



JANUARY 2024



President's Message: Keep Your Eye on Wisconsin in 2024

By Linda Bjella
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I make it a practice to watch "Week in Review" on [Wisconsin Eye](#), an unbiased nonprofit news source. In just 30 minutes, it provides me a much better understanding of not just what is happening in Wisconsin politics, but why. Their recent "Year in Review" gives a great overview of the top 10 events in Wisconsin politics in 2023, and forecasts what will come in 2024. Here's their "Top 10":



10. What to do with Wisconsin's aging prisons?

Both the Waupun and Green Bay prisons were built in the late 1800's. The appalling state of the aging buildings together with persistent staff shortages results in unsafe conditions and frequent lock-downs of prisoners. Democrats and the governor favor release of non-violent prisoners which Republicans reject. Both sides have talked about closing both prisons and replacing them with a new modern facility, but the cost (\$4-5 million) and location present huge obstacles.

9. What about the state's \$4 billion surplus?

Republicans will introduce a new plan to reduce taxes on retirement incomes and collapse the 4 tax brackets into 3. Evers opposes this idea fearing it may lead to deficits in the future, and also has rejected reducing taxes for high incomes. What might happen when Evers proposes his next (and probably last) budget for the next biennium?

8. What's with the controversy over DEI?

While an agreement over the DEI issue was finally reached to release \$800 million to the UW system providing salary increases, some sticky issues around building projects still remain. Now Robin Vos is proposing an inquiry into DEI positions in all state agencies. While Democrats believe that "diversity, equity, and inclusion" makes Wisconsin more welcoming and helps with workforce development, Republicans believe it is a form of "division, indoctrination, and exclusion."

7. What will happen with the abortion issue?

The ruling by a Dane County judge found that Wisconsin's 1849 abortion law doesn't apply to consensual abortion. As a result, clinics in Madison, Milwaukee, and Sheboygan have resumed abortion as part of their comprehensive women's health care. This decision is currently being

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President: Eye on Wisconsin, cont.

appealed to the more conservative Waukesha County Circuit Court, and may make its way up to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. There has been talk about putting a referendum for a 12-week ban on abortion in front of the voters this fall. (Currently abortions are allowed up to 20 weeks of pregnancy.) Another provision being discussed is exceptions for rape and incest. The timing of this issue is crucial. If it is resolved prior to the November election, progressive voters may be less motivated to get to the polls.

6. What about Meagan Wolfe?

Wisconsin's embattled Elections Commissioner is still in office despite the senate's attempt to remove her. (Attorney General Josh Kaul filed suit contending the senate doesn't have that authority.) Previous rulings pertaining to the state DNR have allowed appointees to remain in their positions until a successor is approved. Vos is under pressure from far-right Republicans to remove Wolfe and talk of her impeachment is still swirling around.

5. Will we really get Fair Maps?

The Wisconsin Supreme Court issued a remarkably quick decision on the redistricting lawsuit which ruled the current maps are unconstitutional based on the provision that requires a district to be contiguous. The case will be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The appeal will argue that Justice Protasiewicz should have recused herself due to the campaign contributions she received from the Democratic Party. If and when the US Supreme Court would accept it remains to be seen. New maps must be in place by March 15 to be used by the November election.

4. The Brewers are Staying!

Hailed as a "good deal for Wisconsin," both parties and local officials in Milwaukee all came together to provide enough public funding from the state's historic surplus to update the stadium to keep the Brewers in the state until at least 2043.

3. Finally, some real shared revenue!

Everyone agreed that shared revenue to local government had been woefully inadequate for a decade or more. Complicating the already complicated issue was the City and County of Milwaukee teetering on bankruptcy due to an insolvent pension fund, but a bi-partisan deal was struck providing a hefty increase to local governments from the state's coffers giving a needed boost, primarily to public safety.

2. Evers got creative with this veto pen.

The Wisconsin governor enjoys one of the most powerful line-item vetoes of any state, and Evers made the most of it this year. While the legislature rejected nearly all of the governor's budget at the outset of the process, by changing a bit of punctuation, Evers was able to keep state school funding at current levels for 400 years. This clever change won't stand, and there are big questions about the next biennial budget. Will the surplus be returned to taxpayers, spent on other needed programs, or kept in reserve anticipating a future economic downturn?

1. The Wisconsin Supreme Court!!!

After a record-setting voter turnout and campaign spending that blew all previous supreme court races out of the water nation-wide (\$56 million), Wisconsin now has a liberal majority on its court for the first time in 15 years. There are lots of cases that could be taken up in addition to the redistricting case: Act 10, right-to-work laws, election rules around absentee voting and drop boxes, and private school vouchers. The court has already declined to take the voucher case, referring it to a lower court. They will probably proceed carefully this year, mindful that next year, liberal Justice Ann Walsh Bradley will stand for re-election and she has indicated she will run. Should she win her race in 2025, conservatives won't have another opportunity to flip the court again until 2028.

