

THE VOTER

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Holly Oppelt

Unite & Rise 8.5

Have you heard about our Unite & Rise 8.5 project that aims to build a movement of 8.5 million individuals to unite and rise up against the anti-democratic actions of this administration? Launched in May 2025 and running until the 2026 midterm elections, this initiative is part of our [Women Defend Democracy](#) campaign.

The number 8.5 million is the estimated number of voters it would take to bring about change through nonviolent protest. This is based on the [following finding](#) from the Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights:

“Nonviolent protests are twice as likely to succeed as armed conflicts...and those engaging a threshold of 3.5% of the population have never failed to bring about change.”

According to the [University of Florida](#), approximately 245 million Americans were eligible to vote in the 2024 general election. According to the above research, if 3.5% of these eligible voters – 8,575,000 people – engage in nonviolent protests, we will bring about meaningful change.

So, my question is: **WHAT HAS YOUR LOCAL LEAGUE DONE?** Did you march on July 17th in the [John Lewis Day of Action](#): Good Trouble Lives On March? His famous quote is 'Get in good trouble, necessary trouble'. Did you even take a moment to sign the commitment form the President Dianna references below. Let's get busy!

From LWVUS President Dianna Wynn: “Over the past three months, you all have worked tirelessly to mobilize and engage voters in Unite & Rise 8.5. Thank YOU for your commitment to protect and preserve our democratic institutions in our fight against authoritarianism. With August here, I know many of you are waiting for the second power playbook, the activation guide that outlines the different calls to action and activities for the next few months. LWVUS will share the second power playbook with League leaders early next week. Look for the new playbook soon on the League Management Site.

“To support Leagues in the second phase of our Unite & Rise initiative, LWVUS is hosting a community call Thursday, July 31 at 4 p.m. Central time. This is a space to coordinate and brainstorm with national staff and fellow League members on the second power playbook. Register for our community call [here](#), and if you haven't already, make sure to complete our online [commitment form](#).”

Let's all get to work and support this project. It's up to us!

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THANK YOU FROM TERESE GRANT

I want to give a huge Thank You to all the members of the League of Women Voters of Iowa for the lovely gifts that I received at the Convention in Mason City. It has been truly and honor to serve as President/Co-President of the League for the past six years. It would be impossible to mention all the things that we have done during this time. What I will treasure the most is all the wonderful people that I have gotten to know and worked with during my time serving as the Leader of the LWV of Iowa.

Terese Grant

Past-President, League of Women Voters of Iowa



Terese Grant accepts an Iowa Public Radio shirt as a gift from the LWVIA

Terese Grant shows off artwork that she received as appreciation gift from the LWVIA.



2025 LWVIA CONVENTION

The New LWVIA Officers



Introducing the new LWVIA Officers
(left to right)

- Shannon Patrick, Treasurer
- Linda Hagedorn, Vice President
- Holly Oppelt, President
- Paula Vaughn, Secretary

Mary Ellen Miller LWV UMRR ILO Chair and
Sue Wilson IA LWV Board Member at IA LWV
state convention in Mason City June 21,2025.



2025 LWVUS COUNCIL REPORT

By Polly Horton

President Holly Oppelt and I attended the 2025 LWVUS Council June 27-28 and 29.

The topics covered were:

- LWV declared a Constitutional Crisis
- Unite & Rise
- Transformation

It was a unanimous LWVUS Board decision to declare the constitutional crisis involving all 3 branches of government. The fabric of our democracy is directly threatened. We're witnessing an alarming rise in authoritarian tactics – with the current administration pushing the limits of executive power, undermining checks and balances and embracing policies that threaten the voting rights of millions.”

The LWVUS will use the words discrimination, equity, and inclusion in place of the letters. Unite & Rise operationalizes the strategies of:

- Collective Leadership
- Decision making
- Systems thinking and Community Engagement.

The League Transformation is appropriate now because LWV could be on a list targeted as a terrorist organization and receive challenges to its tax-exempt status. Transformation recognizes multiracial democracy where “everyone’s rights are respected no matter who they are.” The State League was reminded to check with local attorney(s) on nonprofit guidance and keep our 990’s current.

