



A LETTER FROM ANNA

Executive Director

As the snow disappears and crocuses start to poke through the mud, it's easier for me to notice signs of persistence and renewal. It can feel like we are living in dark days for global democracy — and yet I am humbled by the resistance of everyday Ukrainian citizens and the bravery of Russians dissenting from their government to call for peace and freedom.

We all have a role to play in defending our democracy, and that includes strengthening trust in elections. Here in Maine, routine post-election audits are one of the most important measures the state can take right now to safeguard our democracy and ensure that it merits the full and unconditional confidence of all the public. We are grateful that Governor Mills has included funding for the bipartisan audit bill (LD 1155) in the latest supplemental budget proposal and we are working hard to see this priority to the finish line.

We know that disinformation is being used by foreign state actors to undermine U.S. democracy. To learn about this threat and how to counter it, this winter the League held a discussion with Kim Wyman, the director of election security at the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, as well as workshops on media literacy and fighting the Big Lie. These are all available to rewatch on our website, and additional events and workshops will be happening all year.

Defending democracy also means confronting the harm that has been, and is continuing to be done by the institutions of settler-colonialism. The League is proud to stand with the Wabanaki people in support of their sovereignty and equal rights. We urge the Legislature and the Governor to pass LD 1626 and ensure the Wabanaki have rights equal to other federally-recognized tribes.

As the saying goes, “think globally, act locally.” Towns across Maine hold town meetings and conduct select board elections in the spring, and we are coming up on a state primary election on June 14. Volunteers are researching these local elections for Vote411.org, and we are also hard at work on a guide to local government and other projects to fill information gaps for this important and often overlooked part of our democracy.

Whether you join the local government or Vote411 efforts, contact your legislators in support of LD 1626 and funding for post-election audits, or tune in to learn more about countering disinformation, I encourage you to find a way to get involved this spring. Our democratic republic needs all of you.

Anna Kellar

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ONCE UPON AN ELECTION IN UKRAINE

By John Brautigam

RIGHT | Residents of the Donbas region grew weary of the armed conflict smoldering since 2014 and costing 14,000 lives.



IN 2019, I had the opportunity to observe the Ukrainian presidential election ultimately won by Volodymyr Zelensky. Serving on an international election observation mission was an eye-opening experience, even more poignant to me now that Vladimir Putin has unleashed Russian military might to undo the democratic process I watched unfold.

Ukraine's struggle for self-determination has deep and painful roots. For centuries, Russia and later the Soviet Union implemented programs to "Russify" Ukraine and discourage a separate national identity. Stalin-era famines in 1921 and 1933 killed millions of Ukrainians, and more than six million died in World War II as the region was a constant battlefield. Most of the casualties were attributed to the German army, and Ukrainians generally greeted the Soviets as liberators.

Ukraine separated from the Soviet Union in 1991 and elected its first independent president. But democracy did not take root overnight. The first decades of independence were marred by allegations of cronyism and abuse of power for personal benefit. Police misconduct and irregularities in the judiciary were commonplace. One presidential candidate was imprisoned, and at least one sitting president wielded his own private "security" force.

The Ukrainian government in this period was heavily influenced by powerful oligarchs, and tension simmered between the majority who favored social and economic alignment with the European Union and a minority who looked to Russia. Sustained economic growth proved elusive, and whether to recognize Russian as an

official language was a recurring question.

The young Ukrainian democracy was fragile. Widespread protests marked the presidential elections of 2005 and 2014, and many Ukrainians did not accept the results. The 2014 election spawned a long and violent clash between Russian separatists and the government in Kyiv, and Russia forcibly annexed Crimea that year. Yet events of this period—especially the pro-democracy "Revolution of Dignity" in 2014—also proved that the Ukrainian people aspire to the kind of self-government many of us take for granted.