The Wisconsin League is staying on top of all of these issues and you can too. Make a new year's resolution to tune into Wisconsin Eye regularly, and mark your calendar for our next **Legislative Town Hall on Monday, February 5** to hear the views of our Fox Cities representatives on these issues.

PROGRAM: 2024 Begins with Lively Conversation

By Renee Gralewicz
Program Director
program@lwvappletonfoxcities.org

As we put another year behind us, I hope that this one is treating you gently. Our League year always begins with a lively conversation about our communities. We get a chance to bring to light areas that we feel need improvement and perhaps, more League attention. We call this session Lively Issues.

Others treat us based on perceived personal demographics (e.g. age, race/nationality) and our appearances (clothing style, hair style, music preferences). That is part of our human nature. Your and your family's personal experiences within our communities offer unique observations which are not only welcome at the table, but are essential for all of us to better understand our communities. This is also why this program is not just for League members. We value the opinions of all our area residents.

If you're unfamiliar with this League event, it really is something you want to experience. You not only get to present and discuss issues, you also get the unique opportunity to hear how others in our communities view and experience the world. It's positively eye-opening. This is the primary reason that Lively Issues is scheduled for three hours.

In addition to discussing issues, the current Review Study Team will present some of the findings uncovered through our research. The approved 2023-2024 study is a Review of all of our LWV Appleton-Fox Cities positions through a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and a Regional lens, so these findings will have an impact on our discussions Saturday.

Please join us and bring a friend or two. Beverages and snacks will be provided.

LIVELY ISSUES

Saturday, January 13 • 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 Noon
Menasha Public Library (440 1st Street, Menasha, WI)

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS

February 5 (Monday, 6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.; virtual) – **Legislative Town Hall**

February 13 (Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.; virtual) – **“Environmental Justice: Systemic problems. Collaborative Solutions.** What does it look like for communities across the state, in both urban and rural areas?” Co-sponsored with LWV of the La Crosse Area. Speakers will include Julie Majerus (WI DNR Environmental Justice Coordinator) and Meleesa Johnson (Wisconsin's Green Fire organization).

March 18 (Monday, 6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.) – **Consensus**; Location: Van Zeeland Nursery & Landscape Community Room

April 15 (Monday, 6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.) – **Affordable Senior Housing**; Location: Brewster Village, 3300 W. Brewster St., Appleton, WI; plus Optional Tour of Brewster Village (4:00 p.m.)

May 23 (Thursday, 5:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.) – **Annual Meeting**; Location: The Hillside at Plamann Park, 1375 E. Broadway Drive, Appleton, WI



Tune in to **Focus Fox Valley** on **WHBY 1150 AM**
with Hayley Tenpas on **Wednesday, January 17 • 12:10 to 12:30 p.m.**
to hear League President Linda Bjella and Voter Services VP Jacqui Klimaszewski inform listeners about the upcoming February election!

2023 HOLIDAY BRUNCH: 'Freedom to Read' Attracts a Crowd

The Holiday Brunch on December 16, 2023 attracted a crowd of about 90 people to Bubolz Nature Preserve. With a theme of "The Freedom to Read," the event featured a panel presentation by Colleen Rortvedt, Appleton Public Library Director; Bradley Shipps, OWLS; Nick Ross, AASD School Board; and Allie Krause, Hortonville Public Library.

Another highlight of the event was the presentation of the Making Democracy Work Awards. Maiyoua Thao was recognized for launching a Hmong Community Center focused on serving the elderly and youth which included a community garden, and for leadership on the local and state level to encourage voting by Hmong residents.

Also honored was Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education, an Appleton-based citizens group that provides information on public schools and advocates for public education.

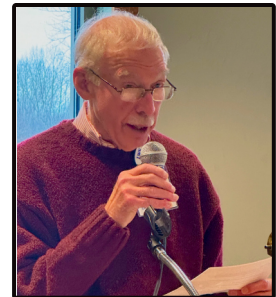
Maiyoua , who along with her husband owns Long Cheng Marketplace, helped launch a non-profit Hmong Community Center focused on care for Hmong youth and elders, including a community garden that provides elders with a space to grow their own food, teach Hmong youth about traditional gardening, and share the bounty with other elders in that community.



She collaborated with LWV of Wisconsin to help the Hmong community learn about voting, creating an informational document in Hmong. During the 2022 election, she developed training for the Hmong community on how to register, how to obtain mail-in ballots, and how to find nonpartisan information. She also organized vans to take elders to the polls and to turn in their ballots early.

Led by retired Appleton Board of Education member Jim Bowman, Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education (FCA4PE) provides information to help residents advocate and vote for candidates and issues affecting public schools in the Fox Valley. The group produces multi-lingual versions of a resource guide making a case for a strong public school system as a foundation for a democratic society, which aligns with LWVWI positions.