Celina Stewart and Diana Wynn gave powerful messages on the last day of Council. LWV is a grassroots tri-federated organization (local, state, federal) and in every state plus D.C. LWV has developed trust and credibility and seeks to be pluralistic and multi-racial. They shared the following motivational actions to support our ability to challenge anti-voter laws, defend democratic norms and empower voters:

Voters need to think of themselves as constituents. **We** must disrupt in ways that are legal. Protect our vote / hear our voice. **Partner** with pro-democracy organizations. Show up because your rights are the same as mine. Diverse groups make better decisions.

WHAT IS GOING ON WITH THE WATER IN IOWA?

Linda Serra Hagedorn, Ph.D.

If you've been following the news—or are just trying to pour yourself a glass of tap water—you've probably noticed that Iowa's water quality keeps popping up as a big concern. The conversation extends from what's coming out of our faucets to whether it's safe for our families to swim and play in local lakes and rivers. Both the League of Women Voters of Iowa and our friends in the Upper Mississippi River Region Inter-League Organization are watching this issue closely—and for good reason.

Let's talk about what's in our water and why it matters. One of the main worries right now is nitrates, which are compounds that mostly get into our water supplies from farm fertilizers and animal manure. Iowa's heavy agricultural activity means our land—and as a result, our rivers, and aquifers—see a lot of this runoff. You may have heard the number “10 milligrams per liter” tossed around; that's the EPA's limit for safe drinking water. In reality, some of our rivers—like the Raccoon and Des Moines—have recently reached nitrate levels as high as 17 to over 20 milligrams per liter. That's not just higher than recommended; it's double the federal safety standard in some places. In rural areas, many private wells are also testing above that threshold.

Why does this matter? For infants especially, high nitrate levels in water can cause a dangerous condition called “blue baby syndrome,” which affects how blood carries oxygen. But it doesn't stop there: research suggests that long-term exposure to nitrates may also be linked to certain cancers and birth defects. While bigger cities have the resources to filter and treat their water, many small towns and private well owners don't, leaving some of our most vulnerable Iowans at risk.

The trouble isn't limited to what we drink. All those nitrates wash into the lakes and rivers where we boat, fish, and swim. You may have noticed more beach advisories lately. That's because high levels of nutrients lead to thick algae blooms—sometimes toxic—that can sicken people and pets, and cause headaches for local wildlife. When all that extra plant growth dies, it uses up the oxygen in the water, creating “dead zones” where fish and other aquatic creatures can't survive. In fact, Iowa now has more than 700 waterways that are officially “impaired,” and the list keeps growing each year.

So, what can we do? Experts point to a few routes forward: updating regulations to better control fertilizer and manure runoff, investing in new water treatment technology, and making sure our small towns get the support and funding they need to protect local wells and water systems. It's a big challenge, but it's one we can't ignore. Clean, safe water is a basic need for all Iowans. As this issue continues to make headlines, let's keep asking questions, raising awareness, and pressing our leaders for solutions that protect everyone—whether we're drinking, swimming, or just enjoying Iowa's beautiful outdoors.

CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT AWARD GOES TO BONNIE PITZ

This year the Carrie Chapman Catt Award winner is Bonnie Pitz of Belle Plaine, Iowa.

Bonnie Pitz has been a member of the League of Women Voters since 2000 when she joined the Jasper County League. She became the President of the LWVIA in 2012 and served as President until 2015 as well as Co-President of the LWVIA with Dr. Deborah Turner. Bonnie continued to serve as a Member of the State Board for several years. Today she is also the Co-President of the Grinnell-Jasper LWV.

During Bonnie's term as President, liability insurance was set up for all Local Leagues as well as the State League and a bookkeeper was hired. The LWVIA joined the ACLU in a lawsuit to restore voting rights to Iowa's convicted felons who had served their sentence. Bonnie worked with Terese Grant to implement VOTE 411 in Iowa and worked to encourage online voter registration. The League website was updated with effort by Bonnie and Karen Person. Bonnie worked with Tina Pace and Mary Ann Nelson to implement MLD: Membership Leadership & Development training for all Local Leagues.

During Bonnie's tenure as President, she wrote Letters to the Editor, advocated for issues for Felon Voting and Justice system issues, and much more. Bonnie has been a dedicated leader for the League of Women Voters in Iowa and inspired many League members to follow her in her efforts to ensure that the League lives up to the mission of "Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy."

