

The VOTER FEBRUARY 2026

Dear League Members and Friends,
It was great to see many of you in person at our post-holiday party in January. Those of us present got to meet the newest member of Teresa's family – Caty, her very sweet Kerry Blue Terrier.



Thank you for coming and remaining engaged in the League! Lobby Days was also held in January. League members from across the state gathered in Tallahassee to meet with State Representatives and Senators. As we move into February, we are preparing for another busy month of civic engagement, where we could use your continued dedication to empowering voters and defending democracy.

We have an important election on the horizon – a **special election** on March 24th for the State Senate District 14 seat. This special election presents a critical opportunity for District 14 voters to make their voices heard and to shape the future of state leadership. We need your help with voter outreach! In the coming weeks we'll be engaged in tabling events, voter registration support, and election information outreach. As always, we rely on volunteers to staff tables, distribute nonpartisan election materials, and assist voters with questions about registration and voting options. This is a wonderful moment to get involved! Please consider signing up. Together, we can ensure that every voter is informed, every voice is heard and our democracy remains strong.

If you like flan, please take advantage of the offer of free flan in this issue.

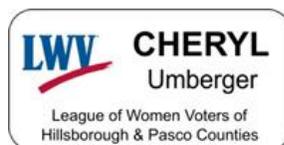
Teresa Potter & Diana Pecha
Co-Presidents

Want to Order your own League Name badge?

Are you interested in purchasing a name badge that identifies you instantly as a member of our league. Whether you are staffing a table at a community event or participating in a league program, these tags show your pride in being a league member.

They are digitally printed, white plastic rectangular name tags, 3" wide by 1.5" high. They have an easy-to-use magnetic closure. Cost is \$10. Once they arrive, we will contact you to arrange delivery. If you have questions, contact president@hclww.org.

[Click here to order](#). Please send your order in by February 16.



Women's Hall of Fame



Congratulations to our own Liana Fernandez Fox, HCLWV President 1991-1992, one of three women being inducted into Hillsborough County's Women's Hall of Fame.

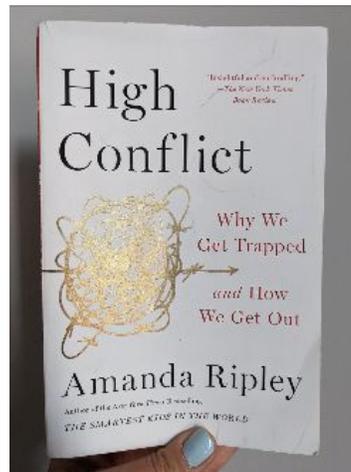
The new inductees will be honored on March 11. Tickets to the event are available [here](#).

Bringing Floridians Together Over Books

Join LWVFL's new virtual book club!

The first book will be *High Conflict* by Amanda Ripley. The virtual discussion will be at noon on Friday, Feb. 27. Register [here](#) and start reading.

[Ed's note: A reminder to get your book from your local library or a local, independent bookstore. My personal favorite is Tombo in St. Pete. This women-owned store will ship the books to you, but if you are in St. Pete, make a point of visiting this cozy space with its knowledgeable bookmongers.]



A Note of Thanks



by Ida Williams Campbell, Membership Chair

Thank you for joining—or renewing—your membership with the League of Women Voters. Your support strengthens our nonpartisan mission to empower voters and defend democracy.

Because of members like you, the League continues to provide trusted voter education, advocate for fair and accessible elections, and encourage informed participation in our democracy at the local, state, and national levels. Whether you are new to the League or a long-time member, your commitment plays a vital role in this work.

As a League member, you are part of a proud tradition of civic engagement and advocacy. We encourage you to stay connected through our events, publications, and volunteer opportunities, and to add your voice to the issues that matter most to our communities.

Thank you again for your dedication to the League of Women Voters. We are grateful for your involvement and look forward to working together in the year ahead.

Women went to Tallahassee

Around 80 LWV members from across the state participated in Lobby Days, lobbying, tabling, sharing literature, and networking. Deana Turnipseed went to represent our league and gave a brief report at our meeting on January 27. More information will be shared at our February meetings.



