

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

THE MAINE VOTER

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From the President

We are just weeks into 2016, and it's already clear that it will be another busy year. But before we get too caught up in what's coming, I want to take a moment and celebrate our shared success in passing the Clean Elections Initiative this past November.



On election night we said Yes on Question 1, sending state and national leaders a clear message: We want a system that works for us. The League has been at this issue of money and politics for a long time – over 40 years – and we were so proud to stand with citizens from across the state last fall to reaffirm our commitment to a system that is more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive and accessible to voters. We are now turning our energy to making sure the legislature sustains our victory. You can help by letting your state representatives in Augusta know that you expect them to implement the law as the voters intended and by encouraging them to use the Clean Elections system if they are running for reelection in November.

Speaking of November, the League is looking ahead and ramping up our efforts to pass Ranked Choice Voting in Maine, which would give voters the power to rank candidates from favorite to least favorite. Last October, the League joined the Committee for Ranked Choice Voting in submitting more than 70,000 signatures for certification, and we are now the first citizen initiative certified by the Secretary of State for the 2016 ballot. And, we are so pleased to announce that, with the help of a very generous gift from the WhyNot Initiative of the Leonard and Sophie Davis Fund, the League's Education Fund will be working with FairVote Maine to develop a range of educational materials on what ranked choice voting is and how it works. Look for more about this as we roll it out over the coming weeks and months.

We are also excited about all the local League events and activities going on across the state this Spring, including voter registration drives in high schools and colleges. And this year's Quad States education and training session, which we hold with other Leagues in New England, will be April 9 & 10 in Wells, Maine. If you are a League member, please think about attending; it is always fun and informative. If you are not yet a member, consider joining just for this event. It's always great.

To keep up with all things League, you can check our website and blog, like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter. Being a member of the League can make a difference, too—from the grassroots level to the national. We welcome your participation

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Upcoming Events:

- Bangor Book Group February 16
- Democracy Forum begins on WERU February 19
- Downeast Book Group February 24
- Quad States April 8-10

The League of Women Voters – A Voice for Citizens. A Force for Change.

Clean Elections Initiative Passes!

Lizzy Reinholt for MCCE

We did it! Thanks to all of your help – with a double-digit margin of victory – the people of Maine passed Question 1 at the ballot box in November and strengthened Maine's Clean Election law.

Together we accomplished so much.

- 2280 volunteers
- 1780 donors
- 211,349 knocks and dials
- 41,601 voter conversations
- 137 op-eds, columns, and letters to the editor
- 119,992 "yes" votes



The people of Maine – Democrats, Republicans, Greens and independents – sent a clear message in November that they want a strong Clean Election system, transparency, and government accountability. Though the election is over, the work continues.

This year, Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) has two major goals:

Educating candidates about the strengthened Clean Election Act and getting them to run using the system.

The Clean Elections law is about elevating the voice of everyday people in our political process. Maine has a proud history of candidates from all political parties using Clean Elections. In recent years, because the law was severely weakened, fewer candidates have been "running clean." Thanks to the common sense improvements to the law passed by voters in November, Maine's landmark Clean Election Act is now stronger than ever. It's essential that we educate candidates about these improvement and ensure that as many candidates as possible run using the Clean Election Act, so that we can strengthen the voice of the people in our elections and limit the influence of wealthy special interests, corporations, and deep-pocketed individuals.

Ensuring that Maine's elected leaders listen to the will of the voters by fully implementing and funding Clean Elections as the voters intended. Already some lawmakers are threatening to ignore the will of the voters and block funding and implementation for the strengthened Clean Election Act. For politicians to ignore the voice of the people, after they spoke so loudly, sends a discouraging and disrespectful message to people throughout this state. It says that our elected officials just aren't listening and don't care about the will of the people.

We can't and won't let this happen.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections is already working with our allies, supporters, and advocates to reach out to lawmakers and ensure they take swift action to implement and fund Maine's Clean Election Act.



CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE <u>www.lwvme.org</u> AND BLOG <u>https://lwvme.wordpress.com</u>



(Post comments or let us know what you want to see on the blog.)

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Citizens Initiatives: A Look Ahead to November 2016

John Brautigam, Falmouth

It has been a busy year for citizen initiatives in Maine. Advocates of a wide variety of policy changes have written ten separate pieces of legislation and gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures to place their proposals on the ballot.

