

## *The VOTER JANUARY 2026*

Happy New Year! We wish you all the very best in 2026!  
Hopefully you can join us for our in-person holiday get  
together on January 10th. Please look below for details and  
RSVP today by clicking on the link below or replying to this  
email. We need an estimate this week for the venue.



We will not have our virtual meetings this month since we're meeting in person, so please join us  
virtually in February for our regularly scheduled meetings. In the meantime, please note the sign-up for  
January 14th at USF, watch for additional sign-ups for tabling opportunities for the upcoming elections,  
and if you're interested in brainstorming ideas to get out the vote for the Special Senate election in  
Hillsborough, please reply to this email.

Teresa Potter & Diana Pecha  
Co-Presidents

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*JANUARY 10, 2025 at 2 PM*

# Annual Holiday Party

*NEW WORLD TAMPA*

All League members and guests are invited to celebrate the new year at our Annual Post-Holiday Party! We are gathering 2-5 pm, Saturday, **Jan. 10**, 2025, at [New World Brewery](#), 810 E. Skagway Ave., Tampa, near the intersection of Busch Blvd. and Nebraska Ave.

The League will provide finger food as well as Kevin Boxx desserts and one drink ticket per person. Additional food and drinks will be available for purchase. We will gather on an outdoor patio with picnic tables, which offers privacy while also allowing us to enjoy the rest of the facility.

There is no charge to attend, and we encourage you to bring guests and potential League members! Please RSVP below by **Jan. 3, 2026!**

(The RSPV is needed so we can provide the right amount of food, so please let us know if you're planning to come. But also please come if you don't RSVP and realize last minute that you can make it!)

**RSVP for Holiday Party!**

From 5-7 pm that same day, [the Reverend Billy C. Wirtz](#) will be playing blues and boogie woogie on the piano in the New World Brewery courtyard. There is no charge to attend and they would welcome us sticking around for the music.

## Voter Information Table at USF - Jan 14

The University of South Florida (USF) has invited us to participate in their Bull Market Partner Fair on January 14, 2026 from 9AM - 2PM (Set-up at 8:30 AM). Our league provides general voting information and voter registration help as needed. This will be outside the Marshall Center. Most volunteers wear comfortable clothes and shoes, no need to dress up. The only rule is no partisan or candidate information. If you are new to the league or this is your first opportunity to come out and help, there will be at least one veteran league member there at all times to get you up to speed! [Click here to sign up to help!](#)

## League Lobby Days!

The Florida 2026 legislative session begins Jan. 13, 2026 and the LWVFL will gather in Tallahassee on Jan. 20 for two days of lobbying! [Click here to register for Lobby Days.](#) Please also contact [president@hclwv.org](mailto:president@hclwv.org) if you are interested in being part of this effort. HCLWV will attempt to coordinate carpools for those joining Diana from Hillsborough and Pasco counties.

## Tracking 2026 Legislation

Various organizations track legislation throughout the legislative session. If you are concerned about development and growth, for example, you can follow bills by using the [1000 Friends of Florida tracker](#). Education? Try the [Florida Education Association's tracker](#). Women's health? Look at [NOW's tracker](#). Of course, the Florida [Senate](#) and [House](#) offer ways to track bills, as well. If anyone would like to suggest other bill trackers, please contact [Voter@hclwv.org](mailto:Voter@hclwv.org).

## Remembering Victims of Gun Violence

The December 7 vigil was rained out and is now scheduled for Jan. 10. RSVP [here](#) in order to receive updates.

# A Night to Remember

Candlelight Vigil for Lives Lost to Gun Violence  
Music, Reflection, Hope

Saturday January 10, 2026 at 6 pm

Copeland Community Ctr  
11001 N. 15th St  
Tampa FL 33612

Hosted by Moms Demand Action, Sean's Love, Rise Up for Peace,  
Kuntry Konnections, 813StoptheViolence, Safe & Sound Hillsborough

## FL Senate District 14 Special Election March 24

Over 500,000 Hillsborough County voters were disenfranchised in the Florida Senate on Aug. 12, when our Senator, Jay Collins, was appointed Lieutenant Governor. The Governor's delay in calling for a special election means the district remains unrepresented through the 2026 Legislative session. Nevertheless, we need to get the vote out for the March 24 special election. What to do?

