

LWV OF ANCHORAGE

OCTOBER 2019 THE VOTER

From the President:

After a summer filled with all kinds of sun, fun, travel and visitors fall is fully underway and the LWV of Anchorage is looking ahead to the months and year ahead! There is a lot going on and the LWV of Anchorage wants to be a part of it and hopes that you, our members, can be a part of all the action too! Here is a short recap of all that we have been doing and all that we have planned for the rest of 2019 and for the Centennial Celebrations of 2020! ~Margaret E. McDonagh, President

Youth Vote:

This summer, the members of Youth Vote joined with students from SayiT of Story Works Alaska to attend the World Anti-Bullying Forum in Dublin, Ireland. Here is a letter one of the students who attended (and LWV of Anchorage member), Tuan, wrote about the experience.

Dear League of Women Voters Anchorage.

Let me first preface this with a hearty thank you. You all have enabled me to enjoy the thing I love most, traveling to new and exciting places with amazing people. My trip to Dublin was not only fulfilling, but inspiring as well. I was able to participate at a conference in a role that not many have the opportunity to do. Presenting and talking about all the incredible ways youth tackle bullying and promote positive change in the community is something I am extremely passionate about. I love to jump at any opportunity to talk about and share with others what youth can do when they are empowered.

While I was inspired by experience at the World Anti-Bullying Forum, it would not be right if I did not also mention my disappointment with the organizers. There was only one other youth group present, and they were only there to attend the forum. We were the only group of youth to present at the forum and unfortunately it showed. It seemed that the forum was heavily focused towards an adult audience, with some presentations being highly technical. The organizers did not seem to have any plans or thoughts about accommodating a youth audience. There was even several examples of tokenism. This is not to say they did this out of malice; some of our concerns that we expressed were openly received. In-fact, they invited us to provide more feedback and potentially work with them so that the organization of their next forum would be more youth friendly. The adult attendees also warmly

received our presence; especially our audience during the workshop. We made several important connections with different domestic and international bullying prevention and youth focused organizations. Youth Vote and SAYiT also gained important exposure; with almost every person we met asking for our contact information and more information on what we do.

This isn't the first time I've had this type of experience. Our presentation at the LWV US 2018 conference in Chicago felt the same as well. I have found myself to be more passionate than ever before to spread the importance of youth involvement at conferences and forums such as these and their organizations. Being able to be exposed to an international setting and audience also provided us with really good feedback that I can't wait to apply.

Overall, I believe it was an outstanding experience and trip. I still cannot fully describe how wonderful it was to travel to Europe for the first time in my life. There was a special joy of exploring ancient streets and buildings full of history with people that I could laugh with almost every step of the way. Thank you once again to the League of Women Voters Anchorage for not only supporting myself and my fellow youth on this trip, but for your unwavering support and drive to empower us youth in our communities. And of course a special thank you to Cari, for being one of the coolest and most supportive co-conspirators that I have ever known.





Welcoming Cities:

Anchorage once again held a Welcoming Cities Week, September 16th – 22nd to coincide with Constitution Day and the LWV of Anchorage was an important part of the citywide celebrations! We had members present at Naturalization Ceremonies on both September 18th and September 20th. We also had a booth at the Civics Fair at the Loussac Library on September 21st. At all of these events, voter registration was a key part of our presence. On September 19th, I attended a celebration of Democracy Week at UAA in which the LWV of Anchorage awarded prizes to essay contest winners. Each winner received a check for \$250; there was a prize for the best essay from a university student and a prize for the best essay from a high school student. The winner of the high school competition was Abbie Spencer of Chugiak High School. Abbie won the Youth Voice Prize with an essay entitled, “Life, Liberty, and the Power of the People”. The winner of the university competition was Ryan Horton of UAA. Ryan won the Informed Citizen Prize with an essay entitled “A Country in the Know Can Only Grow”. It was a pleasure to meet both of these great students and to hear them read their winning essays! The winning essays are presented here:

Abbie Spencer, Chugiak High School

Life, Liberty, and the Power of the People

As the daughter of an Air Force veteran, I grew up hearing stories of people in foreign countries struggling to find their liberty. Their opinions, wants, and needs have no value to those who dictate their government. These people’s lives are put into the hands of an authority who fails to acknowledge “freedom” or “democracy”. They do not have the same inalienable rights that we, as Americans, are fortunate enough to have. They can not even begin to fathom the idea of representing themselves, not to mention living in a world where each citizen’s voice is valued and heard. Democracy is only as successful as those who see it for what it truly represents, our choices, our voices, and our people.

