

THE VOTER

**JULY 2026
VOLUME 824**



**EMPOWERING VOTERS.
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY.**

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Voters of Iowa](#)

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Linda Serra Hagedorn
Breanna Oxley

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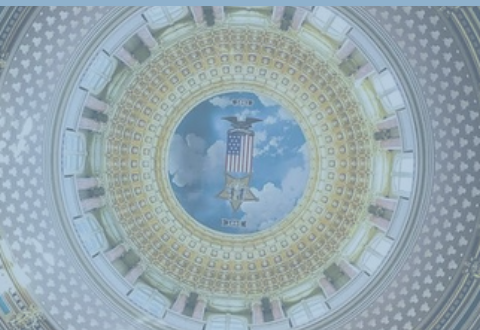
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Introducing Co-President Linda Serra Hagedorn

Dear League of Women Voters of Iowa,

I am honored to serve as co-president of the League of Women Voters of Iowa this year alongside my valued colleague, Bre Oxley. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself by sharing a bit about my personal, professional, and political background.

On a personal note, I am married to my husband of nearly 50 years, Tim. Together, we have four adult children—Bill, Mike, Aaron, and Serra—and eight grandchildren. While none of our family currently lives in Iowa, we cherish the opportunities to visit them and remain closely connected.



Professionally, I am a retired college professor and administrator, having concluded my career at Iowa State University in 2018. My research focused on community college student success, particularly factors that influence successful transfer to four-year institutions. I published extensively on this topic, and after retiring, I continued my work as a consultant to community colleges across the country. In that role, I supported the development of programs aimed at helping low-income students and students of color successfully transfer and complete bachelor's degrees.

My political engagement has deep roots. Coming of age during the height of the feminist movement, I developed a strong and lasting commitment to equity for women and girls. I participated in rallies and advocacy efforts during what was then commonly known as the “Women’s Liberation” movement. This commitment also shaped my academic work; my dissertation examined salary disparities between male and female professors nationwide, revealing significant inequities that, unfortunately, will not surprise many readers.

I joined the League of Women Voters shortly before my retirement. While I had long been politically engaged, the demands of career and family limited my involvement. Within a year, I became president of the Ames and Story County League, where I discovered not only meaningful work but also an inspiring community of dedicated individuals. I strive to contribute my experience and skills in support of the League’s mission and its promotion of informed and active participation in government.

Since 2022, I have served on the state board as vice president, where I had the privilege of observing the leadership of Terese Grant and Holly Oppelt. Their dedication underscored for me the scope and importance of this work. I am grateful to now serve as co-president, and I look forward to supporting our members and advancing the League’s mission across Iowa!

Linda Serra Hagedorn

lwvia.president@gmail.com

Introducing Co-President Breanna Oxley



Dear League of Women Voters of Iowa,

What a privilege to serve as co-president of the League of Women Voters of Iowa with my esteemed partner Linda Hagedorn. We are excited for a great year and have already hit the ground running!

I currently serve as the LWV of Linn County President and have served in various roles on the board, including President Elect, Nominations Chair, and Technology Manager. I have been going to LWV events since I was a toddler with my grandma Jean Oxley. She was the first female elected county supervisor in the state of Iowa and helped instill the importance of civic action in me from a young age. I have been an official member of LWV of Linn County since 2016 and I look forward to continuing the work of many great women before me.

Political engagement and civic action are more important than ever in our state and the LWVIA will continue to serve as an educational resource for people to know how to vote and what issues are impacting them. We look forward to continuing our partnerships with other like-minded organizations in the state and welcoming new local LWV chapters in the near future. Linda and I have already connection with LWV of the United States and will be bringing back action items and best practices from around the country.

Civics has played a huge role in my life and led me to a path of becoming a Social Studies teacher. Over my 13 years of teaching at the secondary level, I have taught Government, World History, Sociology, US History, Economics, and Special Education for Adaptive Behavior. I currently teach at a high school in Cedar Rapids and am also the Student Senate advisor. I have watched students organize and partner with the LWVLC to register voters and engage in local civic action. It is truly a joy to watch the next generation engage and light the way for each other to become more involved. I am also an adjunct professor at Oxford affiliate Reach University, where I teach preservice educators metacognition and special education courses. Educators know the importance of voting and how many issues on the ballot impact our communities and the students we see in our classrooms.

In my downtime, I visit every farmer's market I can find and travel to new places to enjoy unique food and experiences. I also enjoy cheering on the Hawkeyes and the Vikings (even if there isn't always a lot to cheer about!). When I am not teaching or traveling, I am hanging out with my 4 nephews Cal, Dax, Lawson, and Rhodes or my 2 cats Lilly and Daisy. I am always looking for new show and movie recommendations so if you see me share your favorites!