As of this date, the only proposal to be certified by the Secretary of State is the Ranked Choice Voting bill, discussed elsewhere in this issue. The RCV bill is now before the legislature as LD 1557, and its fate as a legislative bill is uncertain. It could be enacted, voted down after debate, or summarily dispatched to the voters without even receiving a hearing. Few observers believe that LD 1557 will be approved by the legislature, but the constitutional provision creating the citizen initiative process automatically affords the legislature the opportunity to consider any citizen-initiated bill before sending it to the ballot. If the legislature does not enact an initiative without changes, it is automatically placed on the next general election ballot.



The nine other citizen-initiated bills now in circulation include measures to legalize marijuana, raise the state minimum wage, roll back the expedited permitting process for some wind energy projects, require background checks for gun sales, allow religious private schools to receive public funds, increase funds for K-12 public education through an income tax surcharge on incomes over \$200,000, and allow gaming in York County.

One additional initiative packages together two unrelated proposals – one to lower income tax rates, and another to restrict welfare benefits. The proponents intend to keep these two measures together as a single bill, but it is not yet clear whether that will occur. The Secretary of State has suggested that the initiative might be split into two separate measures for the public vote. An additional initiative to legalize marijuana was approved for circulation in 2015, but its sponsors abandoned their bill after joining forces with the other marijuana proposal.

These citizen initiatives require 61,123 verified signatures to be certified by the Secretary of State. The deadline for submitting signatures is February 1, 2016. The text of each initiative, along with information about the sponsors, is available at this website: <u>http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/citizens/index.html</u>. Whether or not all of these bills appear on the next general election ballot, it seems clear that this is a bumper crop of citizen initiated legislation.

Why do we have so many bills this year, and why do we even have a citizen initiative process?

In the heart of the Progressive Era, voters in Maine and several other states gave themselves the right to enact legislation directly through popular vote. Maine's citizens initiative process is set forth in a Constitutional Amendment enacted on September 14, 1908. The citizens initiative process is rare in the eastern U.S.: only four eastern states permit direct enactment of legislation, while 24 of the western states allow citizens initiatives. California is an extreme example, where numerous initiatives crowd onto the state ballot each election cycle.

Since 1909, 67 issues have been placed on the ballot by citizens initiative, with 24 of them enacted by the voters. The most recent voter enactment, as LWVME members are aware, was the measure to strengthen and improve the Maine Clean Election Act passed in November, 2015. On six other occasions the legislature has enacted a measure initiated by the people before requiring a public vote.

A citizens initiative is not the only pathway to the ballot for legislative issues. The legislature is also empowered to send referendum issues directly to the people. This is mandatory in the case of many bonds and is occasionally utilized with other issues as well. Not including bonds, there have been 20 bills placed on the ballot by the legislature over the years, with 14 of them approved by the voters.

Citizens Initiatives: Continued from Page 3

Like most of the other states that allow citizens initiatives, Maine also has a provision allowing the citizens to veto any bill enacted by the legislature. Proponents of a people's veto must collect 61,123 signatures to place an issue on the ballot. Thirty people's veto attempts have made it onto the Maine ballot since 1908, with 14 successful.

Occasionally the legislature places a "competing measure" on the ballot, with the citizens given the choice between the citizen-initiated proposal, the legislative proposal, and none of the above. No legislatively proposed competing measure has ever been enacted by the voters. So there are many ways voters can weigh in directly on pressing state issues, but rarely do more than one or two make it onto the ballot in any cycle.

Does the frequency of citizens initiatives in 2016 tell a story about the democratic responsiveness of our legislative system? The conventional wisdom of citizens initiatives is that they are particularly appropriate when the legislature has failed to take action on an issue with broad popular support. This may be explained by a divergence between the public's perception of the issue and that of our elected officials.

Issues that directly affect the legislature and how it is chosen fit in this category. LWVME has been deeply involved in three ballot issues relating to voting and elections in recent years. We were a leader in the initial effort to enact the Maine Clean Election Act public funding system in 1996, and to pass a package of measures in 2015 to strengthen that system, enhance transparency, and ensure the integrity of campaign finance regulations in Maine. LWVME was also prominently involved in repeated campaigns regarding term limits, as well as proposals to change Maine's voter registration requirements. In each case the initiative related directly to the democratic process by which the legislature (and others) are chosen.

