

The VOTER October 2023

President's Corner

It's Official, It's Fall!

This month it is my pleasure to step in for Teresa Potter and introduce the October VOTER. Fall has officially arrived and I am sure we are all looking forward to the many holidays and the chance to gather with family and friends. It is a time to enjoy that little cold nip in the air and put on our sweaters and jackets and . . . wait a minute, I forgot for a moment, this is Florida and maybe temps will drop to the 80s! We can only hope.



This is also an important time when we reflect on the past year and look forward to the upcoming one. We are organizing a holiday gathering in early January, as we did last year. We found celebrating the New Year together, after all the holiday rush, provided a more relaxed gathering and want to repeat the fun. We will keep you posted on the date and location. We also are working on more in-person membership gatherings. We are targeting later in October for the next one and will update you on progress.

As we begin to work on the 2024 League Legislative Priorities, as well as the numerous issues and events, I am reminded of what an honor it is to be a member of the League of Women Voters. We are passionate and dedicated people who inform, educate, and advocate for the residents of Hillsborough and Pasco Counties. Our hard work has and will continue to make a difference. We are a fearless group that will not back down. We are never silent, which makes us a force to be reckoned with. Just look at our efforts: voter registration, VOTE411, petition-gathering for an amendment on the 2024 ballot to limit government interference with abortions, petition-gathering for the right to clean and healthy water in Florida, reminding residents they must now reregister to vote by mail... And if this is not enough, when redistricting would have diminished minority voting power in Hillsborough County, the HCLWV made known that this was unfair and demanded that residents have the right to be informed and to vote on new districts in 2024. You should hear League Presidents Cecile Scoon (LWVFL) and Teresa Potter on WMNF's Midpoint show with Shelley Reeback on this latter topic. Listen to it here on WMNF or download the WMNF app.

And if that's not enough, we have addressed transportation, education, Medicaid expansion, DEI, gun violence prevention, and immigration. Communications has designed an amazing website to serve as a great source for information. And all of this is accomplished by volunteers who have jobs and responsibilities beyond LWV, yet take the time to give back and make a difference. It just takes my breath away!

We are pleased to be able to hold the Lifetime Achievement Awards Luncheon on Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2024, at the Glazer JCC. Save that date for the chance to celebrate civic engagement with other members. And I cannot emphasize enough the importance of collecting more signed abortion petitions. We have only two more months to collect 1,250,000 petitions. Details on petitions can be found on our League website or at https://floridiansprotectingfreedom.com/petition/. Ask family and friends to sign a petition, take some to events and gatherings, wherever you can - just do it! We must demonstrate our strength and get a constitutional amendment on the ballot in 2024 to protect Floridians' freedom to access abortion. Together we can achieve this.

We look forward to working together and hope each member will take an active part and make a positive contribution to the League. Together we are fearless and can continue to make a difference, demonstrating we are a formidable group. Now, if we could just control the weather and lower those temps!

Call Against Gun Violence

by Betsy Braden, Chair, Gun Safety Action Committee, gunsafety@hclwv.org

The leading cause of death for children in the U.S. is gun violence. The Florida League has made gun safety a top priority. The White House announced the creation of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention to be overseen by Vice President Kamala Harris. This will build on other actions this administration has passed, including the Safer Communities Act.

In Florida, there is still much to be done. Please reach out to your legislators and tell them to reject both HB 17 and Stand Your Ground/Shoot First and also to accept money for gun violence prevention. Here are some talking points:

- HB 17: Following the Parkland shooting, Florida law required background checks to
 be completed before a gun sale could proceed. Rep. Joel Rudman's bill will roll
 back that change to require that the sale proceed within three days, even in the
 small minority of cases when law enforcement needs more time to complete the
 background check.
- Stand Your Ground: This summer, A.J. Owens, a mother of four, was shot when she rang her neighbor's doorbell. The Stand Your Ground law was responsible for a delay in the arrest of the shooter. This terrible law has promoted a culture of violence and racism in our state. Florida's Stand Your Ground law has been associated with a 32% increase in gun homicides. It is long past time to repeal this law and reinstate traditional self-defense law, where people can defend themselves when needed, but can't shoot people from behind a closed door.
- Federal gun violence prevention funds: We are advocating for Community Violence Intervention programs. These are community-based organizations, such as the Naples Shelter, that work to either interrupt the cycle of violence or address its root causes. The rate of gun deaths has increased 15% in Florida over the past 10 years, but the governor vetoed \$5M in state funds and refused \$15M in federal funds to prevent gun violence. Florida is one of only four states that made this deadly mistake. We need to encourage the legislature to correct it and protect public safety with both state and federal funds.

