

The Voter

August 2023

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear LWVSP members,

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you as president of our League. I'm excited about the next two years and the continuing good work we'll do in our community.

The success of the past few years, with Amy Perna and Heidi Kloempken at the helm, built on a path established by previous presidents. I'm glad Heidi will be staying on as vice president, bringing her wisdom and grace to the board and helping keep me on track.

As we continue on our mission to improve our democracy, this year's board will engage St. Paul residents from their perches on these committees:

- **Voter Services.** Co-chairs Joann Ellis and Pam Mercier will be reimagining how to engage voters now that the new voter registration laws are in place.
- **Membership.** Nona Beining continues to chair this committee, seeking to engage members, provide benefits, and ensure all our members have a voice.
- **Program.** Chair Cheryl Bailey continues working with her team to create a series of programs that cover both education and advocacy.
- **Youth Vote.** In Committee Chair Grace Reardon, the Saint Paul schools have an active advocate for graduating informed voters.



Left to right: Vice President Heidi Kloempken, former Co-President Amy Perna, President Beatrice Owen, DEI Committee Chair Donna Addkison

- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.** As ongoing chair, Donna Addkison will help us find ways to ensure our League community is representative of our larger St. Paul community.
- **Executive Committee.** This four-member group comprises Nichole Fairbanks, continuing as treasurer, Jacquelyn Kelly, continuing as secretary, Heidi, and me.

Now, about your role and your voice, which are vital to the success of our League. Are you able to

continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

Events	<u>2</u>
LWV Statewide Registration Event	<u>3</u>
Program Recap: Toni Carter & Rena Moran	<u>4</u>
DEI Policy Sets the Stage	<u>5</u>
Book Clubs & Annual Meeting	<u>8</u>

EVENTS

SOS Speaker at Voter Service

All members are invited to attend a special Voter Services Committee meeting on August 16.

Guest speaker Melanie Hazelip, director of voter outreach for the Office of Secretary of State, will join us to discuss Voter 101 and election law changes that will make access to voting easier for more people. She'll also talk about local elections and their importance.

We'll meet at the Highland Park Library on **Wednesday, August 16**, 6:30 to 8 p.m. It would be great to see all of you!

Fall Candidate Forums

We're nailing down dates for candidate forums. Look for details on lwwsp.org. (Wards not listed currently have candidates running unopposed.)

If you have time to help with any of these, please contact [Amy Perna](mailto:pernalwvstp@gmail.com) (pernalwvstp@gmail.com).

Ward 1 – September 28

Ward 3 – September 21

Ward 5 & 7 – TBD

School Board – September 18

More For Your Calendars

August 7: Evening Book Club. 6:30 p.m. (See details on page 8.)

August 16: Guest speaker at Voter Service Committee meeting. See "SOS Speaker" story on this page.

September 11 Evening Book Club, 6:30 p.m.

September 12: Learn about ranked-choice voting from members of FairVote Minnesota at the fall season opener of "Our St. Paul: Learn With the League." Watch for details on LWVSP.org.

September 13: Morning Book Club, 10 a.m. (See page 8.)

President's Letter, continued

help on any of these committees? Are there other areas of interest you'd like us to consider? Please let us know!

Here's a little about me:

I recall hearing about the idea of service when I was 12, in the car with my mother. She pointed at a house as we drove by and said, "Mary Gover lives there. She is very active in the League of Women Voters."

That was the first time I heard about the League: my mother telling me that this was something people did—serve their community. Later I'd watch the presidential debates hosted by the League and become a life-long supporter of the organization, its goals, and what it stands for.

I grew up in St Peter and graduated from Gustavus. My master's degree in public policy is from The Ohio State University. My work life has revolved around three issues: membership organizations, education, and public health. Currently I'm executive director for the Minnesota chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. I work with members in the industry, including contractors, suppliers, and lawyers. Service is still my goal.

My contact information is below. Call, write—let's chat. I'd like to hear your League story and what service means to you.

—Beatrice Owen
Beaowen1234@gmail.com
612-900-8857

Registering Newly Eligible Voters

On July 7, LWVMN and the Minnesota Department of Corrections sponsored registration events across the state for citizens who have felony convictions but are no longer incarcerated. These individuals may now vote even if they're on parole—thanks to a new law passed by the state legislature in 2023. The League strongly supports this law and advocated for its passage.

