



*your*  
★ **VOTER** ★

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**LWVNYS website**

[www.lwvny.org](http://www.lwvny.org)

**LWVUS website**

[www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

Voter is published 11 times a year. Send copy by the second Monday of the month to Terri Parks.

*The League and Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site present*

# Has Journalism Failed Democracy? Society?

Date: Thursday, September 23, 2021

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site  
641 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14202

This is a hybrid Zoom and in-person event. Thirty people may attend the event in-person. All in-person attendees must wear masks.

Panel: **James Campbell, Ph.D.**, SUNYAB Distinguished Professor, Political Science Department, author of numerous books and articles  
**Lee Coppola, J.D.**, former dean of St. Bonaventure School of Journalism and Mass Communication, retired news reporter, and former assistant U.S. attorney in Buffalo  
**Sandra Tan**, Buffalo News reporter since 2000 with focus on local government, Buffalo Newspaper Guild president, graduate of Columbia University School of Journalism

The discussion will be moderated by Lynda Stephens.

Discussion issues including but not limited to: Free press as The Fourth Estate, relationship to US democracy; critical nature of an “informed electorate”; media biases including “selective omission”; propaganda vs. facts; impact of corporate ownership; influence and challenges of diverse media including print, television, Internet, “social media”; impact of decline of local newspapers

**Registration is required. Contact the League at [lwvbn.org](http://lwvbn.org) or call 716-986-4898. Please be sure to indicate if you want to attend in person or by Zoom.**

### League of Women Voters Mission

The League of Women Voters is a good government organization that encourages informed and active participation in the political process, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League never supports political parties or candidates.

## **Letter from Our New President**

Hello League!

Wow, the days do fly by. I hope you are enjoying our beautiful Western New York summer.

I am happy to report that we have a vibrant and busy League. Everyone is contributing to our goal of educating and registering our citizens to vote. Our upcoming September kick-off program – “Has Journalism Failed Democracy? Society?” – and another Fighting for Our Vote webinar with our partners, the NAACP and Self Advocacy of New York, are on deck in the coming months. Please note the calendar of meetings and join us in planning these exciting programs and bring your ideas for others. Or explore interesting topics with our discussion group. All are welcome to any of the committee meetings scheduled.

We are continually working on keeping our website up to date. Please visit [lwvbn.org](http://lwvbn.org) for information on our local activities and links to LWVNY, our state League, and LWVUS, our national League.

We have had a change in our office staff. Victoria Mueller has moved on to a full time position. Amelia Palka-Mikes will be coming on board to keep us organized and support our efforts.

Please email me with any questions or concerns at [president@lwvbn.org](mailto:president@lwvbn.org). I look forward to getting to know each of you.

With kind regards,  
*Lori Robinson, President*

### **Waterfront Committee Volunteer Opportunity**

The Waterfront Committee will meet on October 20 at 4:00 p.m. via Zoom. We continue to advocate for our position that supports “protection and enhancement of the natural environment at the water’s edge.” But how does the “natural environment” function?

Perhaps the Outer Harbor would benefit from a cadre of folks willing to guide the public through the wonders of the natural world at that precious place. Could we help organize docents for the Outer Harbor?