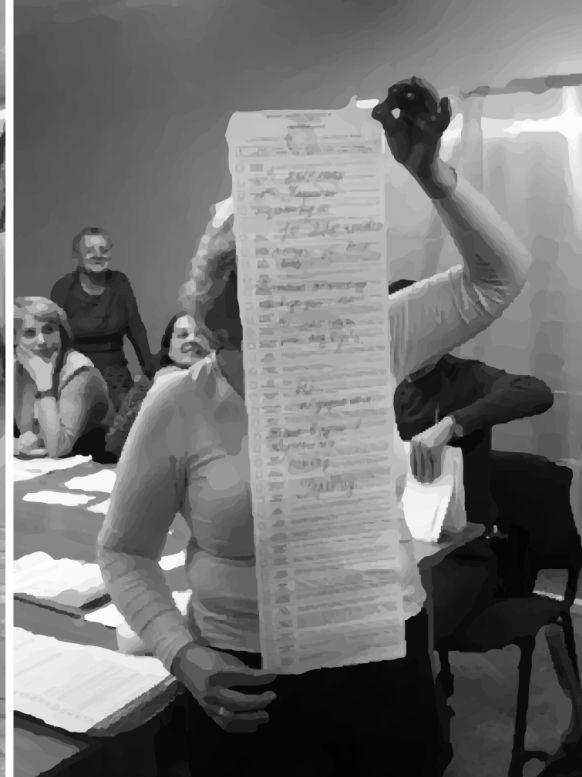
With that backdrop, experts in Eastern European democracy anticipated the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election as an important test of the country's institutions and voting systems. Ukrainian officials scheduled March 31, 2019 for the first-round contest between 34 qualified candidates. The top two would meet in a runoff three weeks later.

Several groups from around the world sent trained observers to assess the process and gather information. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provided over 750 election observers from 55 nations to watch and report.

I was recruited by the State Department to join the United States' delegation of 90 OSCE observers. I was paired with a seasoned observer from France, and together we were detailed to the Donbas region to inspect election preparations and visit as many polling places as possible on the day of the vote. Our observation locations were carefully selected to maintain a

BOTTOM | Under Ukrainian law, the ballot box must be transparent to guard against ballot box stuffing.

RIGHT | Rather than voting, one person cast a ballot with a message protesting the conflict in Donbas: "Since 2014, 10,220 people are now in their graves. I vote for each of them."



safe distance from the line of conflict separating the heavily armed Russian-leaning separatists from the troops of the Ukrainian government. We were not allowed to post on social media or disclose our itinerary to anyone in advance. OSCE also deployed peacekeepers in nearby Mariupol and throughout the Donbas.

After a week of training and preliminary observations, we arose at 4:00 on election day to meet our driver and interpreter. Our team spent about an hour at eleven different polling sites in schools, medical facilities, municipal buildings, and an opera house.

Our election day tasks included observing whether ballot boxes were empty at the start of polling, whether eligible voters were turned away, that voters properly signed voting lists, and that ballots and other materials were secure through the conclusion of counting. Although turnout was high, we saw no long lines, and voting proceeded smoothly. Sometimes local officials used ad-hoc approaches, such as physically carrying voters up a stairway to comply with rules about accommodating voters with disabilities. At each polling place we completed a 10-point checklist and reported the results in real time to OSCE headquarters in Kyiv.

Our role was strictly to observe—never to instruct or interfere. We were impressed with the integrity and care of local officials, who warmly welcomed us and openly answered our questions. I never witnessed any attempt to corrupt the election. The only irregularity occurred when one local official refused our request to observe a data entry process. Despite monumental

challenges, the presidential election appeared overwhelmingly open, free and fair.

This is not to say that Ukrainian presidential elections resemble those in the U.S. In Ukraine, candidates secure a place on the ballot by paying a fee of \$100,000. Political parties are mostly small and transitory. Campaigning is almost entirely through television advertisements and promotional videos. We saw no lawn signs, palm cards, or bumper stickers. Media are sometimes aligned with individual oligarchs, who in turn often have close ties to specific candidates. And with 34 contenders, there were no debates. The winning candidate did not hold a single campaign rally.

Despite the comparative fragility of democratic elections in Ukraine, my time there gave me a deep admiration for Ukrainians' sincere commitment to principles of self-government. I saw everyday people determined to hold a successful election, hopeful to see the rule of law flourish. Weary of five years of violence, Ukrainians in the Donbas wanted to show the world that a majority chose democracy over violent conflict.