An alternative explanation in some cases is that the citizens initiative process is attractive because it is more susceptible to the application of large amounts of money. Someone with sufficient resources can pay to collect signatures, and then pay again to conduct a campaign for the support of voters, side-stepping the political powers and the unpredictability of the legislative process.

Are there certain issues that are more appropriate for citizen legislation? Are there other issues that, due to their complexity or other factors, should not be presented to the public for a popular vote? Depending on the number of initiatives certified for the 2016 ballot, these questions may be explored in depth during the coming months. Whether voters face one citizen-initiated bill or nine this year, the venerable citizen initiative system remains an important part of democratic policy making in Maine.

2015 Voter Guides: Another Successful Year

Barbara Kaufman, South Freeport

This past November's election was a big one for Portland (a new mayor) and a referendum election for the rest of the state. To help educate voters about their choices, we released two nonpartisan *Easy-to-Read Voter Guides*.

The 2015 guides helped Portland voters make informed decisions on the mayoral race, and all Maine voters got the facts on the statewide ballot questions. The Portland Guide also included a great step-by-step description of ranked choice voting to help voters understand how that system works.

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Thanks to Sarah Robinson of SCR Contract Services and her crew of dedicated League volunteers for helping to publish these two *Easy-To-Read Guides*. These Guides and past editions can be found on our website at: http://www.lwvme.org/guide.html

The 2016 Voter Guide will be a must read as we prepare to vote for our next U.S. President, Congressional representatives, and as many as ten statewide referenda, including Ranked Choice Voting.

New Partnership with FairVote Maine on Ranked Choice Voting Educational Initiative

Finn Melanson, FairVote Maine



Polly Ward, Vice President LWVME, speaks at the signature delivery press conference in Augusta. More than 70,000 people signed the petition to put Ranked Choice Voting on November's ballot.

There has been a lot of momentum on the election reform front over the past year as proponents of ranked choice voting have been working hard across the state to raise public awareness and understanding about the benefits of ranked choice voting.

On October 9th, 2015, supporters of the ranked choice voting ballot initiative delivered over 70,000 signatures to the Secretary of State's office to officially secure access on the November 2016 ballot!

League leader, Polly Ward (pictured left), joined current and former elected officials at the signature submission press conference in Augusta to express support for the ballot initiative, which the League has helped drive since endorsing the policy in 2011.

The next step is to ramp up voter education and outreach as Mainers look for more information about this issue. To get that rolling, the League will be partnering with FairVote Maine, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization established in 2015 to improve democracy through public education on

Together we will be developing an education program that recruits volunteers to write letters to the editor, works with educators to create interactive demonstrations for high school voters, and travels across the state to engage senior citizens through educational presentations at local retirement centers and in communities. As we move closer to the November 2016 vote on this issue,

we look forward to activating support among volunteers who are interested in lending their energy and voice to improve elections for generations to come in the State of Maine.

If you would like to become involved in this effort, please contact Education Coordinator, Finn Melanson at <u>finn@fairvote.org</u>. Look for more information on this partnership and initiative at <u>http://www.fairvotemaine.org/</u> and at <u>www.lwvme.org</u>.

This is what a Ranked Choice Voting ballot looks like. Get the facts about Ranked Choice Voting on LWVME's website.

www.lwvme.org

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Example from the Committee for Ranked Choice Voting web site 1/27/16.

Gun Safety and the League of Women Voters

Helen Hanlon, Winthrop

Every year over 100,000 people in this country are killed or injured by guns.

Concurring with the national League's position on gun safety, the League of Women Voters of Maine testified in opposition to LD 652 (An Act to Authorize the Carrying of Concealed Handguns without a Permit) during the last Legislative Session. Despite our efforts, the measure carried. In 2013, we testified in support of LDs 997 and 1240, which would have banned high-capacity magazines and required background checks on all gun purchases. Despite our support, both measures failed.

Given Maine's rate of domestic violence and its culture of sporting and hunting, the debate on both sides is spirited. Much remains to be done to find sensible measures to address the epidemic of gun violence while protecting our Second Amendment rights.