While the legislature and governor are making our state more dangerous by catering to the gun lobby, one thing we can push locally is safe storage. There is broad, bipartisan agreement that safe storage laws are one of the most effective methods to reduce gun violence. Moms Demand Action and Be Smart have teamed up with the Hillsborough County Schools, the Hillsborough Tax Collector, the Hillsborough Sheriff's office, and the Tampa Police for safe storage education and to distribute gun locks. For more information or training, please contact me at gunsafety@hclwv.org.



As if driving in Florida isn't bad enough already, Gov. DeSantis signed into law a bill that paves the way for radioactive pollution to be used in road construction in communities throughout Florida.

The EPA prohibits this toxic waste in roadway construction because it poses a significant risk to public health, water quality, the environment, and the health of road construction workers.

There is still a chance to prevent this environmental and public health threat from taking root in Florida. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must approve any plans to use phosphogypsum in Florida road construction. They need to hear from you today.

<u>Urge the EPA to protect public health and the environment by rejecting the use of phosphogypsum in Florida roads.</u>

The Skinny on the Final Three Months of Abortion Petitions

by Laurie Winkles, Chair, Healthcare Action Group, heathcare@hclwv.org

Where are we now and what remains to be accomplished to place an amendment on the 2024 ballot to remove government interference with abortion decisions? The answer to both questions is "signed petitions."

Over 290,000 signed petitions have been certified, which is more than enough for the Florida Supreme Court to review the referendum language and approve the language for the 2024 ballot. Phew. But we need over 890,000 certified petitions to place the referendum on the ballot. Because the rejection rate is high, the goal is to have 1,250,000 signed petitions by late December 2023. The next three months are crucial.

There are no longer paid petitioners, which leaves the task to people like us, volunteers. What can you do? Sign and collect signed petitions from registered voters. Information is on the <u>Florida League website</u> and at <u>Floridians Protecting Freedom.com</u>. Both sites have petitions, a list of locations or "hubs" that provide petitions and serve as petition drop-off locations, and information on how to donate money.

Want to do more? Take petitions to local libraries, sporting events, concerts, day spas and salons, book clubs, social clubs, local events, and universities and colleges and ask, "Are you registered to vote? Will you help us get abortion rights on the next ballot?"

Support is needed. Please do what you can to get this constitutional amendment on the ballot! Time is running out and it is up to all of us to limit government interference with abortion.

Abortion Petitions by the Numbers

Skip this if it's too much data and you'd rather use your time gathering petitions. Read on if you want to understand how far we are from getting the petition on the ballot and why you might be asked for money for the petition drive.



As of late September, Hillsborough County has received 54,023 petitions of which 35,480 are valid. Pasco County has collected 14,816 with 10,665 valid. Petitions are invalidated for an assortment of reasons - illegible, wrong, or incomplete information, no match with voter records, duplication, etc. This is why the goal is to collect 1,250,000 signed petitions although just 891,523 are needed.

Where are we falling short? Everywhere. The requirement is to collect petitions from at least 8% of voters in at least half of Congressional districts. According to myflorida.com, not a single Congressional district is close. In our area:

- CD 12 (Gus Bilirakis) needs 34,000 signatures but has 11,000;
- CD 14 (Kathy Castor) needs 31,000 and has 19,000;
- CD 15 (Laurel Lee) needs 29,000 and has 7,000; and
- CD 16 (Vern Buchanan) needs 33,000 and has 11,000.

These figures are apparently 60-90 days behind, so don't get discouraged. Get energized instead.