Thank you again for the honor Linda and I have of serving as co-president of LWVIA. We are excited to meet members from across the state and share the amazing resources LWVUS has to help Iowa empower voters and defend democracy!

Breanna Oxley

lwvia.president@gmail.com

LWVIA COUNCIL MEETING

June 6, 2026 | Ames, Iowa

The 2026 League of Women Voters of Iowa State Council was held on June 6 at Reiman Gardens in Ames, bringing together 44 delegates from leagues across the state for a day of education, advocacy, and organizational business. Attendees heard presentations on civic education, public policy, election advocacy, and a demonstration of the Citizens Handbook, while also viewing a special suffrage exhibit.

During the business meeting, delegates approved the 2026–27 budget, elected a new slate of officers, and discussed plans to educate Iowans on the upcoming SJR 11 constitutional amendment. The Council highlighted the League's continued commitment to strengthening democracy, supporting civic engagement, and preparing for the 2026 election cycle.

See our [publications page](#) for more details under Convention Materials.



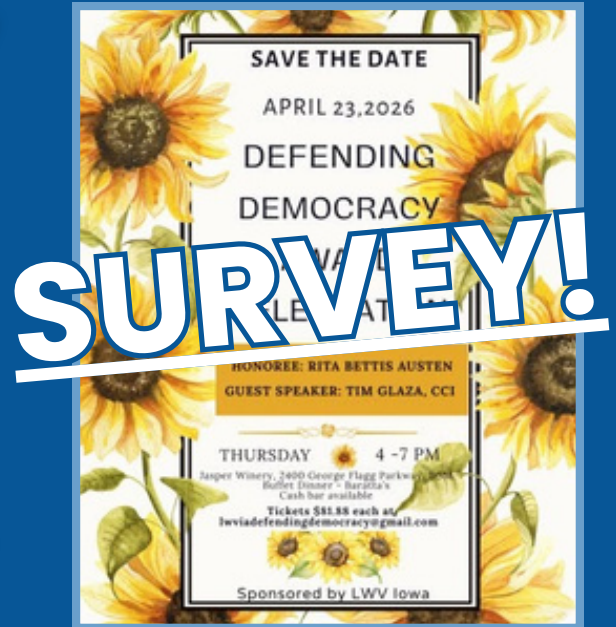
From Left to Right:
Holly Oppelt (outgoing President),
Paula Vaughan (Secretary),
Carmen Hernandez (Member, LWV Dubuque), Bre Oxley and Linda Hagedorn (Co-Presidents elect),
Shannon Patrick (outgoing Treasurer), Polly Horton (Nominating Committee), Sue Wilson (Director, LWV Dubuque)



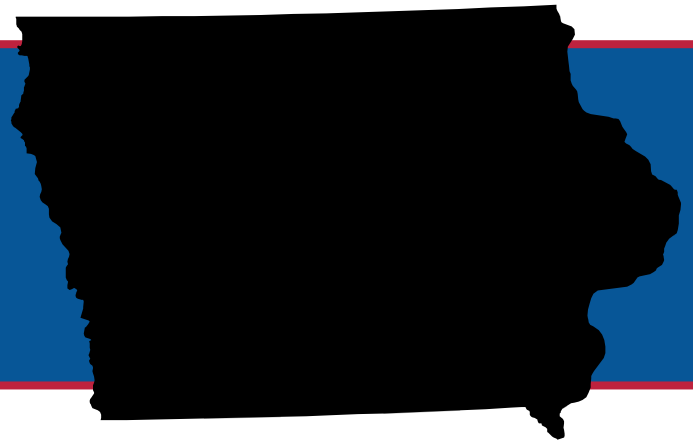
New Survey for Fundraiser Improvements

Members, we are using this survey to improve our Fundraiser, the **Defending Democracy Award Celebration**. Please take a few minutes to fill out this [survey](#).

Your valuable input helps us plan events with each of you in mind and spread more awareness across the state of Iowa!



What's Happening in Iowa? 2026 End of Session Report by Amy Campbell



The 2026 Iowa legislative session has concluded. Explore the End of Session report for highlights of this year's legislative activity, with a final update coming after the Governor completes action on all bills. [End of Session Report](#)

Interested in tracking legislation throughout the year? Visit the Iowa Bill Tracker to explore current bills, follow their status, and stay informed about the latest developments in the Iowa Legislature. [LWVIA Bill Tracker](#)

Visit Amy Campbell's Public Policy Blog for thoughtful analysis and timely updates on Iowa's legislative and public policy landscape. Explore in-depth discussions on the issues shaping our state and their impact on Iowans. [LWVIA Policy Blog](#)

INTRODUCING A NEW VOTER SECTION

With each Volume, we will highlight a local chapter. We will give each opportunity to share their accomplishments, their goals, and their plans. In this volume we turn the spotlight on The League of Women Voters of SE Iowa.