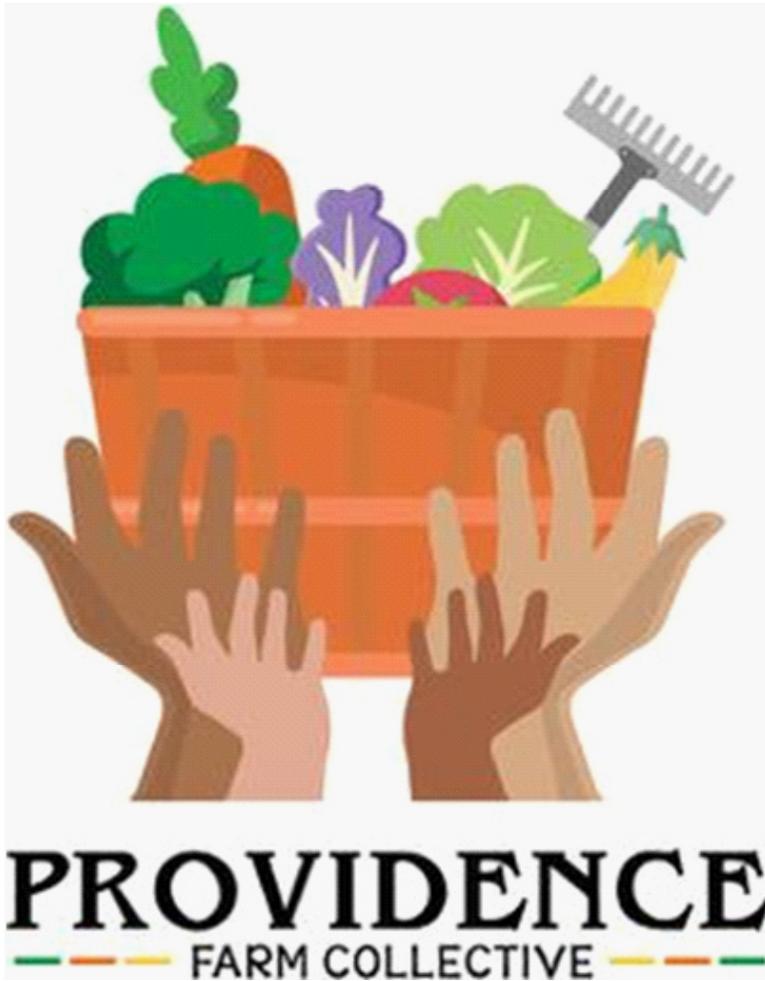
All of us are conditioned to see nature as the simple, sterile landscape of lawns and edgings and cultivated gardens near our homes. What we have at the Outer Harbor is nature in the raw: untended meadows and open spaces with trees that grow where they sprout and critters that live and love and die without any intervention from humans. To the uninitiated it is a mess, and I suspect that the ECHDC board (owners of the Outer Harbor) feels uncomfortable with this uncontrolled side of nature. Outer Harbor docents could share insights with the public, in small doses, to garner appreciation for our urban treasure.

I offered this idea first to Jay Burney, at Friends of Times Beach, and he is willing to train such volunteers. Others I have consulted are enthusiastic, so long as we cast our net far and wide for helpers. When more members of the public understand the intimate workings of nature at the Outer Harbor, the more support will grow for its protection. Please email me at [lwvbn@lwvbn.org](mailto:lwvbn@lwvbn.org) if you’re interested in becoming an Outer Harbor docent.

Come join in the conversation, October 20, 2021, at 4:00 p.m., via Zoom and help expand the network of people who love and protect all of Buffalo’s waterfront!

*Gladys Gifford, Chair*

## Providence Farm Collective Message to League Members



Dear Members,

It was wonderful to share the work of Providence Farm Collective (PFC) with you on July 21. I am grateful to all who attended! For me, the best part of PFC tours is the opportunity to meet community-minded leaders who offer dialogue and support as to how an organization like PFC can work with other organizations in WNY to uplift its communities. The fact that PFC is only the third incubator farm program for under-resourced farmers in all of New York State speaks to the uniqueness of its work and the need for its programs – especially in Western New York where one in five children is food insecure, and racial and economic segregation are persistent barriers for food access and land ownership.

As I mentioned during my presentation, there is opportunity and urgency in our region to rethink the food and farm systems, to make them sustainable, resilient and, more important, equitable. There is also untapped opportunity in our region to develop businesses and jobs in agriculture that uplift and empower under-resourced individuals and their communities, while also conserving our natural resources. PFC, through the three programs it offers, is a unique enterprise and a trailblazing leader in its mission to empower just and equitable access to

food and farmland. Again, the intersectionality of food security, sustainable organic farming, land ownership, nutrition, health, economic justice, and sovereignty – all happen at Providence Farm Collective.