At Saint Paul's Federal Courthouse, two volunteers from the Department of Corrections joined Pamela Mercier, co-chair of the Voter Services Committee for LWVSP, to register eligible voters.

'People who are more engaged in their communities are at less risk of coming back into the system.'

At the Minneapolis courthouse, state and federal officials stopped in to make remarks. Kito Bess, chief U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services officer, explained that probation officers now cover voting information during pre-release orientation. Paul Schnell, Minnesota Corrections Commissioner, spoke about the public safety benefits of parolees being able to vote.

"We know people who are more connected with communities and are engaged in their communities are at less risk of coming back into the [corrections] system," said Schnell.

The Secretary of State's office estimates that there are more than 50,000 Minnesota citizens now eligible to vote as a result of the new voting law.

"The State of Minnesota and community organizations are working to reach newly enfranchised voters through phone calls, text messages, emails, and visits with parole officers," says an [online article on the Secretary of State website](#).



Above, Pamela Mercier, right, with other volunteers.



Left, Kito Bess

Because of the July 7 event, 18 more Minnesotans are registered to vote.

Check out some of the plentiful press coverage of the event. Several stories include an interview of a formerly incarcerated man who turned out to register:

- [Fox9 News](#)
- [Kare11 News](#)
- [MinnPost](#)
- [Star Tribune](#)
- [Mankato Free Press](#)

OUR ST. PAUL: LEARN WITH THE LEAGUE

All Politics Are Local: Meet Commissioners Carter & Moran

Suburban Community Channel (SCC) and Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) broadcast this Zoom program, moderated by Heidi Kloempken, now serving LSVSP as vice president.

You can view this program and others on our [LWVSP YouTube page](#). Our Saint Paul: Learn With the League offers programs 8 to 10 months a year.

On May 23, Toni Carter, newly appointed Metropolitan Council member for District 14, and Rena Moran, District 4 Ramsey County Commissioner, explained their roles and talked about learning the ropes in new positions.



Rena Moran



Toni Carter

After 18 years as a Ramsey County Commissioner, Toni Carter was appointed to the Metropolitan Council in March by Gov. Walz. She represents District 14, which covers the portions of St. Paul west of I-35E.

The 17-member Met Council is the regional policy-making body, planning agency, and infrastructure provider for the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. With 3 million residents in 182 cities and townships, the metro is home to more than half of the state's population. It's a diverse community, with more than 300 languages spoken at home.

The council's \$1.3 billion budget is funded by user fees (for transit and other services), state, federal and local governments, and metro-wide property taxes.

Per state law, the group plans for the region's physical, social, and economic needs, including transportation, aviation, water resources and regional parks. It provides services in three main areas: transit (via Metro Transit and Metro Mo-

bility), wastewater collection and treatment, and affordable housing.

By using policy and shared vision, Carter says, the council can facilitate orderly development as population grows. She sees the Council's role as "working out the kinks" between the suburbs, the urban core, businesses, and the natural environment so that everyone—from seniors to children, from businesses to nonprofit organizations—can thrive.

The Met Council's last comprehensive plan, for the year 2040, focused on stewardship of resources, prosperity, equity, livability, and sustainability. The draft 2050 plan includes these vision statements:

- Our region is equitable, inclusive, and welcoming.
- Our communities are healthy, safe, and vibrant.
- We lead in addressing climate change.
- We protect and restore natural systems.

Carter ended with a few comments on Metro Transit, which serves all seven metro area counties and about half its cities across 900 square

continued on page 6

Understanding the Policy, Then Being the Change

In 2020, the League of Women Voters U.S. incorporated a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policy into its bylaws, lifting DEI to the same level of importance as the nonpartisan policy.

Here's Article II, Purposes and Policies, of the national bylaws:

Sec. 1. Purposes. The purposes of the LWVUS are to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government and to act on selected governmental issues.

Sec. 2. Policies. The policies of the LWVUS are

1. Political Policy. The League shall not support or oppose any political party or any candidate.

2. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policy. The League is fully committed to ensure compliance – in principle and in practice – with LWVUS' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy.

That's Section 2 in its entirety. Notice that DEI is second only to nonpartisanship.

DEI and our goals for democracy are inextricably related.

Think about how much the nonpartisan policy has influenced the way we work, the success we've achieved, and the understanding of who are as an organization.