Lobby Day #1 - presentation of key LWVFL issues and advocacy techniques by Monica Elliott of LWVFL Voter Services



Attendees listen to award-winning journalist Mary Ellen Klas, keynote speaker



Stephanie Sembler, Shannon Tierney, Sarah Peacock, and Barbara Pierce of LWVSPA and Deana Turnipseed of HCLWV with Allison Kuhn, Legislative Aide to Representative Susan Valdés

And *Moms* did too

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America went to Tallahassee in Jan. to protest HB 6029 which would repeal the Red Flag law piece of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas legislation. If the repeal goes forward, law enforcement will have no avenue for removing guns from people going through crises. Law enforcement officials petitioned over 10,000 times between July 2022 and a year ago to remove arms from individuals. How does anyone quantify the number of lives saved? By seeing gun violence statistics going post-repeal?

Mothers and others also protested SB 896/HB 757 which would allow college and university employees and students to carry weapons openly or concealed on campus. Another bill that Moms oppose is HB 133, which would lower the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas age of 21 to 18, for the purchase of guns.

One bill Moms approve of is HB 321, which would establish sensitive spaces where open carry is not permitted.



See how Florida compares with other states regarding gun safety by clicking [here](#).

Tracking Legislation -- Updated!

Various organizations track legislation throughout the legislative session. A good general blog on legislation is in [Seeking Rents](#). 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.

FL Senate District 14 — Special Election March 24

Over 500,000 Hillsborough County voters were disenfranchised on Aug. 12, when our Senator, Jay Collins, was appointed Lieutenant Governor. The district remains unrepresented through the 2026 Legislative session. We need to get the vote out for the March 24 special election anyway, especially since there may be a special session on redistricting in April. 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, 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**.

It is undemocratic that we will go seven months without representation. Channel your frustration towards 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.

Finally, use this special election as a dry run for the August primaries: get your canvassing muscles and VR/VBM chops back in shape. The beauty of the March 24 elections is that the weather is cool enough to accommodate outdoor activities.

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](#).

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.

Remember?

Remember being a student activist? That might become a thing of the past if the Florida legislature bans all political activity on campuses. Yes, that's [a real threat](#).

Remember to check your own voter registration and vote-by-mail requests. Anyone who gotten a new driver's license since late 2024, for example, needs to check that the voter record has been updated and that everything is correct. Many people have been surprised that they are now listed with no party affiliation! Additionally, VBM requests need to be renewed for this election cycle. Don't forget that the biggest predictor of whether people will vote is whether they requested a VBM ballot.

Check out your registration at VoteHillsborough.gov or PascoVotes.gov.

Break the ICE — Call 1-888-600-5762

Do you know what to do if you see ICE engaging in questionable activities? Call the above number. For more information, read [this](#). Want to do more to help immigrants? Check out the [Florida Immigrant Coalition](#).

Election Deniers and Promises Kept

Five years ago, on January 6, 2021, a violent mob stormed the U.S. Capitol building. Following the attack, over a hundred major companies released statements condemning the insurrection and promising to stop donating to the 147 members of Congress who voted to overturn the 2020 election, or to halt all political donations entirely. Most companies that pledged to stop donating to these lawmakers have broken their promises. For more on this, read [Popular Information](#).



Jess Craven's [Chop Wood, Carry Water](#) blog publishes good news once a week. Subscribe for a regular adrenaline shot.

Florida Supreme Court Nominations

All the nominees for the Florida Supreme Court last month were white men.  What do you think about that?

Worried About a New Cruise Ship Port?

Check out [here](#) what you can do about it.

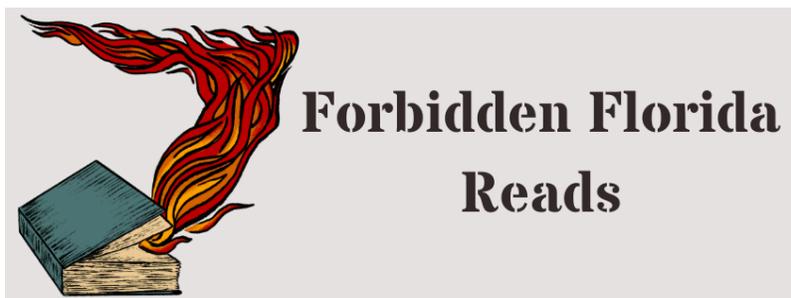


A Threat to Separation of Church and State

“Protection of Religious Expression in Public Schools” (HJR 583/SB 1006) would allow students to wear clothing, accessories, and jewelry that display a religious message. And they could organize prayer groups and religious clubs to the same extent that students can organize secular activities and groups.