1. Check what district you are in by looking at a [map of District 14](#), checking your own representatives at [votehillsborough.gov](http://votehillsborough.gov), looking at your Voter Information Card, or calling the Hillsborough County SOE at 813-744-5900.
2. Make sure by **Feb. 23**, you are registered and eligible to vote and, by **March 12**, request a vote-by-mail ballot at [Voter-Information-Lookup](#). Remind your friends and relatives to do the same. Participate in Get out the Vote (GOTV) activities with us and/or other groups.
3. Research the two candidates, Brian Nathan and Josie Tomkow.
4. Vote by mail, during early voting (**March 14-21**), or on election day, **March 24**.

Multiple state districts will be empty during the 2026 session, leaving their voters unrepresented. It is undemocratic that we will go seven months without representation. We can channel our frustration to GOTV actions. Also, at least one Florida legislator has filed legislation to prevent this from happening again in the future by requiring the Governor to act within a set time frame. We will keep you updated at our monthly meetings so we can encourage our legislators to sign on to this bill.

## Pasco Votes

Dade City, New Port Richey, Port Richey, St. Leo, and San Antonio are holding municipal elections on April 14! The deadline for registering to vote is **March 16**. Dates and deadlines have not yet been posted for early voting or requesting mail-in-ballots. Keep up to date by clicking [here](#). If anyone in Pasco would like to write about the municipal elections for the Feb., March, April, and May Voter, [send The Voter an email](#).

## Plant City Votes

Plant City is holding municipal elections on **April 7**. The deadline to register to vote is **March 9**. Early voting is **April 3-4**. If there is a runoff, it will be on May 26. The deadline to register will be April 27 and early voting will be May 22-23.

Check your voter registration and mail-in-ballot status at [VoteHillsborough.gov](http://VoteHillsborough.gov).

## What Does Helping Farmers Mean?

According to Jason Garcia of Seeking Rents, Florida legislation couched as helping farmers may really be aimed at harming environmentalists and the environment. Read more [here](#).

## H2O, ICYMI

If you didn't read The Tampa Bay Times article on water contamination in Florida going into 2026, read it [here](#). And [this](#) is their piece on water pollution and our health.

