

★ 1920

2020 ★

100  
years!

# OHIO VOTER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OHIO **SUMMER 2020**

## A Tale of Gerrymandering and Dark Money

*By Jen Miller, LWVO Executive Director*



Many Ohioans were shocked to see Speaker Larry Householder and four statehouse lobbyists taken into custody for racketeering and bribery. Dubbed by federal lawyers as the largest scheme of its kind in Ohio history, legislation to bail out of aging nuclear plants (HB 6) and efforts to stymie the HB 6 referendum are at the heart of this controversy.

Based out of Akron, FirstEnergy pushed legislation for years to increase the electricity bills of customers across the state in order to prop up the company's bottom line. Facing bankruptcy and lowered credit ratings, the utility finally got their pet legislation passed once Householder was at the helm. According to the FBI and DOJ, getting the bailout and killing the repeal effort took a dark money shell game of \$60 Million, run by a shadowy group called Generation Now.

Last September, LWVO and Common Cause hosted a press conference to raise concerns over Generation Now. We objected to misleading ads that falsely suggested that China was behind the nuclear bailout repeal and their unethical treatment of referendum petition collectors who were threatened or bribed to stop.

Speaking as a guest at our press conference, former Columbus Bureau Chief for the Dayton Daily News and a former Washington correspondent for the Akron Beacon Journal, Bill Hershey, stated: "Disclosure provides the sunlight needed to hold candidates and campaigns accountable and to help voters make informed decisions."

At the time, we didn't know the size of Generation Now's coffers, who was funding the effort, or the extent of corruption, but our impassioned plea for Ohio to update campaign finance laws was covered by media outlets statewide. Many of you made phone calls or sent emails/postcards that echoed this call for transparency in campaign finance, though our message largely fell on deaf ears at the Ohio Statehouse.

As Leaguers, we also know that gerrymandering is another key ingredient to this recipe for corruption. Many state lawmakers feel so comfortably safe in their seats that they're not as responsive as they should be to constituents who call for dark money reforms or policies that go against the requests of big-monied groups. The good news is that Ohio will make new legislative maps next year, and the mapmakers will be required to implement our Fair Districts ballot initiatives from 2015 and 2018. LWVO will work to ensure that the letter and spirit of those reforms are upheld in the process through direct advocacy, grassroots action, media outreach, a public map-making contest, and so much more. With a new General Assembly, we can renew our calls for campaign finance reform and transparency too.

If you run into candidates on the campaign trail, you should ask them to pledge to end gerrymandering and commit to support policies for more transparency in campaign finance. If your local League is running candidate forums, you may want to pose these questions. Our goal is simple: make sure the incoming General Assembly understands that we are tenacious defenders of democracy with a 100 year track record of getting results. We will not stop until Ohio ends its decades-long partisan gerrymandering tradition and closes dark money loopholes. This latest story simply just reaffirms our resolve.

## Election Policy Update

*By Jen Miller, LWVO Executive Director*

Boards of Elections (BOEs) are facing high participation rates, stark partisan divides about election security, and the global pandemic. Unlike the Primary where polls were closed, we expect in-person voting to be available on Election Day. Ohio didn't have confirmed Covid-19 cases until just days before Ohio's originally scheduled Primary, making it impossible to secure sanitation supplies or adopt safety procedures. Fortunately, counties are planning to implement public health protocols this fall, and early and absentee voting remain good options for immunocompromised voters.



To avoid long lines on Election Day, we encourage early and absentee voting. BOEs need more capacity and equipment to process higher absentee rates, as well as funding to purchase public health supplies for Early Vote Centers and Election Day polling locations. We need to continue to call on the US Senate to pass another stimulus package that includes elections funding. The \$12 Million in CARES Act funds for Ohio elections is not enough; we estimate that Ohio needs as much as \$82 Million more.

Lines could be exacerbated by poll worker shortages. The majority of Ohio's 35,000 existing poll workers are at high risk for the virus, so we must do our part to recruit poll workers. In the last few years, many counties have replaced their aging voting machines, and some Ohioans voting in person will be unfamiliar with the new equipment, which can add to voter confusion and the wait times. We also expect broadscale relocation or consolidation of polling locations, given that senior centers and other facilities that serve vulnerable populations will remain off limits.

Voters face uncharted waters this fall, and our voter education and service work is critical this year, as always. LWVO hopes to still meet our goal of reaching 1 Million Ohioans with nonpartisan voting info this year. Given the need for continued social distancing, LWVO will double down on digital engagement. Please make sure you follow us on social media and share voting info on your personal and local League pages. We will create materials with key dates, links to register or request track absentee ballots, tips on voting absentee, and much more. We're also thrilled to report that we have a record number of local Leagues participating in Vote411.org; we will create materials for local Leagues to advertise the nonpartisan voter guide.