On January 5, 2016, President Obama outlined his most recent efforts to address the need to curb gun violence. His Executive Action focuses on new background check requirements and enhances education and enforcement efforts at the state level. Greater dialog between state and national officials on criminal history information along with an FBI overhaul of the existing background check system will heighten efficiency and accuracy.

Two hundred ATF agents will be added, and federal U.S. attorneys will work with states to address domestic violence. Funding for access to mental health services, domestic violence prevention, sharing Social Security beneficiary mental health information, and R&D for safer gun technology are also part of his initiatives.

Under federal law, only licensed federal firearms dealers are required to run background checks on purchasers before selling a gun. While Obama's executive actions work to clarify who needs to obtain a firearms license, it does not address the entirety of private gun sales. Those without a federal license can still sell their guns with no background check run, no records kept, no questions asked.

Many states have passed laws that require background checks in private guns sales. Unfortunately, Maine is not yet one of these states. Private sales, with no background checks, can be found in the pages of Uncle Henry's and on on-line sites such as Armslist.com.

Maine Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense has been actively gathering signatures to place the question of universal background checks before the voters in November 2016. They were joined by families affected by gun violence, members of the law enforcement community, anti-domestic violence activists, and a host of others committed to this one sensible approach.

On January 19th, the group delivered 85,436 signatures to the Secretary of State, collected from every county and all 503 towns in Maine. Nearly one-third of the total number of signatures were collected in the 2nd Congressional District, demonstrating strong support for the measure throughout the state.

Our LWVME Secretary, Cathie Whittenburg, has been tirelessly involved in the issue of gun safety for many years, providing research, testimony and impetus. The League is fortunate to have Cathie as our go-to expert on this important issue.

Suggested Reading:

The Second Amendment: <u>A Biography</u> by Michael Waldman

<u>Gunfight: The Battle Over</u> <u>the Right to Bear Arms in</u> <u>America</u> by Adam Winkler

The Spiral Notebook: The Aurora Theater Shooter and the Epidemic of Mass Violence Committed By American Youth by Stephen and Joyce Singular

Recommended academic resources:

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for gun Policy and Research - <u>http://</u> <u>www.jhsph.edu/research/</u> <u>centers-and-institutes/johnshopkins-center-for-gunpolicy-and-research/</u>

Harvard School of Public Health, Injury Control Research Center, Firearms Research - <u>http://</u> <u>www.hsph.harvard.edu/</u> <u>hicrc/firearms-research/</u>

Register to Vote!

It's never too late to register to vote in Maine.



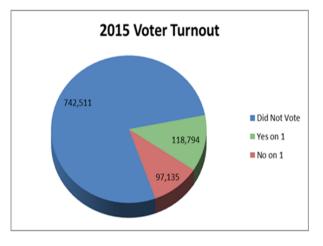
We're Blogging!

This blog post from November 12 notes the successes (and areas for improvement) from the 2015 election and highlights reasons why the League's work in voter registration is so important. This is just one example of the news you'll find on the LWVME blog. Stay up to date on League testimony and advocacy work at the Statehouse. Plus, get press releases, opinion, and information on events, media appearances, and more.

Visit the LWVME blog at https://lwvme.wordpress.com and give us your feedback!

2015 Elections: The Good News and the Bad News

Barbara Kaufman and Jill Ward



The 2015 election is one for the books, and there is some good news and some not-so-good news.

The Good News: The 2015 Voter Turnout graph at left shows that, through approval of Question 1 on this year's statewide ballot, most Mainers want a more accountable, transparent election system that values voters over donors. By a 10-point margin, Maine voters passed the Clean Election Initiative, which would strengthen Maine's landmark public financing system, require more disclosure of the top donors on the political ads, and exact stiffer penalties on those who break Maine election law. The League of Women Voters of Maine helped organize and support this effort from its very beginning, and we are thrilled that it passed.

The Bad News: More than 740,000 registered Maine voters didn't vote this year. Good government and strong democracy require active citizens. Voting is the most basic way to be engaged, and the League is committed to continuing our efforts to register voters, study the pros and cons of current issues, and educate Mainers through forums and debates, blogs and newsletters.