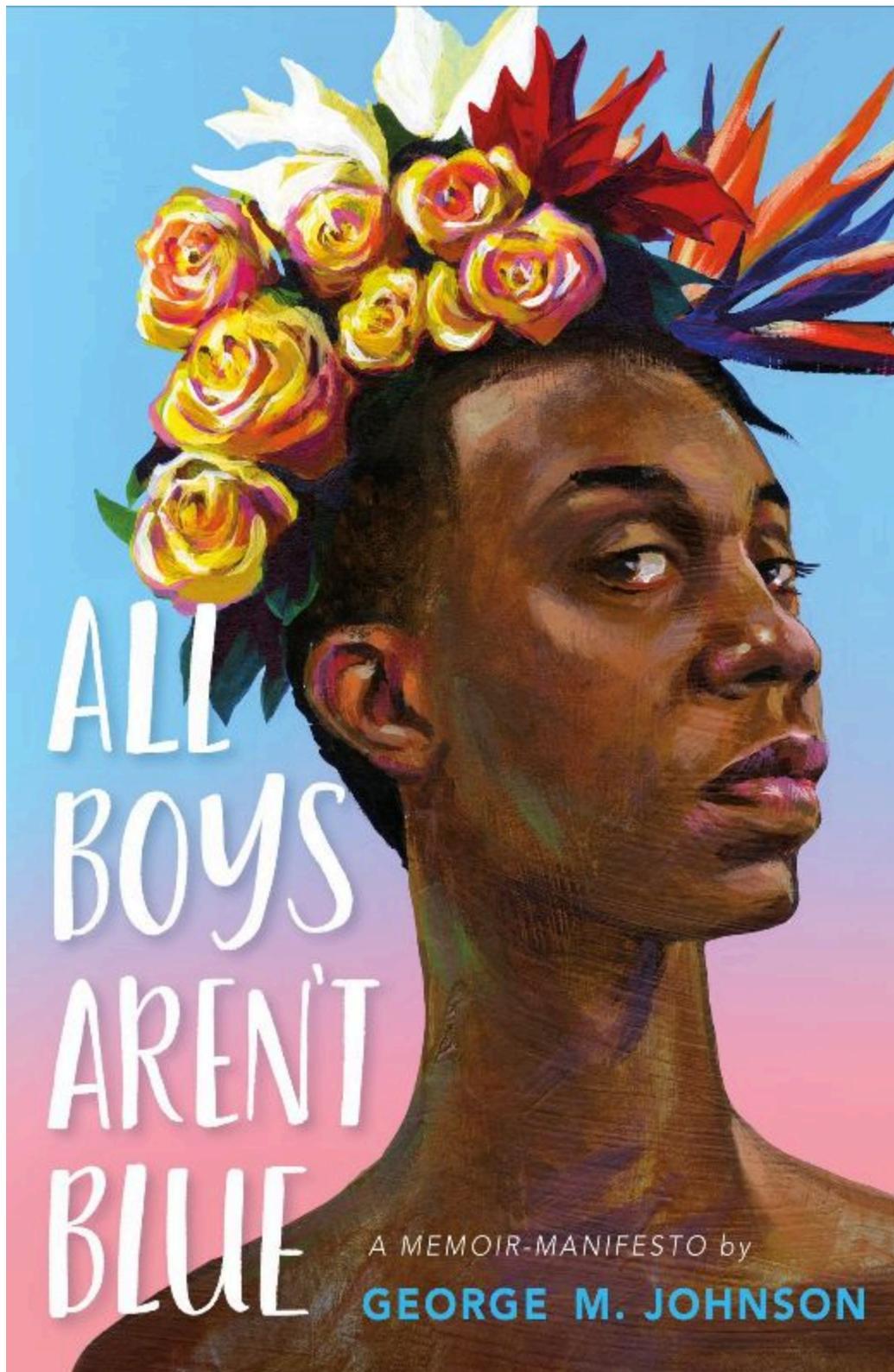
If you want to know what the water around you contains on any given day, look at Tampa Bay Waterkeeper's [recreational water quality map](#).

## What Public?

What will be the public's role in future development? According to [Craig Pittman in the Florida Phoenix](#), nada.

**Banned Book of the Month**  
*by Izzy Miletic, Forbidden Florida Reads*

**Banned in** Alachua, Brevard, Broward, Citrus, Clay, Escambia, Flagler Hillsborough, Lake, Manatee, Marion, Osceola, Palm Beach, Polk, Santa Rosa, Union **and** Volusia County Public Schools.



*All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson (they/them) was published in 2020 and is Johnson's memoir about growing up Black and Queer in New Jersey and Virginia. The LGBTQIA+ activist recounts their journey to self-love, including their sexual identity and gender exploration.

Named the most challenged book in America in 2024 by the ALA, *All Boys Aren't Blue* is at the center of many significant book banning debates in Florida.

In November 2021, Flagler County School Board member Jill Woolbright filed a criminal complaint with the Flagler County Sheriff's Department over the memoir's appearance on Flagler Schools' library shelves. She alleged it was a crime to have the "memoir manifesto" in media centers and demanded the librarian responsible be "held accountable." The Sheriff's Department found no violation of the law.

Despite the Flagler Schools Review Committee's recommendation to retain *All Boys Aren't Blue* on library shelves, Superintendent Cathy Mittelstadt ordered its removal, claiming it was inappropriate for 9th grade students. Outside one Flagler School Board meeting, at least a dozen students and some parents protested the censorship of Johnson's memoir.