Finally, we will continue to prioritize the nonpartisan Election Protection coalition by promoting the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline and deploying poll monitors to serve voters in the field. As voters or poll workers report problems during the election cycle, we will respond in real time to ensure that they are resolved efficiently and effectively. If you are unable to work an entire day as a poll worker or are concerned about being in public for health reasons, there could be a place for you in this work.

In our 100th year, League will once again stand in the service of democracy as advocates and educators. Please do your part by joining our local or statewide efforts.



## Teamwork Makes the Dream Work!

*By Shelly Lewis, President, LWV of Geauga*

*Shelly Lewis joined the League of Women Voters of Geauga (LWVG) last October and has led an effort to revitalize the chapter and bolster the League's presence in the community. Here, she talks about some of the challenges faced.*



*LWVG 2020 Primary Candidates Forum, hosted by the Political Action Committee of Kenston (PACK).  
L to R: Joann Randall, Meg Pauken, Shelly Lewis, Anissa Smith*

### **Tell us a little about LWVG:**

Our League was organized in 1949 and enjoyed robust membership for many years. A steady decline began in the 1980's and the roster eventually fell to five members. These stalwart Leaguers kept the LWVG alive, and continued to host candidate forums and produce a voters guide. I frankly don't know how they did it.

A recent influx of new members brought welcome relief but also introduced tension. It has been a balancing act to honor the traditions of our past while also embracing the changes needed to move forward.

### **Social Media has been a challenge. How are you addressing that?**

Until very recently we simply did not exist online. Over time that absence prevented people from connecting with our League and eventually created a void in the community. Our work now is largely about reclaiming that space - creating room in our community for civil discourse and for public engagement with government. Social media will play a critical role.

Our job is to use social media to create landing spots for those seeking information and connections. We had hoped a Facebook page would suffice, but it became apparent a more robust information and communication hub was needed. A website was in order and we turned to our friends in California for help. For small Leagues like ours, LWV of California's website template and hosting services provide nothing short of a lifeline. I'm excited about the many opportunities the website will bring.

### **Where are you turning for guidance?**

Stepping into this leadership role was daunting. I am more naturally a behind the scenes person and the need to be a voice for this organization was downright panic-inducing.

I needn't have worried so much. A trove of LWVUS best practices guided me through everything from holding a candidate forum to recruiting new members. When I was uncertain, the Ohio staff listened and made sure I had answers.

An unexpected, lovely surprise has been the patient and generous support from my liaison, Susan Murnane, and from my League colleagues in Kent, Hudson and Akron. Their mentoring has proven invaluable.

### **What excites you about the coming year?**

I'm usually the least imaginative person in the room, and I lean heavily on our members to come up with creative solutions to problems. We are facing many challenges in this COVID environment, but I am most excited for the solutions we will find together.

**Is there a topic you would like to see in the Voter?**

Write a guest column about any issue related to a League position or current events for the Voter! Contact the state office with any questions or to submit your column for consideration.

## Join Us To Commemorate Women’s Equality Day on August 26!

On August 26, we’ll observe Women’s Equality Day - 100 years since the 19th Amendment was ratified. **Yet as we commemorate, we acknowledge this historic milestone didn’t guarantee ballot access for all.** From 1920 through the Civil Rights era, too many of our sisters were still prevented from voting through literacy tests, poll taxes, and violence. Voters with disabilities or serving overseas also experienced unequal ballot access.

Despite legislation crafted to remove these barriers, we are still combating unequal access to the ballot box today. Polling place consolidations, lack of public transit to polling sites, failure to accept Native American tribal IDs or passports, questioning a transgender person’s identity, long lines, and a cumbersome absentee system are just a few of these challenges.

**League of Women Voters Ohio continues to fight barriers that threaten voting rights.** There’s so much work to do, and we MUST keep momentum, including but not limited to:

### DONATE TODAY!

Yes, I want to support the work of the LWVO!

\$25  \$50  \$100  \$250  \$500  Other \_\_\_\_

Gifts can be made payable to:

- LWVO (non-tax deductible)
- LWVO Education Fund (tax deductible)
- Split evenly between LWVO and LWVO Education Fund

You can also donate at [www.lwvohio.org](http://www.lwvohio.org) and click “Donate.”