Now imagine the potential impact of the DEI policy. If we embraced it with the same gusto and commitment.

This year, as required by LWVUS, the St. Paul league incorporated the policy (along with other revisions) into our bylaws. Let's take a moment to review and begin to ponder what each of us as individuals—and all of us as the LWVSP —can do to move policy into practice.

(The document does not use a bullet list, but we're using one here to more easily see all the details of what diversity means.)

LWV is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.

There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of:

- *gender, gender identity*
- *ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin*
- *age, generation*
- *sexual orientation*
- *culture, religion, belief system*
- *marital status, parental status,*
- *socioeconomic status*
- *language, accent*
- *ability status, mental health, educational level or background*
- *geography, nationality*
- *work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type*
- *physical appearance*
- *political perspective or affiliation*
- *any other characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity*

You may ask how we, a group of volunteers, can focus on something as big as DEI when there are so many other pressing priorities in an active election season and in the countdown to the 2024 legislative session.

My answer: How can we not? DEI and our goals for democracy are inextricably related. If we re-

continued on page 6

DEI policy, continued from page 5

ally want to eliminate barriers to participation in elections and in democracy, should we not also eliminate barriers to participation within the League?

This work has already begun and will continue, as we take concrete steps to infuse LWVSP's membership, culture, and practices with diversity, equity and Inclusion. It will take time and commitment, and we'll need to believe that we can be the change we wish to see in the world.

I'll leave you with the following (which may be an old African proverb, though it's sometimes credited to the Dalai Lama): *If you think you are too small to make a difference, you have never been in bed with a mosquito.*

If you'd like to be a collaborator in our DEI evolution, please contact me at donna@withertynes.com.

—Donna Addkison

Commissioners, continued from page 4

miles. Carter notes that while it's part of the Met Council, the agency can have effects extending well beyond the metro area. The Green Line LRT project, for example, had a \$90 million payroll and, during construction, provided a paycheck to workers from 69 of the 87 counties in our state.

Transit ridership and workforce are down since the pandemic, but slowly increasing. Carter says funding from this session's state transportation should help provide resources to address recent safety concerns.

Rena Moran was a six-term state representative before beginning her term in January as Ramsey County Commissioner for District 4. (Her district includes much of St. Paul.) After developing so many relationships and es-

tablishing seniority in the legislature, Moran says it was a difficult decision to leave. But she sees her new role as an opportunity to tackle the same issues locally.

Among the issues she vows to take on at the county level: improved community access to services, investments in health and safety, increased support to youth and families, pathways for BIPOC entrepreneurs, affordable housing. She mentioned her commitment to transforming public safety and justice, and working to eliminate disparities between racial groups in Minnesota.

Q&A

What are your top three priorities?

Carter: safety, health and well-being, and sustainability. This means leveraging the existing structures in the Met Council's purview to maximize positive impacts on youth and families. Examples include promoting equity in the parks, better transportation to jobs, and housing vouchers.

Moran said she's always focused on children, family and community, which are all connected to big issues around housing, safety, workforce, and mental health. Stabilizing families, she says, is the umbrella for all those critical issues.

Thinking ahead, what project you haven't yet tackled that most interests you?

Moran wants to spend more time providing opportunity and resources to youth.

In looking at public safety, she says, we need to understand that youth are not adults.

"[By] bringing in the concept of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) . . . looking at mental health concepts and how we can [provide] resource for our young people instead of just incarceration," we can better help kids who are doing poorly. She sees opportunity in a "strength-based, trauma-informed juvenile justice system."

"Of course there are consequences," to crime,

continued on page 7

Commissioners, continued from page 6

she says, but she's passionate about changing the narrative, using what we know about brain development, then working with partners (sheriff and county attorney offices, schools, community groups, and families) to put supportive systems in place.

Carter, in her new role just two months at the time of the event, said she's noticing all the connections. Many of her comments dovetailed with Moran's emphasis on youth.

'I'd like to see us engage more of the voices, the ideas, and the plans of those who are most impacted by the region's efforts to grow.'

She mentioned that the council recently had 40 young people sharing their ideas on the 2050 regional development plan, and that's something she'd like to see more of. Housing, jobs, training, secondary education, transit—these are all youth issues. “We need them to be the ones who are planning,” Carter says. “I'd like to see us engage more of the voices, the ideas, and the plans of those who are most impacted by the region's efforts to grow.” She'd love to get kids to play a role in transit safety, for instance, rather than only be seen as part of the problem.