Thank you for networking on behalf of PFC and its farmers. Regarding next steps, please feel free to make my introduction to other organizations such as churches or community organizations through my email. Presently we are very much in need of support for our capital campaign to purchase the land at Burton Road, secure it in agricultural easement, rehabilitate the barn, and build a pavilion. It would be wonderful if you could connect me with others who would attend a tour and consider becoming part of the fundraising team for the campaign. As I noted above, this is a necessary next step in securing the future of Providence Farm Collective for its farmers and building more resilient, sustainable and equitable farm and food systems.

If anyone from the League is interested in making a donation to the joint capital campaign in support of Providence Farm Collective, please feel free to share my contact information.

Thanks so much for your time and consideration!

Kind regards,  
*Kristin M. Heltman-Weiss, President, Providence Farm Collective*  
[ProvidenceFarmCollective.org](https://ProvidenceFarmCollective.org)

## League Discussion Group Reaction to Critical Race Theory

If you want to explore the issue of critical race theory as the LWVBN discussion group did in July, you can use the first link to Wikipedia (below) to get at least one definition:

***Critical race theory (CRT)** is a body of legal scholarship and an academic movement of [civil-rights](#) scholars and activists in the United States that seeks to critically examine [U.S. law](#) as it intersects with [issues of race](#) and to challenge mainstream [American liberal](#) approaches to [racial justice](#). CRT examines social, cultural, and legal issues primarily as they relate to race and [racism in the United States](#).*

Our group read many articles in preparation for this discussion. It was a useful learning experience. We found that what we support should be defined by another term. CRT is a complicated issue, especially for those in our group who grew up in a suburb where the first time they may have had contact with someone of another color or religion was when they went to college.

We read a Fourth of July oration by Frederick Douglass that he delivered in 1852. He said, "We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and the future." We decided CRT is a frightening term leading people to think in terms of the oppressed and oppressors rather than thinking of how more alike we are. Focusing on the differences can lead to white privilege and bullying. Some members of the group suggested that our country is a work in progress. The second link (below) is a recommendation for those of us who seek to improve our relationships and learn other perspectives. As adults, we can start a personal effort to learn to be more inclusive, so check out this link for this free program.

We don't understand the current opposition to learning history and civics. The subconscious learning that leads to prejudice needs to be recognized and understood before we can make changes. CRT has become a political issue. Institutional racism NEEDS to be addressed. Some of the barriers to inappropriate language and behaviors no longer exist. We function in silos that threaten our democracy. Who were those people who threatened our democracy on January 6, 2021? Do they represent our best? Are we proud of their behavior?

Our goal is to quietly and gradually familiarize young people with the historical facts that they have not been taught. It need not be intimidating if presented in the way it has been done by Mr. Rogers, School House Rock, and Sesame Street, and in children's literature. We are all in the HUMAN race and should not be defined by differences.

Our next discussion will take place on Zoom on Tuesday, August 31, at 7:00 p.m.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical\\_race\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_race_theory)

<https://www.uwbec.org/21daychallenge>

*Marian Deutschman*

## Great Decisions

The Great Decisions discussion group will meet on Thursday, September 2, at 10 a.m. via Zoom to discuss Chapter 4 in the 2021 Great Decisions book: **The coldest war: toward a return to Great Power competition in the Arctic?** The Foreign Policy Association, which sponsors this discussion group nationwide, says this about the topic:

"Struggles over the Melting Arctic" by Stephanie Pezard: "U.S. President Donald Trump left many scratching their heads when it was rumored that he was looking to purchase the large island nation of Greenland from Denmark. While any potential deal seems highly unlikely, the event shows the changing opinion within the U.S. government toward engagement with the Arctic region. Because of climate change, large sheets of Arctic ice are melting, exposing vast stores of natural gas and oil. With Russia and China already miles ahead with their Arctic strategies, can the U.S. catch up?"

Fran Holmes will lead the discussion. Contact Fran Holmes at [lwvbn@lwvbn.org](mailto:lwvbn@lwvbn.org) for more information.