Thank you!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please return to: League of Women Voters of Ohio,  
100 East Broad Street, Suite 1310, Columbus, OH 43215

- Ensuring that no Ohio voter has to choose between protecting their health and participating in democracy
- Recruiting poll workers and pushing for improved poll worker training
- Improving absentee voting, so that it is a more convenient, efficient option this fall
- Defending voting rights for all through the nonpartisan Election Protection coalition
- Increasing funding for Boards of Elections to ensure that this election is well-run
- Registering, educating, and empowering Ohio voters

This fall, we expect record turnout in the midst of a global health crisis. We know that seniors, students, people of color, voters with disabilities, and low-income voters may have more challenges casting their ballots. In order to continue this fight, we need your support now more than ever. **Please consider supporting LWVO in our efforts towards protecting the security, accessibility, and fairness of the upcoming election in November by donating today!**

## LWV Ohio Organizational Membership

Want to give your employees access to the essential election information? LWVO’s organizational membership will provide your staff with resources to engage on legislative priorities at both the state and local levels. Apply for Organizational Membership today at [www.lwvohio.org](http://www.lwvohio.org) or contact the LWV Ohio at [lwvoinfo@lwvohio.org](mailto:lwvoinfo@lwvohio.org) or 614-469-1505 for more information.



## Hear from our Leagues about VOTE411.ORG



“One of our members, Nena Hankins, works closely with the Portage County Board of Elections to obtain all of the candidate and issue information. Once the platform is populated, we link it with our web page and Facebook page. We are very fortunate that our local paper, Record Courier, publishes this for us without charge. Our members know that all the information they need can be found on Vote411, and we are always referring local citizens to it as well. It is a very valuable resource for everyone.”

- **Deborah Barber, LWV of Kent**

“The Metro Columbus League has been using Vote411 for our online candidate & issue guide since 2014. The site just got a major redesign this past year and is earning acclaim from around the country. LWVUS anticipates serving 6 million Americans through Vote411.org in 2020. On a local level, Vote411 has been beneficial for us because it is becoming a recognized brand. The National LWV helps with advertising and promoting the candidate guide by providing social media templates and other communications information directly related to Vote411. The site has been easy for candidates to use, which is important because we want high candidate participation! Most importantly, Vote411 is really helpful to voters. Voters are able to get a personalized ballot based on their address and compare candidates on various issues. They can save their preferences to take with them into the voting booth.” - **Elizabeth Grieser, LWV of Metropolitan Columbus**

## From the President's Desk



*Iris Meltzer*

I just reread my column that appeared in the February 2020 Voter. It's full of congratulations on our 100th birthday and excitement about the many events being planned to both commemorate and celebrate that milestone. How things change!

The response to the LWVO staff to the pandemic has been nothing short of amazing, and I want to take this opportunity to thank them and to highlight what they have accomplished while working (very, very hard) from home. As soon as Ohio closed non-essential businesses, the state League office sent staff home and they began working remotely. They pivoted seemingly seamlessly.

Statehouse Day had been in the works as its usual daylong event in Columbus. Once it became clear that if we were to hold this event, it would have to be a virtual one, plans for our first ever Virtual Statehouse Day were underway. It was held – with more attendees than at any previous SHD. Thanks to technology beyond Zoom, attendees were able to engage in digital lobbying.

Suffrage events had been scheduled with our scholars Dr. Treva Lindsey and Dr. Carol Lasser. Again, thanks to technology, we were able to hold two virtual Suffrage Events with them. (Check out the updated reading guide.)

Lobbying became more difficult, but we continued to advocate at the Statehouse for our issues (positions). Most of our advocacy at this point is focused on ensuring fair, accessible and safe elections. Every Tuesday you should be receiving a request from the Mission Impact committee asking you to engage in a pertinent, critical lobbying activity. Please respond to these. They are timely without taking much time.

We've always held telephonic All Member Calls on a monthly basis and those have transferred to virtual calls drawing more than 100 Leaguers. Voter Services calls and Membership calls have been added to the roster of virtual support to local Leagues and I have added a quarterly Presidents call. (The next one will be held September 9 at 7 pm.) In some ways, being forced to move to on-line platforms led to us being more engaged with membership, not less. It has also meant even more work for the LWVO staff—which is where I started this column. They deserve more thanks than we can ever give them.

No one knows how long physical distancing, masking, the limit on meetings of more than 10 individuals will continue, but I do know that we will not merely survive, we will thrive!

## Meet Omar Shabsigh!

We are so thrilled to share that our staff member, Nazek Hapasha had a healthy baby boy on Thursday, May 21. His name is **Omar Shabsigh**. We are looking forward to meeting Omar very soon and wish Nazek a happy, healthy maternity leave.



## Meet Our New Staff Member!



**Alice Pressler** joined the LWVO staff in May 2020 as part-time Administrative Assistant. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from the Ohio State University, inspired by a summer spent volunteering for the United States Forest Service in the Bridger Teton National Forest. In the 20+ years since, she's worked for the Ohio Environmental Council, where she had the privilege of working on a national campaign to curb drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. She transitioned to the health and fitness industry after having her daughter, working for the past decade as a yoga and fitness instructor. A lifelong central Ohio resident, Alice resides in Worthington with her family.