Why is money being collected for the abortion petition drive if there are no more paid petitioners? For two reasons. The first is that Florida enables the Supervisors of Elections Offices to charge for certifying petitions. Floridians Protecting Freedom estimates that it will cost over a million dollars to certify 891,523 petitions.

The second reason is that it takes money to print and mail petitions. It takes money to advertise the existence of the petition. It will also take money to educate voters once this is on the ballot. Money is needed from now until election day.

The Verdict is Still Out

Every Thursday at 11 am, advocates for abortion access hold their breaths as the Florida Supreme Court releases new opinions for the week. They are awaiting an opinion on the 15-week ban lawsuit, which, if allowed to stand, will trigger the six-week abortion ban thirty days later.

Keep your eyes open for the following:

- Decision Day: The day the Court releases the decision, a social media storm will launch statewide, asking people to collect petitions and donate to the ballot initiative campaign. To receive the social media toolkit on Decision Day, sign up here.
- Weekend following Decision Day: Following a Thursday Decision Day, there will be
 a weekend of action. To sign up to receive updates on an action near you, <u>click</u>
 here.

And, Yes, We Still Need Signed Water Petitions



In brief, print, sign, and send in your petition in English
or Spanish. No printer? No problem! Click here to have five blank petitions sent to you. If you would like to track the number of water petitions received, click on myglorida.com.

We Need YOU . . . to Help Lead the League

Your nominating committee is already working to put together a slate of officers and board members for the 2024-25 League year that begins next July. This slate will be put before the membership at our annual meeting in the spring.

Currently we are seeking members to fill the position of treasurer, as well as several director positions and nominating committee members.

Regarding the treasurer's position, our administrative assistant handles the League's bookkeeping duties, so the treasurer is responsible for serving on the budget committee to craft the following year's budget, monitoring and updating the budget, and reporting to the board each month. It is a two-year commitment.

Directors generally chair a committee or action group, or have other leadership roles with the League, and these are generally two-year positions. We also elect three members of the nominating committee, including a chair, each year.

We would love to hear from you if you have interest in serving on the board in any of these capacities, or if you want to recommend someone to fill a position! Please contact

A Walk Back in Time in New Port Richey

Our League is having a private Walking Tour of Historic Downtown New Port Richey, led by volunteers with the West Pasco Historical Society, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 28.

The tour begins at the Rao Musunuru, M.D. Museum, 6431 Circle Boulevard, New Port Richey, FL 34652 (next to the playground in Sims Park). It includes a stop with refreshments at The Hacienda.

The cost is \$30. Payment can be made by cash, check or charge card at the museum on the day of the tour. Please plan to arrive around 12:45 pm so we can take care of those details before the tour begins at 1:00 p.m.

While organized through our Pasco group, this is open to all League members. Please RSVP to Pasco Chair Christine Bright at pasco@hclwv.org.

Pasco 2050



Pasco County is embarking on the important process of updating its plan for growth. Receive updates and offer your opinion at pasco2050.com. Your vision may help define the vision of the future. Start by taking the survey at mypas.co/2050visioningsurvey.

COVID

VACCINES: As of September 12, 2023, the 2023-2024 updated Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines were recommended by CDC for use in the United States.

The 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 vaccines more closely targets the XBB lineage of the Omicron variant and could restore protection against severe COVID-19 that may have decreased over time. We anticipate the updated vaccines will be better at fighting currently circulating variants.

Schedule your vaccines now. It is safe to get them when you get your flu shots. Tell them Joe Ladapo sent you.

TESTS: Free Covid-19 tests are back! As of now, households can receive four free rapid tests through USPS once again. Order here: COVIDtests.gov.

Become a League Speaker

We anticipate having many requests for speakers in the coming year and would truly appreciate your assistance in educating the public on a variety of topics in person or by Zoom. Use this questionnaire to choose which topics you feel most comfortable presenting. PLEASE consider speaking on behalf of the League. We received just two responses to our request last month, and we want to be ready when requests come in.

Thank you for considering this rewarding opportunity!

Any questions? Please contact Jill McDannold at speakersbureau@hclwv.org.