At election time, the group circulates surveys and offers questions for League interviews with candidates for local school boards. Members have testified before the state legislature's Joint Finance Committee, issued action alerts, and published letters to the editor focused on the impact of private school vouchers on public school budgets.



ACTION: Followup to Brunch Library Legislation Q&A

Following our Freedom to Read Holiday Brunch program, we heard back from Bradley Shipps, Director, Outagamie Waupaca Library System. Bradley was responding to some of the requests voiced during the Q&A.

Q: Is there anything we can do with our state legislators that will make a difference?

A: Yes. Let your legislators on both sides of the aisle know that you value intellectual freedom and will oppose any bills that infringe upon it.

Q: What library-related bills are currently circulating in the Wisconsin legislature?

A: Currently the legislative bills on both sides are essentially "messaging" bills. Majority party bills on these issues are unlikely to acquire the Governor's signature and minority party bills are unlikely to be heard in committee. Taking advocacy on current specific bills is unlikely to have much impact for that reason.

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ACTION: Library Legislation Q&A, cont.

Q: What is the Wisconsin Statute quoted that morning that protects librarians, library trustees, and libraries from lawsuits and prosecution?

A: Wisconsin Statute 944.21(8)(a) and (b)([https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/document/statutes/944.21\(8\)](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/document/statutes/944.21(8)))

Interested in more background? On Tuesday, December 19, 2023, DPI State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly wrote the following Op Ed in the *Wisconsin State Journal* about intellectual freedom: <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/dpi-connected/don-t-let-extremists-criminalize-librarians-censor-libraries-wisconsin>. If you would like to view the full list of bills, please email Jan Quinlan at action@lwvappletonfoxcities.org

2023 HOLIDAY BRUNCH: Photo Album

Freedom to Read Panelists



Colleen Rortvedt
Appleton Public
Library



Bradley Shipps
OWLS



Allie Krause
Hortonville
Public Library



Nick Ross
AASD
School Board



ACTION: Legislative Town Hall Slated for February 5

By Jan Quinlan
Vice President of Action
action@lwvappletonfoxcities.org

The League of Women Voters of Appleton-Fox Cities along with the Winnebago County League and the Greater Green Bay League will host the next **Legislative Town Hall on Monday, February 5, 2024 from 6:30-8:00 p.m.** For the first time, we have expanded our invitation list to include elected officials from Oshkosh to greater Green Bay area, giving a wider range of insights into the legislative priorities of our representatives in Madison.

These Fox Valley legislators have been invited: Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara, Senator Robert Cowles, Senator Dan Feyen, Senator Andre Jacque, Senator Eric Wimberger, Representative Joy Goeben, Representative Nate Gustafson, Representative Joel Kitchens, Representative John Macco, Representative David Murphy, Representative Lori Palmeri, Representative Kristina Shelton, Representative Lee Snodgrass, Representative David Steffen, and Representative Ron Tusler.

This will be a virtual meeting so please be sure to check **Upcoming Events** on our [website](#) to register and receive the Zoom link.

What are the Wisconsin issues you think should be included? Submit your questions for legislators to: action@lwvappletonfoxcities.org Please be aware that we will screen questions to ensure a nonpartisan exchange of ideas.

As in the past, we will hold our Legislative Town Hall even if not all elected representatives are able to join us.

VOTER SERVICES: Prospective Voters Need Your Help

Jacqui Klimaszewski
Vice President, Voter Services
voterservice@lwvappletonfoxcities.org

Voter Registration Assistance

In December we were at the Hmong New Year Celebration at East High School and provided voter information to a number of people—plus we played the Civics Game with numerous children and adults. It was a very productive day.

There is much planning going on for the upcoming winter/spring elections. We have some locations identified (high schools, assisted living homes, etc.)—however, if there are community locations where you think would be important for us to have a table, please contact: voterservice@lwvappletonfoxcities.org.

We will need more volunteers for some of these plans. Let us know if you need training and we'll get something set up for you. Remember, we always try to connect the newly trained with veteran volunteers, so you're never completely on your own. More information on locations and schedules will be coming up in the next newsletter.

Primary Election-February 20

Lists of candidates running for offices in the Fox Cities have recently been finalized. We will be focused on setting up candidate interviews for races that will be on the primary ballot first: Appleton City Council, District 4, and Grand Chute Town Board Supervisory Seat 2. The goal is to record these and have them on our website. If there are other races on the primary ballot of interest to you, please contact us.

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VOTER SERVICES: Your Help Needed, cont.

Planning for interviews for the Spring Election (April 2) will then begin for contested races. If there is a race of particular interest to you, please contact us.