Chapter Highlight: SE Iowa

(Burlington / Fort Madison) By: Martha Wolf, President

Hard to believe the LWV of SE Iowa started with a lunch in 2021 with Holly Oppelt and Sue Johanssen. Today, we are 74 members strong (and desperately looking for a number 75, as it sounds bigger and better). We hit the ground running, as we all are committed to a successful and safe election.

We have a group who regularly register voters at festivals, libraries, community events, schools, churches, and our neighbors. We also dedicated a lot of resources to identifying voters who were purged from the voter lists in 2025. They will get a postcard from us informing them how they can register and voter in the upcoming midterm elections.

Forums in SE IA counties are scheduled, with local partnerships, are usually well attended. Our chapter has our fun as well. We sponsor 3-4 “socials” to have “little” updates and lots of social. The networking is tremendous and building relationships makes the work that much easier. We just want to get the word out that much work is being done on their behalf to **Defend Democracy** and **Educate Voters**.



We've hosted programs for the past year on water quality, mental illness, civics, women's health, clean energy, climate change, AI, & more!

Give a Shoutout to a Fellow Member!

Do you know someone who has gone above and beyond? Has a fellow member volunteered their time, supported others, or made a meaningful impact in our community? We'd love to hear their story.

Email us your Member Shoutout with a few sentences about why they deserve recognition. Throughout the year, we'll feature selected shoutouts in our newsletter and on social media to celebrate the incredible people who make our organization stronger.

Send your shoutouts to: lwviowa@gmail.com

Democratic Socialism New Visibility in U.S. Politics

By: Linda Serra Hagedorn, Ph.D.

Recently, “democratic socialism” has moved from the political margins into mainstream debate, especially within the Democratic Party. Candidates using this label have gained attention in places such as New York City, where a Democratic Socialist mayor has advanced ideas on health care, housing, wages, and the cost of living.

What Democratic Socialists Say They Want

Democratic socialists argue that free elections and civil liberties should be paired with a stronger public role in the economy. **They contend that unrestrained markets create too much inequality and leave essential needs dependent on ability to pay.**

Common proposals include:

- Universal or near-universal access to health care, higher education, and child care.
- Stronger labor protections, higher minimum wages, and easier union organizing.
- Expanded public or cooperative ownership in areas such as housing, health care, or energy.
- Major public investments in infrastructure and climate-related programs.

Supporters see these policies as ways to make basic needs more secure and to give ordinary citizens more influence over economic decisions.

Arguments in Favor

Advocates say broader public benefits can **reduce economic insecurity, narrow income inequality, and improve workers’ leverage with large employers.** They often point to Nordic and other Western European democracies that combine market economies with strong public services and labor protections.

For some voters, especially younger adults facing high housing costs, student debt, and unstable employment, these ideas feel practical rather than ideological.

Concerns and Criticisms

Critics raise three main concerns. **First is cost:** broad public programs generally require substantial tax revenue, and opponents worry higher taxes could weaken economic growth, investment, or innovation. **Second is administrative capacity,** since large public systems can be hard to manage and may invite waste, delay, or favoritism. **Third, fear that expanding public ownership and regulation could diminish consumer choice, entrepreneurship, or local flexibility** and create uncertainty about how far government control might extend.

Lessons from Elsewhere

International experience offers both encouragement and warning. Countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway show that strong welfare states, labor protections, and progressive taxation can coexist with democratic institutions and successful market economies.

Other countries associated with socialism have experienced serious economic or political problems when state power grew too concentrated or democratic accountability weakened, highlighting the importance of checks, transparency, and capable institutions.

How This Shows Up in Central Iowa

Central Iowa has fewer self-identified democratic socialist officeholders than large coastal cities, but the ideas are present. A Central Iowa chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, active in the Des Moines area, focuses on labor rights, economic inequality, and political education while seeking to “revive socialism in the heartland.” Iowa’s caucus tradition exposed voters in Ames and Story County to democratic socialist messaging during Senator Bernie Sanders’s campaigns, where themes such as universal health care, student debt relief, and economic populism gained traction among some Democrats and skepticism from others.

On and around Iowa State University, student activism reflects concerns that overlap with democratic socialist priorities, including tuition costs, housing affordability, climate policy, and workers’ rights. **For now, democratic socialism remains a minority current in central Iowa, but it is likely to remain part of the local political conversation.**

Questions for Voters

Because “democratic socialism” is a broad label, its meaning depends on the candidate and the policy. Voters might ask:

- Which specific programs are proposed, and how will they be funded?
- How would these policies affect taxes, jobs, and local businesses?
- What safeguards would limit waste, over-centralization, or unintended consequences?
- How do these ideas compare with more incremental reforms?

As democratic socialist ideas become more visible, such questions will matter in local, state, and national elections.