Speaking of Speakers

by Betsy Braden, gunsafety@hclwv.org

Richard Corcoran, interim President of New College and former Florida Speaker of the

House and Education Commissioner, spoke at Tampa Tiger Bay in September. Corcoran became interim president after the hostile takeover of the college by the governor. He spoke about the record number of new admissions plus the benefits of a liberal arts education, but denied that, since he has been president, 125 students and 40% of the faculty have left and many classes have been cancelled. During the question and answer period, he mostly avoided answering a question from HCLWV member Shelley Reback about the status of the federal investigation into the no-bid contract in Jefferson County schools when he was Commissioner. Thank you, HCLWV member Pat Hall, for your coverage on charter schools in Jefferson County that helped shine light on the no-bid contract.

If you would like more information on New College and the assault on higher education, contact me.

We Biked

by Emily Hinsdale, Chair, Transportation Action Group, transportation@hclwv.org

On Sept. 23, HCLWV members turned out for Tampa's first World Car-Free Day, which was hosted by Walk Bike Tampa and the City of Tampa. People on foot and bike explored some of Tampa's present and future walk/bike facilities from Midtown to Downtown to Ybor City. Highlights included:

- Chalk art, activities for children, mini golf, and pickleball in the streets;
- A drawing for prizes from new bikes to fitness activities and area restaurants; and
- Food trucks, a snack station at the Glazer JCC, and street fairs.

Additional sponsors included Sidewalk Stompers, Tampa General Hospital, Tampa Downtown Partnership, and the Westshore Alliance.

Below, the Mayor and a friend demonstrate how to ride a 3-D chalk bicycle.



On September 17th, Tampa celebrated its fourth annual Fancy Women's Bike Ride, an international event highlighting the adage that a community where women can ride

bikes comfortably for transportation and pleasure is a community where biking is safe for everyone. Dressed literally to stop traffic, an enthusiastic crowd of women (and male allies) peddled a seven-mile loop through downtown, Water Street, and Hyde Park. HCLWV members were definitely among the fancy women.

When our community is not reliant on cars alone, we have access to better health outcomes, better options for less-affluent residents, improved air and water quality, and greater public safety. Start putting together your outfit for next year's ride.

Postcards for the Penitent

by Cindy Wilson, communications@hclwv.org



Five members of the Pasco group gathered recently at Raining Berries in Lutz to address and stamp postcards to people with past felony convictions. Hundreds of thousands of these Returning Citizens in Florida need assistance learning if they owe fines and/or fees related to their sentences. Pictured here are those members at Raining Berries, and the stack of completed postcards awaiting mailing.



Our State League offers free legal assistance to answer questions, verify records, and help with any voting issues. This help is available at (407) 710-5496 and canivote@lwvfl.org.

If you would like to address and stamp postcards between now and November, contact Elizabeth Corwin at woter@hclwv.org in Hillsborough County, and Chris Conn at woterservices@hclwv.org in Pasco County.

New Mailing Address



Our new mailing address is P.O. Box 18933, Tampa 33679. The rental term on our old box was expiring, so we moved it to a box that is more convenient for those who pick up our mail regularly.

And just a reminder, our phone number changed last year. It is now (813) 461-5365. This goes to a recorded line, but all messages are forwarded to us for a response.



Leaguers in the News



From working families to school children and differently-abled individuals, sidewalks are a lifeline to independence and a source of safety for many residents who rely on walking or biking as their means of travel. Mayor Jane Castor and community sidewalk advocate and HCLWV former president **Sandy Sroka** recently highlighted the need for safer, more accessible sidewalk pathways citywide.

Research and advocacy organizations monitoring Florida's expanded school voucher program have called on the state to release more information about the students receiving scholarships and what officials will do if demand exceeds the amount of money set aside. HCLWV board member Norín Dollard, senior policy analyst for the Florida Policy Institute, has been one of the most vocal. Read the story here.



One Water Victory

In September, the California State Water Board approved a Cease & Desist Order that will stop bottling giant and Nestle-successor BlueTriton from removing tens of millions of gallons of water annually from southern California's San Bernardino National Forest.



This is a huge, long-awaited win for the Story of Stuff Community and its friends and allies around the world.