"Elections belong to the people. It's their decision. If they decide to turn their back on the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters."

- Abraham Lincoln

We know Maine can do and has done better. In 2014, <u>Maine led the</u> <u>country in voter turnout</u> and has consistently ranked in the top 5 states for voter turnout in recent years. Part of why Maine does so well is that

we have implemented policies that encourage civic participation by making it easier to register and to vote. <u>No-excuse absentee ballots</u> and <u>same-day voter registration</u> are just two of the policies supported by the League that have made access to the polls easier for thousands of eligible Maine voters.

Throughout the state, dedicated League volunteers also help register voters at high schools, colleges, and <u>U.S.</u> <u>Naturalization Ceremonies</u>. So far this year we have registered close to 400 new voters. Since 2007, the League has published and distributed <u>non-partisan</u>, *Easy-to-Read Voter Guides* and held many forums around the state to help educate voters.

Local League Updates

Portland Area League Update

Barbara Kaufman, South Freeport

This year's goals for the Portland Area League are guiding our programming, so to keep us honest(!), here is an update on our chapter based on these goals.

Learning about and helping to improve the structures and themes of democracy

We are committed to bringing the national League studies to Portland for fun, food, and consensus!

On November 21, we met to understand more deeply what it means to amend the U.S. Constitution. The Study Guide had 3 parts: evaluating constitutional amendment proposals; understanding more about an Article V Constitutional Convention; and helping Leagues put these guidelines into practice. I believe that everyone there was surprised at how effective study and civil discussion can be to changing minds!

On January 21, in partnership with the Portland Public Library, we read and discussed <u>Madison's Music</u>, by Burt Neuborne. At this one hour brown bag book group, we enlarged our understanding of the First Amendment and how it's been interpreted by the Courts and how it should be interpreted. Not a speedy read, but a very thought provoking one.

On January 23, we again met over bagels for yet another consensus meeting, this time about the Money In Politics study. Each consensus question had a well-prepared discussion leader. There was a lot to read and digest. Fortunately, it was not the only thing we digested, needing brain food (carbs?) to help us forge ahead.

Expanding voter services

September Voter Registration Days. As part of National Voter Registration Day, Portland area volunteers registered voters at Portland area high schools, Maine State Library, Southern Maine Community College, and the University of Maine at Augusta. As a result, 45 new voters were registered. Another registration drive takes place in the spring, after the caucuses but before Maine primaries on June 14, 2016. If you are interested in helping out, contact Barbara at <u>kaufman.barb@gmail.com</u>

Educational Forum: "How to Communicate Effectively With Your Legislator." On December 9, 2015, LWVPA and Portland Public Library co-sponsored a workshop led by Joanne D'Arcangelo. Her terrific presentation was followed by a panel consisting of Senator Anne Haskell and advocates Robyn Merrill of Maine Equal Justice Partners, Eliza Townsend of Maine Women's Lobby, and Dan Walker from the law firm of Preti Flaherty.

US Naturalization Ceremonies. In 2015, a perfect count of 365 new citizens were registered to vote! If you would like to attend these moving ceremonies and help with registering voters, please contact Peg at <u>pbalano@maine.rr.com</u>

LWV-Downeast Announces 2016 Democracy Forum

Ann Luther, Trenton

The League of Women Voters Downeast is pleased to announce the 2016 edition of its popular radio program, the Democracy Forum, on WERU FM Community Radio.

This year, the program will broadcast live from the WERU station in East Orland, Maine at 10:00 am on the third Friday of every month beginning on Friday, February 19th. The format will feature interviews with expert guests and listener call in during the last half-hour.

In recent Presidential election years (2004, 2008, and 2012), the League of Women Voters - Downeast has collaborated with WERU Community Radio to produce nearly thirty radio programs in the Democracy Forum series to raise awareness of the many issues facing voters and the importance of civic participation; how democracy works; and the functioning of government on the key issues of the day. Previous programs in the series are archived at the League of Women Voters of Maine web site at http://www.lwvme.org/forum.html.