Student protestor Jack Petocz said, "When I read that book, I identified a lot with Johnson's struggles, (with) constantly having that conversation brought up as a young kid - are you gay? and the fear of that resonated with it."

Students like Petocz are the reason Johnson wrote *All Boys Aren't Blue*. Johnson said, "I was inspired to write *All Boys Aren't Blue* because I once was a teenager who didn't feel seen in the world who didn't feel like I had any representation in the world ... so I wrote it to prevent the next me from not having representation of themselves in the world."

*"In America people have an issue with books that tell the truth and my book tells the truth."*

*– George M. Johnson*

## Test Yourself

How well do you follow the news? Let's find out! This [quiz](#) appeared in *The Tampa Bay Times* last week.



Attend the lecture "Picturing Paradise: From John James Audubon to the Florida Highwaymen", by Keri Watson, associate professor of art history at the University of Central Florida and co-executive editor for *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*. **Jan. 22**, 2-3, Hugh Embry Library, Dade City.

Learn the colonial and civil rights history of St. Augustine with Florida Humanities, **March 6-8**.

Click on the logo above for information about these events and more.



If you live in Pasco County and want more information about your local chapter, go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/suncoast>. There will be an orientation for new volunteers on Jan. 10. Find out more [here](#).

If you live in Hillsborough County, go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/tampa-bay>.



Planned Parenthood of Florida

Mark your calendar for Planned Parenthood's [Tampa gala](#) on Feb. 27, 2026. Tickets start at \$250 and sponsorships at \$500.

## Mind and Music

World-renowned soprano Renée Fleming is a leading advocate for the study of the powerful connections between the arts and health. Part of [Straz Center's](#) Arts+Health initiative, join her and other industry experts for a free presentation on the power of music as it relates to health and the brain. Jan. 13.

## Tiger Bay

Come lunch with the Tampa Tiger Bay Club on Jan. 16 and hear from Susan McManus, Brenden Leslie, Lisette Campos, Javier Manjarres, and Patrick Manteiga about their perspectives on the upcoming legislative session.

Doors at the Cuban Club open at 11:15. Lunch is served at 11:40. The program begins promptly at noon.

Click on the Tiger below for more information and to register.



## The Performing Arts

The [Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative](#) has partnered with The Florida Orchestra to offer free vouchers for library customer sto see a select concert at a variety of venues for their 2025-26 season. The ticket vouchers are limited to two per person and will be on a first come first serve basis. For more information, visit your [local library](#).

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Renée Fleming's program at the [Straz](#), *Voice of Nature - The Anthropocene*, is an expression of her love of nature and her concerns for the planet or, in her words, “this theme of nature as both our inspiration and our victim.” The performance features music ranging from classical to contemporary, and will include a National Geographic-produced film spotlighting the beauty of the natural world. Jan. 14.

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Comedian Tig Notaro appears at the [Tampa Theatre](#) on Jan. 16.

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Grammy-nominated Laila Biali will perform the music of Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, and Bruce Cockburn Jan. 16 at the [Carrollwood Cultural Center](#).

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Tampa native and musical theater maven Alexis Carra returns to the [New Tampa Unplugged stage](#) after her heartfelt hometown performance last season. Her entertainment career has spanned from the Broadway stage (*Wicked*, *Sweet Charity*) to Hollywood (*Mixology*, *Two and a Half Men*). Jan. 18.



## The Plastic Arts



*Dimpy Bhalotia: Small Lens, Big World* opens at [FMoPA](#) on Jan 15. This exhibition celebrates the extraordinary potential of the cell-phone as a creative tool, showcasing the poetic, spontaneous, and deeply human moments of photography by the award-winning Indian photographer Dimpy Bhalotia. Through April 5.