The Rev. Dr. Russell Meyer, executive director of the Florida Council of Churches, says the bill contains no controls to make certain there will be any balance. Rev. Susan Gage, an Episcopal priest, says that under the bill, Satanists would have the same political rights in public schools. The Freedom From Religion Foundation Action Fund, a national group, warns that such language could marginalize students who do not share the “favored” beliefs.

Read the details [here](#) and make up your own mind.



by *Izzy Miletic*

Last Night at the Telegraph Club by Malinda Lo was published in 2021 and awarded the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature (2021).

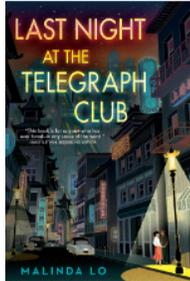
BANNED in Brevard, Broward, Clay, Escambia, Flagler, Hillsborough, Manatee, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Santa Rosa, Seminole, Union, and Volusia County public schools

Last Night at the Telegraph Club is Malinda Lo’s coming-of-age novel following Lily Hu, a Chinese-American teenager navigating her lesbian identity in Chinatown, San Francisco. In the Telegraph Club, a lesbian bar, Lily finds both sanctuary and self-realization during a fearful political climate.

The novel confronts the difficult realities of 1950s America - realities that remain strikingly relevant to contemporary students. During the Red Scare, Lily and her Chinese-American family are at risk. Lily’s father faces the looming threat of deportation, despite his American citizenship. Lily herself faces the possibility of criminal prosecution for her burgeoning lesbian relationship, which violates [morality laws](#). Lily’s experiences echo anti-Chinese sentiments during the COVID-19 pandemic, the escalation of ICE raids, and new anti-LGBT+ legislation passed in states like Florida.

In 2025, these themes landed *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* among 57 titles banned in Hillsborough County Public Schools by administrative order for “patently pornographic” material. Another 600 titles were ordered for removal awaiting review. At the state Board of Education meeting that resulted in this mass ban, a board member suggested firing all Hillsborough County Public Schools media specialists, calling them “child abusers.”

In response to the banning of *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, author Malinda Lo wrote a [lengthy blog post](#). She writes: “There is a heavy element of shaming involved in these book bans. It’s clear that the book banners are declaring my book shameful - and by extension, they’re trying to shame me. The condemnation of these book banners does not shame me now.



“Reading a book about someone different from you can show you how similar we are: human.”

– Malinda Lo, October 3, 2023, blog post



A Motion Picture Paradise: Often overlooked in its contribution to film history, Florida has played a key role in creating the modern entertainment industry. This **Feb. 13** presentation at the Hugh Embry Library in Dade City discusses how Florida became a “third coast” to the American film and television industries over the past one hundred years.

Southern Road to Freedom: Did you know that the nation’s first Underground Railroad was established in Florida in the late 17th century, serving as a beacon of freedom for runaway slaves from the American South? Existing before the better-known northern Underground Railroad, enslaved Africans gained their freedom by escaping for asylum in Spanish Florida. A **Feb. 22** presentation by Magdalena Lamarre focuses on Florida’s early history as a Spanish territory, the escape routes used by runaway slaves, and the black communities they established before the abolition of slavery in the United States. Free admission and refreshments at the Sulphur Springs museum in Tampa.

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.



Good news last month for all but 52 Florida bears! According to the Sierra Club, out of 172 issued, at least four dozen permits went to people who had no intention of killing bears! The others must have gone to bad shots. Thank you to all of you who applied for permits.

There were many other victories on the part of the two local clubs in 2025. Connect with the Sierra Club to learn about them and to see how you can get involved in fun excursions and priority issues in 2026.

If you live in Pasco County and want more information about your local chapter, go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/suncoast>. The Pasco group is meeting Feb. 4, there’s a raptor event on Feb. 7, and the monthly social gathering is Feb. 16.