THE MISSION OF THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER REGION INTER-LEAGUE ORGANIZATION

Submitted by Sue Wilson, LWV of Dubuque

Your Upper Mississippi River Region Inter-League Organization (UMRR-ILO) concerns itself with water quality as well as quantity. *The Des Moines Register* reports: Be careful where you "enjoy" your water recreation this summer.

Twelve beaches monitored by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources had high test results for algae or high E. coli. A beach monitored by Polk County also reported high E. coli levels.

Wondering how can you check up on water monitoring, beach classifications and know what locations are open or closed? Iowa Department of Natural Resources tracks it all and [updates the public](#) weekly on its website and using a phone hotline at 515-725-3434.

The DNR [collects weekly samples](#) at 39 state-owned swimming beaches to determine the public's risk of coming in contact with waterborne diseases. Testing starts a week prior to Memorial Day and runs through Labor Day. *(continued on next page)*

(Mission of UMMRR-ILO continued))

Other water contaminants: Agricultural fertilizer use implicated in nitrate crisis

Officials have said this year's nitrate levels have been high in part due to drought conditions over the past few years that left nitrogen fertilizer applied to farm fields intact. Large rainstorms upstream from Des Moines have flushed out the fertilizer, [which is carried through drainage tiles beneath cropland into the streams in the Des Moines and Raccoon river watersheds.](#)

The regional authority had previously lifted some restrictions, allowing splash pads in city parks to operate and [a dozen sod companies to install and water new lawns](#), a requirement before new homeowners can close on their mortgages.

High nitrate levels in drinking water can be harmful to pregnant mothers and cause a blood oxygen deficiency in infants under 6 months called blue baby syndrome. They also have been implicated in certain cancers.

Donnelle Eller covers agriculture, the environment and energy for *The Register*. Reach her at deller@registermedia.com

LWV OF SE IOWA HOSTS BLEEDING HEARTLAND JOURNALIST LAURA BELIN

On a sultry summer evening, more than 50 attendees enjoyed a light supper in air-conditioned comfort at the Cornerstone Wedding and Event Center in Burlington, Iowa, supporting the annual fundraiser of the League of Women Voters of SE Iowa.

Following the meal, animated table conversations and delicious desserts, President Martha Wolf introduced the keynote speaker. Iowa's own Bleeding Heartland author and podcaster [Laura Belin](#) served a full course on the current political landscape in our state. Highlighting the upcoming mid-term elections, the disparity between rural and urban voting populations, and the issues critical to rural areas of the state, the importance of the League's commitment to voter registration was certainly emphasized.

Belin's in-depth knowledge and first-hand perspective prompted a number of questions from attendees. Belin welcomed the audience's participation, and it was clear from the response that attendees were not only informed but inspired.

Next up for the SE chapter is a member social on August 6.



Laura Belin speaks to the LWV SE Iowa



Chapter members listen to Belin

VOTER EDUCATION DAY

A statewide LWV committee has been meeting on Zoom and is working toward a Civic Education/Registration proposal for all Leagues in Iowa. With a financial gift and the work of many it comes down to what the League can deliver.

Please check out our proposal below.

Subject: Statewide High School “Voter Education Day” Initiative

Purpose: To engage Iowa high school seniors in the democratic process by registering them to vote, providing meaningful civics education, and fostering lifelong participation in democracy.

Background: Voter participation among young adults, especially those newly eligible to vote, traditionally lags behind other age groups. Early education and hands-on involvement can empower students to become informed, active citizens.

Proposed Statewide Initiative

Key Ideas:

- **On-site Voter Registration:** LWV volunteers visit high schools to register seniors, guiding them through the process and answering questions.
- **Civics Education Resources:** Distribute pamphlets, guides, and digital resources about voting rights, democratic institutions, and local government.
- **Interactive Presentations:** Deliver engaging talks or workshops on the importance of voting and ways to participate in civic life.
- **Mock Elections:** Set up simulations to let students experience the voting process in a supportive, educational environment.
- **“Voter Education Day:”** Schools designate a special day for these events, enhancing visibility and participation.

This initiative leverages the LWV’s statewide network and expertise in civic education, ensuring consistent, nonpartisan information reaches the next generation of voters. By making voter registration accessible and relevant, and by providing interactive experiences, the program will foster a culture of lifelong civic participation.

For questions contact Carolyn Klaus at prez.lwvasc@gmail.com