As I reflect on my mission to Ukraine, I am reminded that the effort to create and maintain a more perfect union here in the United States remains a work in progress. One day soon, OSCE election observers will arrive here to monitor one of our elections. I hope they will see a model worth emulating. And may we also learn from the people of Ukraine and other OSCE countries who have sacrificed so dearly to advance and defend democracy. ■

STANDING UP FOR TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY | LD 1626

We stand with Wabanaki communities in their long-fought battle for tribal sovereignty. In our public testimony in support of LD 1626, the tribal sovereignty bill, we described how Maine's tribes have been excluded from both true sovereign status and equal voting rights.

What does the bill do exactly? It implements the consensus recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act. The legislation would place the tribes in Maine on similar and equal footing to the other 570 federally recognized tribes in 49 other states, according to the Wabanaki Alliance.

In 2020, the tribes in Maine (Mi'kmaq Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet, Passamaquoddy Tribe and Penobscot Nation) formed the Wabanaki Alliance. To date, over 55 organizations are a part of the alliance, including the League. The coalition focuses on educating Mainers about tribal sovereignty and other important legislation impacting the tribes.

This bill received incredible support during its public hearing, with over 1,600 written testimonies submitted. On Lobby Day, over 100 individuals, representing various organizations and the Wabanaki Alliance, lobbied at the State House. It's clear that Mainers support the Wabanaki communities and their right to tribal sovereignty. There were several work sessions and contentious conversations around this complex bill, heralded as the: "The civil rights issue of our era in Maine."

At the time of printing, this bill had received a divided report and was heading to the full Legislature for review. It's uncertain how it will pan out in the House and Senate, and whether or not the Governor will veto this bill if it passes in both chambers and makes it to her desk to be signed into law.

You can take action by contacting your legislators. Inform them that Mainers stand with Wabanaki communities and demand that they be granted the same rights and footing as hundreds of other tribes across this colonized country. Lastly, be sure to follow the Wabanaki Alliance across social media to receive important updates — look for the #StandWithWabanaki tag. ■



ABOVE | League staff members Will Hayward and Lane Sturtevant joined the Wabanaki Alliance for Lobby Day.

UNDERSTANDING
DAWNLAND
TODAY

Last fall, the League presented a series to promote a better understanding of the past and present of the Wabanaki indigenous people. These materials are available online at our website here: lwvme.org/Wabanaki.

GETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT |

By Penelope Hamblin

With the establishment of the Portland Charter Commission in 2020, the Portland Area League had an opportunity to take a deep dive into local government processes. We knew that there would be a need for impartial information, so our team formed a plan to follow the workings of the Charter Commission from start to finish.

The Portland 2020-2022 Charter Commission is charged with reviewing the City Charter — the city's constitutional document — and recommending a set of reforms, which must be approved by the voters before taking effect. Three members were appointed, while nine more were elected in June 2021. During the run-up to that election, the Portland Area League focused on voter education and engagement, spreading the word about Vote 411, the League's online voter guide, and volunteering as nonpartisan observers on Election Day.

League member Anne Schink had been a close observer of the 2010 Charter Commission. She felt that, this time around, we should do more to help inform the public and the Commissioners about the complex issues at play. We formed a small Research Team, led by Valerie Kelly, plus Beth Bandy, Anne Schink, and Phil Steele. The team's first project was to partner with the Portland Public Library in presenting a panel discussion on lessons learned from the 2010 Charter

Commission experience.

How to distribute power among the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager is the central issue before the Commission. In their election campaigns, several Commissioners called for sweeping changes to the power structure. The Research Team has focused on this issue, doing original research and creating reports to help voters and Commissioners compare options and understand what is at stake.

The Research Team's most recent report is a detailed comparison of the three alternate governance proposals. The Commission has been using this report as a reference during its workshops on government structure.

The Commission is heading into the final stages of its work, with a preliminary report on recommended changes due in May. The Portland Area League will continue to keep voters informed about its deliberations and decisions, which could lead to historic changes in Portland government. We can always use more help — if you're interested in volunteering, please get in touch at portland@lwvme.org.