Here is the working program schedule for our 2016 productions:

- February: Political Inequality, and the Risks for Democracy
- March: Wealth and Income Inequality, Money in Politics
- April: Capitalism or Corporatism: Who Is Democracy For
- May: Moochers and Freeloaders: Welfare for the Rich, Welfare for the Poor
- June: Us vs Them: Is Government the Enemy
- July: Privatizing Public Policy: Shadow Networks, Private Foundations, the Private Drivers of Public Policy Innovation
- August: Press or Propaganda: Free Speech, Free Press: Press for Profit and the Future of Democracy
- September: Engineering the Electorate: Gerrymandering and Redistricting: Recent State Action and Court Rulings; plus Voter Participation: Obstacles and Opportunities
- October: Ballot Questions in Maine (includes Ranked Choice Voting)

WERU transmits from Blue Hill, Maine and serves the central coastal and Downeast regions of Maine. WERU can be heard at 89.9 FM, in Bangor at 99.9, and streams live on the web at <u>weru.org</u>.

Bangor League Group Continues to Grow

Barbara McDade, Bangor

The Bangor League has been enjoying meeting during the fall to talk about the U. S. Constitution and politics. On September 24, we met to discuss the book, *Madison's Music*, by Burt Neuborne. On October 7, the Bangor League hosted candidate forums for Bangor City Council and for Bangor School Committee. October 13 was a discussion of *The Quartet* by Joseph Ellis. On November 17, the members held a planning session and, with Ann Luther moderating, discussed the consensus questions for the National League study on amending the U. S. Constitution. On November 20, our League was represented by Pat Rice at the Citizenship Ceremony held at the District Court. December 8, we discussed *James Madison: A Biography* by Ralph Ketcham. At our January meeting, we discussed *American Nations* by Colin Woodard, and we will discuss *Sisters in Law* by Linda R. Hirshman in February. Everyone one is invited to join us. The discussions are lively and informative. We are trying to grow the Bangor League.

We welcome those willing to help us study, educate, and promote good government to the Bangor area.

Caucus Time Approaches

Maine uses a caucus system to select national Presidential candidates. This means that delegates to a party's state convention are chosen based on the results of a municipal caucus and are pledged to support a specific presidential candidate at each party's Maine state convention. Caucuses are run by the political parties.

CAUCUS GOERS MUST BE REGISTERED VOTERS and enrolled in the party whose caucus they wish to attend. You can register to vote and enroll at your local municipal offices. If you are unregistered or unenrolled, you may register and/or enroll at any time up to and including on Caucus Day. If you are already registered and enrolled, but wish to permanently or temporarily switch your party enrollment so that you can attend a specific caucus, you may do so 15 days prior to that caucus. If you then wish to change enrollment, you may do so 3 months after the initial change.

Search http://www.maine.gov/local/ to find your Town Clerk's address for voter registration and local election information.

- Maine Democratic Caucuses will be held on March 6. For more information: <u>http://www.mainedems.org/page/2016-caucus-and-convention</u>
- Maine Republican Caucuses will be held on March 5. For more information: <u>http://www.mainegop.com/CaucusBasics</u>
- Maine Green Party information: <u>http://www.mainegreens.org/</u>

LWVME CALENDAR

TUESDAY, February 16 – 5:30–7:30 pm –Season's Restaurant, 127 Main St., Bangor – Bangor League Book Group reads *Sisters in Law: How Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg Went to the Supreme Court and Changed the World* by Linda Hirshman. Cal 941-8508 for more information.

FRIDAY, February 19 – 10:00 am – Democracy Forum on WERU FM

WEDNESDAY, February 24 – 5:00–7:00 pm – Ann's House, Trenton – LWV-Downeast Book Group. The book is Robert Reich's *Saving Capitalism*. Anyone interested or ambitious enough may read Joseph Stiglitz's *Rewriting the Rules of the American Economy* instead or in addition. *Call* 460-9587 to RSVP.

FRIDAY, March 18 – 10:00 am – Democracy Forum on WERU FM

FRIDAY, April 8–SUNDAY, April 10 – Hampton Inn, Post Road, Wells, Maine – Quad States Leadership Development Conference. Save the Date.

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Thank you to our members and donors who help support the work of the League of Women Voters of Maine (LWVME) and the League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund (LWVME Ed Fund).

We could not do it without you!

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Join the League and be part of the solution! Your community needs leaders like you to be a strong, safe and vibrant place to live. Become a member and make a positive impact on your community.



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