If it can happen in California, it can happen in Florida, right?

A Friend of HCLWV in the News



From her farmhouse in Pasco County, retired USF professor and political analyst Susan MacManus has seen Florida's political landscape change drastically over the years and has generously shared her observations with us on many occasions. WUSF spoke with Dr. MacManus about her experiences. Listen to or read the full interview here.

Democracies Don't Ban Books

Protest the banning of books at Shuffle in Tampa Heights now through Oct. 7. See details here. Tuesday's event is presented by HCLWV member Shelley Reback.

Members of our League will be at Shuffle on Saturday afternoon to register voters and answer questions about voting and elections. If you'd like to help with this effort, check out the Signup Genius event here - but make sure you are certified with the League to register voters first! Details can be found in the members-only area of our website.

And if you are not already familiar with Tombolo Books in St. Pete, this women-owned independent bookstore has been protesting book bans all year. It also hosts regular book readings and book discussions. Check out its offerings at tombolobooks.com.

1000 Friends of Florida

On Wednesday, Oct. 18, at noon, join 1000 Friends for a webinar, The Underline: Innovative approaches to linear park planning and landscape architecture. The Underline is transforming underutilized land below Miami's Metrorail—from the Miami River to Dadeland South Station—into a 10-mile linear park, urban trail and public art destination, complete with bioretention ponds, bioswales, and nature-based climate solutions. Register here.

Stressed Out?

Shut out the outside world and rev up for your weekend with Pilates in the Park every Thursday 6-7 pm, hosted by your Downtown Tampa BODYBAR Pilates studio. Just bring your own mat and be ready for a fun and energizing core-focused workout! Free to all.

Don't Dilly-Dally

Get thee to the Dali. In a free exhibit at The Dalí, Leonora Carrington: Writer, Painter, Visionary is an introduction to the remarkable life of Leonora Carrington, a Surrealist artist, sculptor and writer whose work deals with the visionary, the fantastic and the occult. Carrington produced more than 2,000 paintings and authored several notable written works. The exhibition will highlight Carrington's personal life, her time as a painter and her written work.

Just for kicks, go to the current Impressionist exhibit at the Tampa Museum of Art and ask why only two of the 50+ paintings are by women.

Café con Tampa

At 8:00 on Friday mornings over breakfast, people gather at the downtown Tampa Portico to listen, ask questions, and learn about what's going on in Tampa or just as likely the world at-large. Want to know about the city's latest development project? Eager to learn more about historic preservation? Have a question about the political landscape? Want to grill a city council member? No topic is off limits at Café con Tampa whose founders describe the forum as a place for insightful conversations. Find out more at http://cafecontampa.com/.

Tiger Bay Club

This month's topic is "City of Tampa's Budget Approval: What's Next?", with speaker Councilman Guido Maniscalco, Chairman of the Tampa City Council. Come October 20 and bring your insightful questions.*



Tampa Tiger Bay Club meets at noon at the Cuban Club in Ybor City. Doors open at 11:30.

The Tampa Tiger Bay Club is a non-partisan political group that presents candidates running for office and lively discussions on important issues. To find out more and/or to purchase a ticket to attend, go to https://www.tigerbayclub.com/

*N.B. Only Tiger Bay members may actually ask questions.



Check out *Indecent* at American State through Oct. 29. The <u>Tampa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival</u> starts Oct. 5. And the many events at Studio 620 in St. Pete -- too many to list.

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute - USF

In October, check out HCLWV's own **Angela Birdsong** as she talks about the Birth of Motown! And **Ron Weaver** on Women Transforming Tampa! If you teach at OLLI and belong to the LWV, let us know - we would like to highlight your class.

The following courses are among those starting in October:

The Greatest Generation Goes to War;

Tour of the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts;

Great Decisions Foreign Policy Discussion Group;

Making Sense of the Climate Crisis;

Tampa Grows: Annexing its Way North Up for Discussion: Oh, Those Women!