The work of the Research Team, along with Charter Commission news, meeting reports, and updates, can be found at: lwvme.org/CharterCommission. ■

IT'S A SMALL PRICE TO PAY |

By Will Hayward

The League has been busy at the Legislature this year advocating for funding for two major priorities: post-election audits and semi-open primaries. Both of these bills passed the legislature last year, but need to be funded to go into effect. Recently, funding for audits was proposed in the governor's revised supplemental budget, but we are still awaiting funding for semi-open primaries at the time of this printing.

Post-election audits are an important measure to ensure election security, which already exists in some form in 44 states. This bill, LD 1155, would implement post-election risk-limiting audits, an election security measure supported by the League of Women Voters of the U.S., the Brennan Center, and others. It would also institute process audits to help improve election procedures, and provide additional resources for election official training. We believe this bill is vital for building and maintaining trust in Maine's elections. We are very pleased that funding is proposed in the supplemental budget.

Semi-open primaries would allow Maine's unenrolled voters to vote in one party's primary of their choice in each primary election. The League conducted a study on this measure in 2017 and found it would increase participation among Maine's large unenrolled voter population. The legislation we support, LD 231, passed the Legislature in a bipartisan vote in 2021, and the additional funding that is needed is a one-time cost of \$200,000 to print more ballots. We think this is a very small price to pay for more participation in our democracy, and we hope the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee will fund this bill.

We've been organizing constituent meetings, talking to legislators, and sharing Take Action forms to rally support for funding LD 231. Even if your legislator is not on the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee, it's a great opportunity to encourage them to lobby the committee in support of funding LD 231. ■

FIXING THE STATUS QUO

By Lori Calderone

NPV, only 75 electoral votes short of enactment, remains the most effective, achievable way to ensure that Americans *directly* elect their president. NPV eliminates several fatal flaws of the current state-by-state, winner-take-all system, and ensures the elected president has won the support of the most voters — just like every other elected office in America.

Let's not judge NPV on whether it's perfect, but whether it's significantly better than the status quo.

NPV eliminates the fiction of "close" elections by combining the certified results of each state. States will continue to run, audit, and certify their own elections, but those "close" state votes will fold into the national total. FairVote estimates that we might have to conduct a national presidential election recount of all 50 states due to a close national tally once every 1,328 years!

NPV eliminates the catastrophe of second place winners. It guarantees that at least one branch of government will reflect the will of American voters. The impacts are breathtaking. Only presidents who win the national popular vote will be able to nominate lifetime tenure

judges (including Supreme Court justices) or take Americans into war. Every vote cast in every state will be politically relevant, not just those cast for the state-wide national race winner. In 2020, over 350,000 Maine voters of both parties cast votes for the non-winning candidate. Every vote must count equally and nationally.

Post-election disruption schemes will become difficult to pull off. States in the NPV will cast their state votes (totaling 270) for the national popular vote winner, delivering that person the presidency. Fights over close states will become almost irrelevant, and alternative slates infeasible. The idea of "swing states" will vanish, as will the harmful polarization of Red and Blue states.

Representative democracy is hanging on by a thread. Maine must do its part to protect all of its voters. By joining the NPV, Maine will again demonstrate its leadership in our democracy, while boosting NPV momentum nationally. Let your state representatives (and don't forget the Governor) know that you expect them to pass the National Popular Vote. Let's fix the status quo. ■

MAKING SENSE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

By Lane Sturtevant

Local governments make many crucial decisions that impact Mainers' everyday lives and future well-being, and that reflect a community's values. However, local government roles and systems are incredibly diverse throughout Maine, and local organizing efforts often occur in isolation from one another. Compounding the problem, there is no central source for local election information, and in recent decades, more and more communities lack a local newspaper to cover such elections. These factors create barriers to an adequate awareness and understanding of their local government among Mainers all over the state, which is evident in the low turnout for local elections in Maine. These barriers undoubtedly prevent many Mainers from getting involved in their local governments in other ways, too.