For Moran: How do we get high quality childcare to those who need it most?

Since childcare is both an immediate and future need, Moran wants to see vacant downtown offices transitioned to childcare. “We'll have to be creative and innovative,” she says. “It's so obvious ... brain development is critical by age 3, and parents are working. We can do this, but we have to value this.”

For Carter: How are the relationships on the council?

She acknowledged differences among council members on issues such as density and open space and varied ideas about safety, well-being and health—areas that the council is struggling with on the 2050 plan. But rather than a struggle of opinions, she says, the council is working to gather data and identify trends to make informed decisions together.

What's your call to action for our audience?

Toni Carter: “Make it happen. Whatever you can do or dream, begin it. Boldness has power and magic in it! Join the League, use your organization of choice, call the Met Council and be part of the 2050 discussion, lead and make connections, join a Ramsey County committee, clean the streets, and get people involved with you.

“As you act on your concern, you develop a greater capacity to help others, and others notice the work you're doing, and develop a propensity to help you.”

Rena Moran: “Change happens by those who show up and participate in the process. If you don't like something, do something. If you want something, do something. Be a part of the change that you want. Participate. Engage. Build relationship. Not being at the table is not an option. Find your voice. We need you!”

—Cheryl Bailey



Likable or Grammable?

Visit us and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

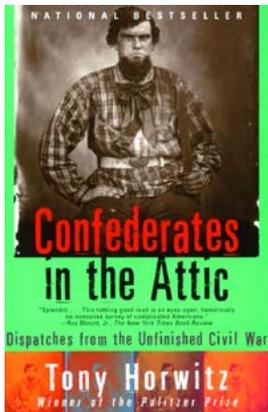


The Voter is published every other month by the League of Women Voters St. Paul. To submit suggestions or news, [contact Diane Hellekson](#) (dianereally@hotmail.com). Deadline for submittals is two weeks before the first of the month of publication, with exceptions for time-sensitive information.

BOOK CLUBS

Morning Book Group Returns in September

We're on summer break (which began after June 14, when we discussed *The Premonition: A Pandemic Story*, by Michael Lewis).



We'll get back together in September to talk about *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, by Tony Horwitz, who explores his own lifelong interest and people's deep ties to a war that ended more than 130 years ago.

From Kirkus Reviews: "Growing up in Virginia, Horwitz painted rebel heroes on the walls of his attic bedroom. Returning home after a decade spent covering foreign wars, he launches a year-long ramble through the landscape of the

Civil War, traveling from Virginia to Alabama in search of explanations for his (and America's) continuing interest in the conflict."

At this meeting we'll also choose books for the upcoming season.

Join us at 10 a.m., **Wednesday, September 13** at the Highland Library. —Mary Palmer

Evening Book Club

On August 7, 6:30 p.m., the groups meets to choose books to read for the upcoming year. The theme will be autobiographies, memoirs and biographies about women in politics. (Subjects can be politicians, people who reported on politics, or had other related roles.)

Although the book club picks a theme, they accept nominations for other nonfiction, and will consider some fiction books, too.

The group has been meeting on Zoom, but may meet in person for this one. [Email Karen](mailto:kare14will@gmail.com) (kare14will@gmail.com) to be added to the email list for updates.

ANNUAL MEETING

Business, Burritos & Kudos

LWVSP held its 103rd annual meeting June 5 at the Wellstone Center. Keynote speaker Michelle Witte, executive director of the Minnesota League, enthusiastically recounted all the voting-related updates from the past legislative session, including preregistration for 16- and 17-year-olds and restoring the vote to formally incarcerated people.

Beatrice Owen presented the Sunrise Award to Grace Reardon and Lia Pak in recognition of their work with Youth Vote. Heidi Kloempken presented the Faye Lyksett Award to Mary Palmer for her commitment to LWVSP and leadership in the morning book club.

Before passing updated bylaws (which will be posted online soon), we had a lively discussion. (Let the Board know of any questions.) We also had a positive financial report; thank you for your continued donations to LWVSP.

It was a lovely meeting—tasty food from El Burrito Mercado and great company. Thanks to the Membership Committee for pulling it together!



Bea Owen, Grace Reardon



Heidi Kloempken, Mary Palmer