## Our League Testifies at the IRC Redistricting Hearings

New York State's new Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) is holding its first round of hearings across the state. The commissioners solicited public comment on how New York shall draw new legislative districts for the U.S. House of Representatives, the New York State Senate and the New York State Assembly. The eighth IRC hearing took place on August 12 and covered the Finger Lakes Region and all of Western New York. Margaret Meyer testified for our League, stating our position in support of fair legislative districts that are free from gerrymandering.

The IRC's second round of hearings will occur in the fall when the IRC will present its proposed maps to the public for approval. We anticipate this second round of hearings to generate significant debate and even controversy, as individuals, communities and organizations evaluate how IRC's new district maps will directly affect them.

Our testimony at the first round of hearings is printed here and is posted on our website, [lwvbn.org](http://lwvbn.org).

*Janet Massaro, Chair, Money in Politics Committee*

### **Testimony for New York State Redistricting Commission**

*My name is Margaret Meyer, and I am testifying on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government.*

*The issue we bring to your attention is regarding gerrymandered districts at the state and national levels. Legislative gerrymandering disenfranchises New York's voters and puts incumbency and party above people. Voters become discouraged and silenced when electoral districts are controlled by one party.*

*When there is little competition in elections and voters know that their vote will not matter, hopelessness sets in. They do not feel heard and turn away from the privilege of voting. Too often, politicians cater to the people who will fund their campaigns and re-elect them.*

*When the gerrymandered district candidates are not challenged, those elected have little incentive to be accountable to ALL those they represent. They see no need for town halls or meeting with their constituents except for PR events. They hide from or avoid some of their people when there are concerns. Subsequently, our democracy becomes compromised.*

*There are many issues people in the Buffalo-Niagara region experience: lack of affordable housing, transportation, low wages, poverty, pollution where the impoverished live and more. Poverty exists in every area of Buffalo-Niagara. Politicians like to ignore this inconvenient fact. The poor have no voice since they have no money to influence and support political candidates. They know they will not be heard and do not vote! Like one man said, "It's like we don't matter."*

*Redistricting impacts every single issue our communities face. We are asking the commission to create fair, nonpartisan congressional and state electoral districts so that there will be a level playing field. Fair redistricting will provide an opportunity for candidates to really compete. The electorate needs to be able to vote for candidates who will listen and truly represent them.*

*Thank you. Remember that fair redistricting really matters!*

## **Naturalization Ceremonies Remain on Hold**

Currently new citizens are being welcomed one by one, in individual ceremonies, conducted by United States Citizenship and Immigration Service officers. The officers are handing out voter registration forms, but do not know how many are being returned. They are continuing to limit access to the Federal Building so we are unable to help register new citizens at this time. We are beginning to look for other things we could do to reach this critical population. As I hear new information I will share it.

I sent a welcome to all new volunteers. If I missed anyone please email me at [lwvbn@lwvbn.org](mailto:lwvbn@lwvbn.org) and I will add you to our group and my distribution list.

*Deborah Shiffner, Coordinator, Naturalization Ceremonies*

## **On the Many Uses of Kitty Litter: West Valley to WIPP**

Merlin, our lap cat, died in the first month of our Covid-19 lockdown. After a suitable mourning period, we went to the SPCA in search of a cat. I had fallen in love with Macadamia's picture on their website. When we found him in the young adult cat room, the staff pressed us to adopt his outgoing "younger sister," Chestnut, as well. A single hoarder's neglected cats got a set of related names; these 17 cats were all named after nuts. Last year's names were breakfast cereals. After rehabilitation, they went to adoptive homes that could take more than one from the hoard for companionship. Mack and Chessy are great entertainment. They aren't yet lap cats but are becoming more confident and less shy all the time.

Our two-cat household goes through more kitty litter than with Merlin alone. But nothing like the amount of kitty litter used in the nuclear industry!

