kelli Jo Griffin, is an Iowa resident and mother of four who is barred from voting due to a felony conviction in her past. Represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, she is challenging the Iowa disenfranchisement law as invalid under the Iowa Constitution. The Brennan Center has filed an amicus brief in the Iowa Supreme Court in connection with this case.

Background

Iowa's Disenfranchisement Law

Iowa has one of the nation's harshest felony disenfranchisement laws. It is one of only two states (with Florida) that permanently bars all citizens with past felony convictions from voting. This lifetime disenfranchisement is written into the state's constitution and effectuated through statute and through an executive order.

For a time, Iowa ended its permanent disenfranchisement. In 2005, then-Gov. Tom Vilsack issued an executive order restoring voting rights to Iowans who had already completed sentences for felony convictions, and providing for ongoing restorations to people completing sentences thereafter. In the nearly six years it was in effect, Vilsack's order restored voting rights to an estimated 115,000 citizens. Immediately upon taking office, his successor, Terry Branstad, issued his own executive order that permanently disenfranchises people with felony convictions unless they apply to his office for approval. That executive order remains in place.

The plaintiff in this case, Kelli Jo Griffin, was prosecuted by the state for attempting to vote in 2013 when she believed her rights had been previously restored. She was acquitted by a jury.

Griffin's Appeal and the Brennan Center's Amicus Brief

After Griffin's acquittal, the American Civil Liberties Union brought a lawsuit against the state of Iowa, seeking to restore her voting rights. The suit argues that Executive Order 70 and other state laws that permanently disenfranchise all people with felony convictions are invalid under the Iowa Constitution.

The trial court ruled in favor of the state, and in doing so noted that it could not rule in Griffin's favor without more guidance on the constitutionality of Iowa's disenfranchisement laws from the Iowa Supreme Court. Griffin appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court, where her case is now pending. Oral argument in the case has not yet been scheduled.

On December 8, 2015, the Brennan Center filed an amicus brief with the Iowa Supreme Court in support of Griffin, arguing that Iowa's felony disenfranchisement policy improperly burdens Iowans' right to vote and fails to serve the state's interests. The brief, authored by Brennan Center experts and attorneys at Greenberg Traurig, LLP, **on behalf of the Iowa League of Women Voters**, draws on research that demonstrates that restoring voting rights can strengthen the state's democracy and serve public safety. It further points out the dramatic scope of Iowa's current disenfranchisement policy and the disproportionate harm it inflicts in certain communities.



Kelli Jo Griffin: During a local election in 2013, she went to her polling place with her children to teach them the importance of voting. Griffin cast her ballot not knowing that she was no longer eligible to vote under Gov. Terry Branstad's latest policy, adopted in 2011. She was later arrested and charged as part of the state's voter fraud investigation championed by then Iowa Secretary of State Matt Schultz. At trial, it took just 40 minutes for the jury to acquit her, though she remains blocked from voting. Photo & content from ACLU of Iowa.

TRUE GRINNELLIAN: TERESE GRANT

by Keli Vitaoli

Reprinted from *The Scarlett & Black*, Grinnell College Newspaper, December 10, 2015

With experience teaching French in New Jersey, Ukraine and China, it takes a true Iowan to return to the cornfields. Terese Grant has done just that. She is a chair of the United Church of Christ outreach board, a member of various women's organizations and the current co-president of the Grinnell chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV).

Grant considers Iowa her home and loves the community which Grinnell boasts. She moved to Grinnell in 1988 with her husband, Warren. Grant taught at Grinnell High School from 1988 until her retirement in 2008 but has taught around the globe.

"Once I retired, my husband and I taught for two years in China. Then we taught for a year in Kiev, Ukraine," Grant said. "It doesn't matter whether you're in Iowa, New Jersey, Kiev or China, students are students everywhere."

Grant joined the LWV in 2008 having always had a passion for current events.

"[I] became interested in the LWV after attending some of the Legislative Coffees. I'm really interested in and have always been interested in issues," Grant said. "I'm an NPR junkie—I listen to it all day. Seeing what [LWV] was doing made me think: I want to be involved in this."

The Grinnell branch of the LWV began in 1923. Originally, the League was designed for women to inform them of their political power. In 1973, LWV opened to men and aims to support all voters.

The League holds events for members to discuss policy such as plans to combat gun control or methods for supplying clean water. Legislative Coffees are hosted February through April to

examine the issues and introduce voters to state representatives. There are larger forums on issues, such as this year's domestic violence forum coming up in February.