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USF Graphicstudio presents *Impressions: 35 Years of Women in Print*, an exhibition celebrating the legacy of women artists who have collaborated with Graphicstudio over the decades. Showcasing the work of ten influential artists from the studio's history, the exhibition highlights the diversity and innovation these women bring to the field of contemporary art. Through March 2.

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At the [St. Pete MFA](#), the exhibition, *Creative Freedom: Women as Decorative Arts Entrepreneurs and Connoisseurs, c. 1900-1940*, celebrates the dawn of the modern woman through the stunning objects she created. As the call for suffrage led to the landmark Nineteenth Amendment, women began to break free from convention. They didn't just demand a vote; they claimed their place as cultural leaders. Through Feb. 1, 2026.

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The [Green Book of Tampa Bay](#) exhibits the works of resident artists at Art Noire Gallery in the Ybor City Kress Building. Dec. 9-Feb. 3.

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On display at [Wild Space Gallery](#) are two concurrent exhibitions. *You Are Here* takes viewers on a journey across the 18-million-acre connected landscape, from the Everglades to the Alabama/Georgia state lines, through photography, maps and informational panels. Photographers include Laurie Meehan Elmer, Alex Freeze, fStop Foundation (William Freund), Paul Marcellini, David Moynahan, Tessa Skiles, Mac Stone, and Carlton Ward Jr.

*Jeff Ripple: Enduring Light* presents Florida landscape paintings inspired by 19th century American artists. Ripple's works are derived from on-site plein air studies, sketches, and photographs. His paintings focus on Florida's ever-changing panoramas of sky, light, and water, and achieve a kind of poetic realism that invites contemplation of our country's historical relationship to its natural environment.

Both exhibits run through Jan. 8.

OLLI



USF

OLLI offers so much in so many locations and on-line.

- Join the new special interest group (SIG) on aging!
- Take a tech class!
- Take a liberal arts course! Learn from Doris Weatherford about Florida history from the perspective of women! Or about Israel and Iran or First Amendment rights!
- Attend the Friday lecture on Jan. 9 to learn about the economic impact of Gasparilla!
- Take a walking tour!
- Attend the OLLI Winter 2026 Open House on Jan. 7, to learn about all offerings!

Click on the bull for more information.



1000 Friends of Florida is hiring a Special Projects Director. See [here](#) for more information.



Going on at TBHC this month:

- Gallery Exhibit: The Lure of Florida Fishing;
- Tours of the Cigar City exhibit;
- Tours of Chinsegut Hill;
- Walking tours;
- Book discussion: *Florida Palms: A Novel* by Joe Pan;
- Conversation about Florida-friendly landscaping;
- and more!

Click on logo above for more information.



There is no Café con Tampa on Jan. 2 and no details yet announced for Jan. 9. Inside sources say that the speaker on Jan. 16 will be John Dinkelman, president of the

[American Foreign Service Association](#), the union and professional association for U.S. diplomats. Find out what recent cuts and changes have meant for the ability of the U.S. to protect its citizens and interests overseas. Get the inside scoop on former U.S. Senator Marco Rubio.

Café con Tampa is a 501(c)(3) organization that holds community forums to discuss important issues facing Tampa Bay. The weekly gatherings of neighborhood and community leaders take place on Fridays at 8 am at The Portico at 1001 N. Florida Ave., Tampa. Doors open at 7:30 am.

To learn about future speakers, visit [Upcoming Events](#). If you are interested in becoming a speaker, visit [Speaking at Café con Tampa](#).

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### *Upcoming Member Meetings*

Saturday, Jan. 10, 2-5 pm, annual [HCLWV Post-Holiday Party](#)

Wednesday, Feb. 4 6 pm, [HCLWV Board Meeting](#)

Tuesday, Feb. 17 7-8 pm, [HCLWV Monthly Issues Meeting](#)

Check the League's website [calendar of events](#) 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](#).

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**EMPOWERING VOTERS. DEFENDING DEMOCRACY.**

**League of Women Voters of Hillsborough and Pasco Counties**

**813-461-5365 | [hclwv.org](http://hclwv.org)**



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