Call with Questions

Please contact us with questions for candidates for the February and April elections: voterservice@lwvappletonfoxcities.org. Please indicate the position you are directing the question(s) for. (e.g. Appleton City Council, District 4—then the question or questions). Additional candidate information will be on VOTE411.

MEMBERSHIP: Renewal Deadline Is Looming

By **Cindy Fallona, Membership Director**

membership@lwvappletonfoxcities.org

*Please welcome our newest members — **Connie Roop, Peter Roop, Patricia Hirby, Steve Hirby, and Emily Tseffos!***

We Need You! It is time to renew your League membership. The deadline to renew online or by check is January 18th. New members are always welcome! There is no better way to Defend Democracy/ Empower Voters than by being a member of the League of Women Voters USA, Wisconsin and Appleton-Fox Cities.

Whether you are new to the League or wish to renew your membership, I will make it very easy for you! Go online to lwvappletonfoxcities.org. Click the Join/Renew button at the top of the home page. If you have questions, or should you encounter any difficulties paying online, please contact me at membership@lwvappletonfoxcities.org. Prefer to pay by check? Print the [renewal form](#) and send it, along with your check, to Treasurer, LWV of Appleton-Fox Cities, PO Box 1281, Appleton, WI 54912, ATTN Renewal.

DIVERSITY•EQUITY•INCLUSION

BOOK SHARE GROUP SELECTS 1ST BOOK OF 2024!

Let's launch our 2024 book reads and conversations with this latest DEI book selection —

"Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm"
by Robin DiAngelo

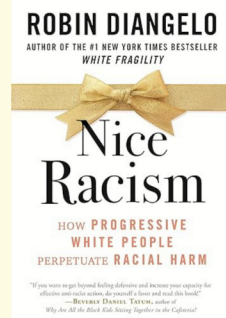
NEW DAY & TIME: WEDNESDAY, January 31, 11 A.M. to 12 Noon

WHERE: League Office (120 N. Morrison St., Appleton)

WHAT: Action-oriented discussion

WHO: open to anyone!

Even if you haven't read the book, you're welcome to come to this lively noon hour book discussion. Bring a friend or coworker. Bring your questions and add your experiences. And, bring suggestions for the next book to read and discuss.



LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF APPLETON-FOX CITIES



You could say we have a “vested interest” in voting!
A very limited number of these crisp yet cozy League vests are available. They will proclaim the call to vote all through the spring election season. A very few remaining Lands End full-zip vests will be available at the Lively Issues session on January 13 at the Menasha Public Library. Or email info@lwvappletonfoxcities.org for purchasing details.

DEI: Understanding Race Through Cake & Colored Markers



Through a special collaboration with the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, the League invites members and our community to explore race, cultural bias, and inclusion through cake, conversation and colored markers at a pair of one-time-only events.

Whether you are new to DEI issues or have been on a journey of discovery for some time, these programs promise to engage and inspire you. Both are the creations of former Wisconsin Poet Laureate Dasha Kelly Hamilton and will have you dishing on DEI!

Dasha Kelly Hamilton's "**Makin' Cake**" spoken word performance at the PAC on **February 27** will give you reason to examine race, culture and class through the metaphor of baking. Bakers on stage will whip up confections that exemplify her message before you are invited to indulge in conversation — and treats — with the poet and creative change agent. This event was featured in a League silent auction basket, so if you missed out on that, here's your chance to enjoy it on center stage. [Tickets](#) are limited, so scoop up yours today!!



Explore your own DEI journey guided by Dasha Kelly Hamilton during an *exclusive* League collaboration with the PAC on **February 28**. Creativity will be key during this "**Truth Evolution!**"

We can't wait to offer details of this free evening experience. Save the date, and watch for an invitation as well as information on the League website and social media *soon!*



Lawrence University hosts the 33rd Fox Cities Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Monday, January 15 at 6 p.m. in Memorial Chapel.

Hear from:

- Keynote Speaker Cainan Davenport | "We Have A Dream"
- Highlight Speaker Dr. Adriana McCleer

With musical performances from:

- NOIR | Lawrence University student group
- Star Scholars | Music & Poetry

The program also will feature the presentation of Jane LaChapelle McCarty Unity in Diversity MLK Community Leader and MLK Educator awards.

IN MEMORIAM

Our League has lost two significant members with the passing of Rev. Cynthia Johnson and Jane Dwyre Garton. We extend sincere sympathies to their families, friends and communities they served.

Jane Dwyre Garton was a journalist, mentor, feminist, and leader whose contributions impacted many Fox Cities organizations, especially those focused on women and girls. A League member, she chaired a study which led to the creation of the Women's Fund for the Fox Valley Region, for which she was a founding donor and its first executive director.

Rev. Cynthia Johnson, a former president of LWV of Appleton, died peacefully at her home on November 13, 2023. Rev. Johnson was an ordained minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, and had served the Appleton Fellowship.