## Meet Our New Interns!



**Eryka Harper** is a rising senior at The Ohio State University and is seeking Bachelor of Art degrees in Public Management, Leadership and Policy, African and African American Studies, and History. Eryka works as a Student Associate for Women Student Initiatives at the Student Life Multicultural Center at Ohio State and spends most of her time creating engaging and innovative programming that empowers and supports the women-identifying community of Ohio State. Eryka sits on the Executive Board for two student organizations at Ohio State; serving as the President of Ladies of Leadership, and the Treasurer for OSU's chapter of Take Back the Night.

**Haanya Ijaz** is a member of the class of 2021 at Hilliard Davidson High School. She has a deep passion for writing and advocacy. Through her experience in social work through journalism and organizing, she has gained deeper insight into student-centered issues, especially those surrounding people of color and minorities. She is also a member of her class Student Council, founder of a local book club, editor for Hilliard Davidson's student-led newspaper, and co-president of the Noor Islamic Cultural Center youth committee.



**Ava Brady** is a rising senior at Bishop Watterson High School and is interested in studying political science and public policy when she attends university. Ava grew up in a politically conscious household and at the age of 13, started volunteering for statewide and national campaigns. Ava cares deeply about election reform, racial and gender equality, and voting rights in America. Outside her professional aspirations, Ava is a national gold medalist in Olympic Style TaeKwonDo and enjoys reading. She hopes to one day be a part of a real change in American democracy.



### Save the Date: Judicial Forum on Tuesday, September 21

The Ohio Debate Commission (ODC) will host a candidate forum for the two contested Ohio Supreme Court seats. While the specific format for the forum is not yet set, it will be held in accordance with public health requirements (either virtually or in a socially-distanced setting). LWVO is a founding organization of ODC, and ED Jen Miller is a current board member.

## From the Executive Director, Jen Miller

### Remembering John Lewis

“The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have.” - John Lewis

John Lewis knew voter suppression. During his childhood, his parents and grandparents could not vote, because of bogus literacy tests and poll taxes. In the South, that inability to vote systematically upheld racism in every aspect of civic life: segregated lunch counters and schools, unfair financial systems and housing laws, and all-white juries that often convicted blacks with little evidence.

Until his final days on earth, he bore the scars from Alabama State Troopers who fractured his skull. The Troopers attacked Lewis and 500 others who were peacefully and prayerfully marching for voting rights from Selma to Montgomery. Lewis would later call that fateful day in March 1965, now known as Bloody Sunday, a “turning point” for voting rights. Just days later, protests were held in 80 U.S. cities, leading to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. By the end of 1965, 200,000 more African Americans were registered to vote in the South. In 1972, the South elected its first black Congress members since Reconstruction: Barbara Jordan of Texas and Andrew Young of Georgia.

May his story be an inspiring reminder about the power of the ballot, and why we must remain vigilant advocates, ensuring that every election is accessible and fair. Rest in Power, John Lewis. We will honor your legacy by continuing our work to serve voters and defend democracy.

“The vote is precious. It’s almost sacred, so go out and vote like you’ve never voted before,” - John Lewis



## Join Us On Our Monthly Member Calls

### LWVO Lobby Corps Call

LWVO’s volunteer Lobby Corps meets via phone twice a month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays at 12 noon. It’s a great way to hear what is happening in the Statehouse and about lobbying. New lobbyists are always welcome. Any member wishing to join this call must contact the state League office to be added to the list-serve.

Here’s how to join the discussion: You will receive an email with a ZOOM link along with call information, a day prior to call. Calls end by 1pm.

### LWVO Monthly All Member Call

The state League hosts a conference call open to all members on the first Tuesday of every month at 12 noon. The monthly call is a great way for League members across Ohio to connect, share ideas, get updates on hot topics, and plan action.

Here’s how to join the discussion: You will receive an email with a ZOOM link along with call information.

Watch your email several days in advance for an announcement of that month’s call topic. Calls typically end just before 1pm.

### LWVO Voter Service Call

We kindly request League presidents and members engaged in voter service work to join our monthly voter service call. This call is typically held the third Tuesday of every month at 7pm.

Please note that League Presidents and voter service chairs are automatically on the list-serve to receive notice about this call. Other members wishing to join this call must contact the state League office to be added to the list-serve.



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100 East Broad Street  
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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

To become a member or for information,

(614) 469-1505

lwvinfo@lwvohio.org

Or join online at [www.lwvohio.org](http://www.lwvohio.org).



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\$60 INDIVIDUAL     \$90 HOUSEHOLD

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