If you live in Hillsborough County, go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/tampa-bay>. There is a paddle scheduled for Feb. 8.



Planned Parenthood of Florida

Big News!

Planned Parenthood of Florida has lined up a "a really fantastic, big time, impressive Keynote Speaker and honoree who is so big we are not allowed to put the name in writing because of security. This is cryptic but sometimes that is very necessary!" If you are debating about attending and this will affect your decision, please call Elizabeth Corwin at 202-290-6130 for the name.

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

Please feel free to ask to be at Elizabeth's table. If we end up with a table that consist mostly of members, we might be able to brand it the LWV table.

BTW, it's not to late to go to Tallahassee with Planned Parenthood for their Lobby Days! Sign up [here](#) to participate Feb. 10-12. Lives may depend on it.

A pair of Florida Democrats have filed legislation that would, in effect, eliminate the state's restrictive six-week abortion ban and other laws limiting abortion access and guarantee access to reproductive health care. You can't believe it? Read more [here](#).

History Under Attack



Monuments glorifying southern secessionists are being restored. Military bases are being renamed for Confederate leaders. And Florida students are being taught that slavery offered "benefits" to the enslaved.

Join WMNF WaveMakers Live on [Feb. 10](#) at The Commodore in Ybor City for a hard-hitting conversation on the future of history with two of Florida's most respected historians, Ray Arsenault, whose research on the Freedom Riders

inspired a Peabody Award-winning documentary, and Gary Mormino, author of the definitive history of Ybor City and an award-winning history of modern Florida.

More [here](#).

Tiger Bay

Join the Mayors of Tampa, Plant City, and Temple Terrace on Feb. 20 as they review the state of their cities. 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.



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

- Ride Suncoast and Starkey trails on Feb. 9, explore Circle B Bar Reserve, or take other excursions with OLLI outdoors on Feb. 12;
- Take a liberal arts course! Starting in February, Black Figures in Tampa Schools and Libraries; Vladimir Putin; Remembering Charlottesville; the Supreme Court Today; and so many more.
- Take a walking tour!
- Take a tech class!

Click on the bull for more information.



1000 Friends of Florida discusses ongoing legislative matters on Feb. 11. Click [here](#).



Meet Audrey Chapuis, the new President and CEO of TBHC, on March 18. Click [here](#) to reserve a seat at her town hall.

Going on at TBHC this month:

- The 5th Annual Black History Gala, on Feb. 27;
- Gallery Exhibit: The Lure of Florida Fishing;
- Tours of the Cigar City exhibit;
- Tours of Chinsegut Hill;
- Walking tours;
- Book discussion: *Welcome to Florida: True Tales from America's Most Interesting State* by Craig Pittman;
- Florida Conversations: African American history in thoroughbred racing;
- and more!

Click on logo above for more information.



No word about the Feb. 6 Café con Tampa speaker, but on Feb. 13, Gianni Hunt of [Magnified Voices](#) will speak about the events that bring people together to learn, build, and act for justice, equity, democracy, and unity.

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](#).

Free Tax Help

UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough offers helpful webinars for residents as they prepare to file their federal tax returns. Learn more [here](#)

Free Gardening Workshops

UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough offers helpful webinars for residents as they prepare to file their federal tax returns. Learn more [here](#)

Trail to Oregon - and free flan!

The Voter Editor had no time in January to note upcoming events in the arts, but will be attending *The Trail to Oregon* at [LAB Theater Project](#) on **Feb. 7** and invites all LWV to enjoy free flan and coffee at the Flan Factory around the corner before the show. Please [buy your tickets](#) to the show and then write to voter@hclwv.org to be put on her list of flan fans.

Also please [let the Voter Editor know](#) whether you found the arts listings useful. If not, they won't be included in future issues.

Tuesday, February 4, 6 pm, [HCLWV Board Meeting](#)

Wednesday, February 17, 6-7 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](#).

EMPOWERING VOTERS. DEFENDING DEMOCRACY.

League of Women Voters of Hillsborough and Pasco Counties

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P.O. Box 18933, Tampa, FL 33679

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