One of the first pieces that I found when I started serious reading about West Valley Demonstration Project nuclear matters was a 2012 UB engineering doctoral dissertation, "Evaluation of a Natural Zeolite Permeable Treatment Wall in the Removal of Strontium-90 from Groundwater: Installation to Long-Term Performance." Dr. Shannon Seneca's research was key in the 2010 installation of an underground wall of natural zeolite (a mineral you know as kitty litter) at the West Valley nuclear site. The project won the National Groundwater Association 2011 Remediation Project of the Year Award (given to the West Valley Demonstration Project team – WVES, DOE, AMEC Geomatrix and UB).

The Bear River Zeolite treatment wall is 260 meters long, 6–9 meters deep, and 1 meter wide and contains 2372 tons of natural zeolite. Zeolite removes the radioactive Strontium-90 from the groundwater before it flows into Frank's Creek. The groundwater was contaminated by a leaking pipe or valve in the basement of the Main Process Plant Building (MPPB) many years ago. Because the plume is so large and concentrated, without the wall, there is far greater risk to Cattaraugus Creek, Lake Erie, and our drinking water. There are portions of the zeolite containing Strontium-90 that need to be replaced and continue to do so until the source under the MPPB can be removed after the building is demolished.

Zeolite has another famous use in the nuclear complex. It is a handy, absorbent packing material for barrels containing military transuranic waste being shipped off to Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), the U.S. government underground burial site in New Mexico. One day at the Los Alamos National Laboratory they happened to run out of their usual zeolite supply and sent someone off to buy some kitty litter at a pet store. He came back with some organic kitty litter, *Sweat Scoop*. Has to be even better, right? NOT! Without adequate education or briefing, without adequate management and under time pressure, they didn't realize that organic chemistry isn't the same as inorganic chemistry. Buried deep underground at WIPP, the barrel caused an explosion and fire in February 2014, releasing radioactivity to nearby communities, closing the WIPP facility for 35 months, and costing over a billion dollars.

(For more details on the mishap, see Vincent Lalenti, "Drum breach,..." *Social Studies of Science*, 2021)

*Pat Townsend*

## League Meeting Schedule for 2021-2022

	Meeting Day	Time	Exceptions
Program/Issues/Events Committee	1st Tuesday	4:00 pm	
Great Decisions	1st Thursday	10:00 am	no meeting in January or February
Board of Directors	2nd Tuesday	4:00 pm	no meeting in December or June
Local Government Committee	2nd Wednesday	2:00 pm	
Get Out the Vote Committee	3rd Monday	7:00 pm	
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee	3rd Tuesday	7:00 pm	
Money in Politics Committee	3rd Friday	1:00 pm	
Education Committee	4th or last Thursday	1:30 pm	
Healthcare Committee	4th Friday	11:00 am	
Waterfront Committee	Check the Voter Calendar		
League Discussion Group	Check the Voter Calendar		

Please note that the locations for meetings may change. Currently all groups except the Money in Politics Committee meet by Zoom. The calendar for each Voter will have the location.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF BUFFALO/NIAGARA

1272 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14209

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

## September 2021

*Note: Due to social distancing and stay-at-home practices, meetings are subject to change and may take place via phone or computer. Please contact the committee chair for the latest information.*

**Thursday, September 2, 10:00 a.m.**

**Great Decisions**

via Zoom

**Tuesday, September 7, 4:00 p.m.**

**Program, Issues & Events Committee**

via Zoom

**Thursday, September 9, 11:00 a.m.**

**Centennial Celebration Committee**

via Zoom

**Monday, September 13, 4:00 p.m.**

**Board of Directors**

League office and via Zoom

**Wednesday, September 15, 2:00 p.m.**

**Local Government Committee**

via Zoom

**Friday, September 17, 1:00 p.m.**

**Money in Politics Committee**

League Office

**Monday, September 20, 7:00 p.m.**

**Get Out the Vote Committee**

via Zoom

**Tuesday, September 21, 7:00 p.m.**

**Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee**

via Zoom

**Thursday, September 23, 11:00 a.m.**

**Centennial Celebration Committee**

via Zoom

**Thursday, September 30, 1:30 p.m.**

**Education Committee**

via Zoom