With two women, Carly Fiorina and Hillary Clinton, currently in the running for president, Grant sees this election as a step for the advancement of women in politics. She remembers when you would not see women working in now commonplace roles like doctors and she is amazed at the traction women have gained in the political sphere. Grant and the organization welcome involvement in the LWV from

Grinnell students and she stresses the importance of being politically aware and involved.

"You have to be educated," Grant said. "Whether that is reading newspapers, listening to the radio or going to the forums when the candidates are local. You have to be careful where you get your news. You need an unbiased source with facts, not opinions."

As the election picks up momentum, Grant sees the LWV as a resource to voters—from registering to becoming informed on the candidates using their website: www.vote411.org. The organization is nonpartisan and does not support one candidate, it merely informs.

"I think [the] League plays an important role locally and nationally in educating and promoting democracy at all levels," Grant said. "It feels good to be doing something like this and get the satisfaction of knowing I'm doing something to help others."

[Not mentioned in the article: Terese is also a Board Member with LWVIA]



Have an article or photo from your local league? We love to share ideas in the LWVIA Voter!
Send your photo or article for consideration to Karen Person at lwvkaren@yahoo.com

FOLLOW THROUGH ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Staff Editorial

Reprinted from Cedar Rapids/Iowa City's *The Gazette*, January 16, 2016

If the need to reform Iowa's criminal justice system wasn't top of mind for state lawmakers, they got a pair of strong reminders this week.

First, Gov. Terry Branstad dedicated eight minutes of his Condition of the State address to advocating for a series of steps to improve Iowa's criminal justice system and address troubling, stubborn racial disparities.

"Our state flag is emblazoned with the motto, '*Our Liberties We Prize and Our Rights We Will Maintain.*' Maintaining our rights means we must maintain those rights for all," Branstad told lawmakers.

A day later, Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice Mark Cady used his Condition of the Judiciary speech to call for reform.

"Racial disparity is a community problem requiring community solutions. The journey to identify and eliminate racial disparity continues for all of us," Cady said.

These are welcome examples of leadership from two branches of government. We hope the third branch, the Iowa Legislature, was listening.

Branstad touted recommendation from his Working Group on Justice Policy Reform, a panel he formed in August to improving judicial practices with a special emphasis on racial disparities.

Blacks make up 25 percent of Iowa's prison population but only 3.3 percent of the state's overall population, a disparity that is among the nation's worst. More than 9 percent of Iowa's black males are incarcerated, a rate also among the nation's highest.

Branstad's working group recommended more funding for drug and mental health courts that offer

alternatives to incarceration, taking steps to increase the diversity in jury pools, giving judges the discretion to keep juvenile offense records confidential and improving phone access allowing inmates to stay in contact with family.

Cady addressed some of the same areas, and said more than 700 judges and other staff have received training on recognizing bias that might contribute to disparities, with more to come. He pointed to Johnson, Scott and Linn counties' cooperation with Georgetown University on juvenile justice improvements. School referrals to Juvenile Court in Johnson County have dropped 61 percent, he said.

We support these efforts. Although we're wary of any effort to make public records confidential, Branstad's case-by-case proposal aimed at keeping a childhood mistake from unduly harming an adult makes sense.

Still, more can be done. In addition to these systemic reforms, lawmakers also should revisit some of the "tough on crime" penalties enacted over the last 20 years, particularly for non-violent drug offenses. That includes penalties for low-level, first offense marijuana possession. A 2013 ACLU study found blacks are eight times more likely to be arrested for a marijuana crime than whites, despite similar use rates.

Branstad also could demonstrate his commitment by rescinding an executive order making it exceedingly difficult for felons who have completed their sentences to seek restoration of their voting rights. Iowa's restoration process is among the nation's most onerous, with its impact falling disproportionately on blacks.

It would be a politically courageous gesture, and would underscore his vow to maintain rights for all.

UPDATE ON UMRR-ILO : UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGION INTER LEAGUE ORGANIZATION

By Bonnie Pitz, Co-President, League of Women Voters of Iowa

Bonnie Cox, Communications Director for the UMRR-ILO has identified “nutrient pollution” as our action focus for the next two years. The Upper Mississippi group includes the states of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. In a communication from Bonnie Cox she referenced Dr. Kamyar Enshyan, Director for the Center of Energy and Environmental Education at UNI. Dr. Enshyan made the following points about ecological flood control in Iowa and the upper Midwest:

**Restoring 3,400 longer crop rotations-there is hard evidence that this will improve soil quality and ability of the land to store more water in the soil profile*