FDR's New Deal;

Real Estate Fraud Prevention and Your Well-Being in Tampa Bay's Senior Living

Communities;

Has American Been Compromised by a Distorted Study of History?;

Race and Nationalism in the Latin Community;

Halloween or Femicide?; and

Exploring Florida's Historic African-American Homes.

Also check out the Shared Interest Groups on China, Politics, and more.

Find out more at www.usfseniors.org.

Tampa Bay History Center

Selected October programs include:

- Discussion: Black Roots from Dobyville to College Hill
- · Ybor City Walking Tour
- Downtown Tampa Walking Tour
- Conversation: Soulwalk
- · Central Avenue Walking Tour

Florida Humanities

USF Contemporary Art Museum is hosting a conversation in connection with the exhibit *Native America: In Translation* on view from August 25 through December 1, 2023. This exhibit assembles the wide-ranging work of nine Indigenous artists who pose challenging questions about **identity**, **heritage**, **land rights**, **and histories of colonialism**. In this conversation, curator Wendy Red Star and artists Marianne Nicolson and Koyoltzintli discuss concepts and approaches to Indigenous visual sovereignty in reclaiming cultural identity. The conversation is moderated by USF Curator of Public Art and Social Practice Sarah Howard. To register for this Oct. 4, 6:00 pm zoom, click here.

Join author and Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam for a conversation on America's decline in community connections over the last half-century. Putnam, a political scientist, will be joined by author Shaylyn Romney Garrett as the two discuss his groundbreaking book Bowling Alone and their joint work The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again (2020). Once you register for the talk, you'll receive a link to watch Join or Die, a feature documentary that follows the half-century story of America's civic divide through the journey of Putnam. To register for the Oct. 5, 7:30 pm zoom, click here.

The Center for Health Equity in St. Petersburg presents a screening and panel discussion of *Underground History*, a documentary film project designed to explore connections between St. Pete's diverse cultural history and emerging community efforts to acknowledge the past in charting the future. The film considers the links between the history and remaining archaeological sites of the region's Indigenous Ancestors, the displaced contemporary African American communities and erased Black cemeteries, and the historic waterways which once created a connectivity for these places and people. Attend this in-person event on Oct. 19 at 6 pm by registering here.

What Should We Know?

Do you have a radio show that touches on issues of interest to the League? Are you teaching a class? Have you written a book? Write to voter@hclwv.org.

Upcoming Member Meetings

- Oct. 2, 12-3 pm, Pasco Legislative Delegation Meeting. See here for details.
- Oct. 2, 6-7 pm Healthcare Action Group. Contact healthcare@hclwv.org.
- Oct. 4, 9-10 am Education Action Group Meeting. Use meeting <u>link</u> and/or contact <u>education@hclwv.org</u>.
- Oct. 5, 5:30-6:30 pm, NPV State Meeting. Contact npvic@hclwv.org.
- Oct. 5, 6-7:30 pm Pasco Planning Zoom. Contact pasco@hclwv.org.
- Oct. 9, 6:30-8:30, HCLWV Board Meeting. Contact president@hclwv.org.
- Oct. 11, 7-8 pm State-wide Gun Safety Meeting. Contact gunsafety@hclwv.org.
- Oct. 16, 6-7 pm Voter Services Meeting. Contact voterservices@hclwv.org.
- Oct. 17, 1-2:30 pm Voter Protection Meeting. Contact voterprotection@hclwv.org.

Oct. 18, 7-8 pm - DEI & Social Action Group Meeting. Contact dei@hclwv.org

Oct. 19, 10-11 am - Environment & Climate Meeting. Contact environment@hclwv.org. Participate by zoom here.

Check the League's website <u>calendar of events</u> throughout the month for new meetings and events.

Want to know what's coming up? You can now subscribe to our HCLWV Events Calendar so our events show up on your online calendar! Find the subscribe link just below the calendar heading here.

EMPOWERING VOTERS. DEFENDING DEMOCRACY.

League of Women Voters of Hillsborough and Pasco Counties 813-461-5365 | hclwv.org















Copyright © 2023 HCLWV. All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:
P.O. Box 1801, Tampa, FL 33601-1801

Want to change how you receive these emails? You can <u>unsubscribe from this list</u>.