As a statewide, nonpartisan organization dedicated to voter empowerment and inclusive democracy, the League of Women Voters of Maine is well-suited to help address the multiple barriers that Mainers face to informed

engagement in local government. We have thus adopted local government as an official program area. One component of this programming will be developing resource materials on local government.

The first resource that we plan to develop is a Guide to Local Government in Maine, an accessible guide for any Mainer looking to better understand or get involved in their local government. Currently, other guides to local government are either not specific to Maine, with its myriad forms of local government, or are written for a narrower audience. This guide will not only serve as a resource to both our league members and Mainers at large, but also as a basis for other resources, like lesson plans, that we will develop later on. We hope that this guide, along with our coverage of local elections in Vote 411 and other related programming, like workshops on local activism, will encourage and empower Mainers to get more involved in their local government. ■



GEN Z LEADING THE WAY |

By Allyson Gardner

Young people here in Maine vote at the third highest rate in the nation. Our state has a variety of passionate and engaged young people who are working towards organizing for change. Within the League and Democracy Maine, we see multiple examples of young people's work.

This spring, the League hired five high school interns from Ellsworth, Newport, Deering, Cheverus, and Portland High Schools. These paid positions provide young people with the opportunity to grow their democracy knowledge and civic skills. A few of the projects that these young people are focused on are:

- + Supporting the LWVME's Youth Council through organizing meetings, building infrastructure, designing a youth focused newsletter, and expanding their social media.
- + Hosting a spring workshop for young people to learn from local trans activists about the effects of national anti-queer legislation and

what actions they can take.

- + Developing a Peer-to-Peer voter education toolkit that can be utilized by young people across Maine.

Maine Students Vote has also launched the Youth Voting Network this spring. This youth-led space centers the civic work that young people are doing across the state. In our first meeting, young people from JustMe for JustUs, UMaine Farmington, Bates, Youth Work Makes the Booth Work, LWVME's Youth Council, and UMaine Orono joined to network and share the work that they are planning for this spring. In addition to monthly meetings, this network also uses Slack for virtual organizing and resource sharing. A young person doesn't have to be part of an organization to join. High school civic clubs, young organizers, and college students are all welcome to join to share resources, events, and opportunities. ■



INTERN SPOTLIGHT: MEET JOCELYN

Intern and junior at Yarmouth High School, Jocelyn Ruffner, admits that when she first found out about the League of Women Voters internship position, she thought it was too good to be true: "as many of us interns now admit, the idea of getting to do important work we're passionate about, creating real change and getting paid for it? I'm still not sure I'm not part of a pyramid scheme."

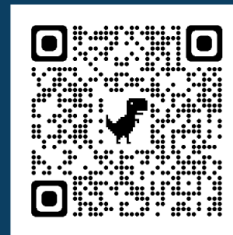
In her school life, she led the Fashion Club and helped out with a myriad of civics clubs, pursuing her interests through independent studies into philosophy, criminology, constitutional law, race in local history, and more. Jocelyn had been looking for a chance to harness her curiosity and take responsibility for the issues she saw in the systems of democracy around her. The League offered such an opportunity, and Jocelyn joined the League's internship program in the fall of 2021.

Jumping in feet first, she helped restart the Youth Council. Such an opportunity has given her the skills she didn't even know she needed, such as learning to ask the right questions and identify problems. These new skills have helped her organize the 2022 Youth Council Launch Party and create infrastructure for the council. More than anything, it has led her to realize that her passion for learning and organizing can help her help others, with the League and her internship giving her the launching pad to reach such dreams.



ELECTION INFORMATION YOU NEED **VOTE 411**

SCAN ME TO VISIT
VOTE411.ORG



Many towns across Maine will have municipal and referendum elections on **Tuesday, June 14**. If you want to feel informed and confident when you vote, check out your personalized voting information on **Vote411.org**. It's quick and easy!

On **Vote411.org**, you can:

- + See what's on your ballot
- + Check your voter registration
- + Find your polling place
- + See where candidates stand on the issues
- + And much more!

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Standing Up for Tribal Sovereignty
Gen Z Leading the Way

> **INSIDE:**

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