**More wetland restoration all over Iowa*

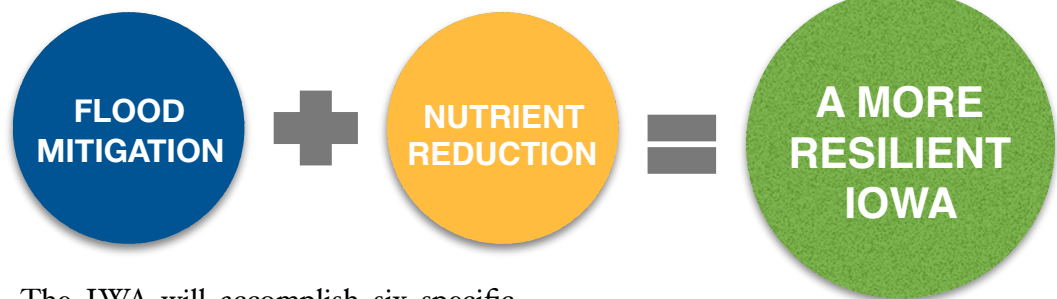
**More prairie restoration, prairie and riparian buffers along streams*

**Staying out of the 500 year floodplain of major rivers and streams*

“Robust scientific understanding of the land tells us that these 4 approaches will solve multiple problems or as Wendell Berry says ‘solve for pattern.’ If we are not putting these hard-won knowledge to work, then what is science for? What policies do we need to have to encourage adoption of these 4 approaches at the large scale to see true impacts? As you can imagine these 4 approaches will require working across city and county lines and working as a state/region. We need to figure new ways of thinking and working.”

For further information regarding the Inter League Organization, contact Bonnie Cox at bonniekaycox@gmail.com

**IOWA GRANT AWARD:
\$96,787,177 FROM
HUD**



Program Description - The Iowa Watershed Approach (IWA)

Through the **Iowa Watershed Approach**, Iowans will work together to address factors that contribute to floods and nutrient flows. Iowans will enjoy improvements in quality of life and health resulting from upstream watershed investments tied to community resilience activities. This adaptive model, supported by U.S. Housing & Urban Development dollars, will leverage the principles of Iowa's innovative Nutrient Reduction Strategy to make our communities more resilient to flooding and help improve water quality.

The IWA will accomplish six specific goals:

1) reduce flood risk; 2) improve water quality; 3) increase resilience; 4) engage stakeholders through collaboration and outreach/education; 5) improve quality of life and health, especially for vulnerable populations; and 6) develop a program that is scalable and replicable throughout the Midwest and the United States.

Nine distinct watersheds across Iowa will serve as project sites for the IWA. These are: Bee Branch Creek in Dubuque, Upper Iowa River, Upper Wapsipicon River, Middle Cedar River, Clear Creek, English River, North Raccoon River, West Nishnabotna River, and East Nishnabotna River. Each will

leverage a watershed management authority, develop a hydrologic assessment and watershed plan, and implement projects to reduce the magnitude of downstream flooding and to improve water quality during and after flood events. These projects will range from construction of farm ponds, wetlands, and storm water detention basins; restoration of floodplains and oxbows; and implementation of perennial cover and buffer strips.

The IWA also includes a community resiliency program to help communities prepare for, respond to, recover from, and adapt to floods. For further information on IWA, click [**HERE**](#).



LWVIA members met at the Capitol on Friday, November 13, 2015, to discuss reduction of mandatory minimum sentencing with the new Majority Leader in the IA House of Representatives, Chris Hagenow. Much of the discussion with Rep. Hagenow centered on the costs to our state of mandatory minimum sentencing, and how research indicates that mandatory minimums have not reduced recidivism. Pictured with Rep. Hagenow are Bonnie Pitz and Dr. Deborah Ann Turner, Co-presidents of LWVIA; Karen Person, co-chair for the LWVIA Criminal & Juvenile Justice Committee; and Linda Murken, LWVIA Board Member.

VOTE411.ORG

By Bonnie Pitz, Co-President, LWVIA

As we are currently involved in the Iowa Caucus season and the start of Legislative Advocacy for 2016, we also look forward to using VOTE411.org for the 2016 elections. This is a LWVIA Board Goal for this year. Iowans will be electing a US Iowa Senator and four Congressional Representatives along with all of our State Legislature Representatives and some of our State Senators. VOTE411.org can be a resource to find out candidate positions on issues.

The plan is to cover elections in all Local Leagues for State offices and the US Congressional races with the US Senator race. At the March 5, 2016 LWVIA Board meeting in Des Moines, the Board will discuss specifics on how to go about this process. We will review the cost and work on a specific plan. The State Board will be in touch with Local League Presidents as we move forward with VOTE411.org in 2016. If each Local League has a volunteer to help with VOTE411.org locally that will help with our overall effort. We will be in touch.

League of Women Voters of Iowa - lwvia.org

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