Knowing that my own father put his life on the line alongside hundreds of men and women for our rights as American citizens, has put into perspective what Americans are falling short of. We do not do our government, nor our citizens, justice with our laissez-faire attitude about Democracy and the democratic process. We fail each other by remaining uneducated and disengaged in our country’s affairs.

For many around the world, voting is not an option; feeling like you are a part of, or have a say in your government, is not an option. Everyday people around the world are dying due to conflicts within their countries sometimes caused due to the discontent with how their government rules over them. However, in America, we somehow seem to overlook what it means to be a Democracy, and take it for granted.

We are blessed enough to have a society that allows us to voice our opinions as to what we believe our government should achieve. Only 61.4% of voters turned out for our 2016 presidential election and percentages at the local level are much lower. The statistics for youth voters are even lower! In the 2016 election 46.1% of voters from the age margin of 18-29 showed up to vote. This was considered a very successful year for this particular group. Even more worrisome, only 36% of 18-29 year old voters showed up for the midterm elections this past year. To add insult to injury, this turnout was a “79% jump” between the 2014 midterm elections and 2018 elections according to the United States Census Bureau. How is a Democracy expected to function when the people who pride themselves so highly on “freedom” and the “rights of the people” cannot be bothered to show up?

It is our duty as American citizens to educate ourselves on the issues and raise our voices. Democracy can only be successful if citizens show interest and concern about where our country is heading. Democracy thrives with unity and accountability, and crumbles when you allow others to do *your* job. When you fail to vote because there are “plenty of other voters,” or you are “uneducated,” you have created excuses as to why *you* will not show up. Getting “educated” about candidates and where they stand on issues is much easier than people believe. It comes down to the fact that people do not want to put in the work; there are numerous debates and civil discussions in your own community, and countless reputable online resources to use. Now-a-days with almost instantaneous access to resources, “uneducated” is no longer an appropriate excuse.

A democratic government is not just its elected officials, it is the voters who recognize their duties, not only to country, but to themselves. How can you argue about who holds an office, if you do not vote for a candidate? If we do not exercise our rights as citizens, and do our part for our government by showing up, we are not only doing a disservice to ourselves, but the future prospects of our country.

We have a civic duty to our government, all of us do. Democracy expects it from us and we need to begin expecting it from each other. One must educate and participate, to ensure a successful Democracy.

Ryan Horton, UAA

A Country in the Know can only Grow
Pursuing a Well-Informed Democracy in the
Information Age

Of the wide range of issues brought to light in America’s most recent election cycle, few stand out as noticeably as the general population’s poor ability to participate in the democratic process – this can be demonstrated most effectively by the discrepancy between the voter’s expectations (and, consequently, the

politician's promises) and the voter's actual needs. To put it simply we, as citizens, are not aware enough of the world around us to know what our society needs and why we need it; either because we lack information about our surrounding reality, or because we're fed too much information to determine which is true, false, or even relevant. As a result, when making decisions about policy we vote based on personal bias and belief, often opting for fast-acting panaceas for the looming inconveniences we can see, while overlooking long-term solutions to potentially catastrophic issues.

While not inherently wrong to 'look out for one's best interests', this method of short-term thinking opens us to greater suffering when the nation, as a whole, gradually worsens. Our selfishness ends up hurting us. The solution to this way of thinking lies not only in applying responsibility to the larger institutions bombarding us with poor or misleading information, but in calling the citizens of our democracy to become effective interpreters and consumer-distributors of said information.

As interpreters, American citizens regularly filter the mass of data poured into our heads by relevance, both immediate and personal: if we can see it, it matters somewhat and if we can feel it, it matters greatly. In order to effectively interpret information, however, we must apply two additional filters to this process – one which sifts out information that sensationalizes or outright misrepresents the world around us, and another 'empathetic' filter which spreads the remaining facts to apply to more than just ourselves. While this may seem a bit complex at first, most American's would find this act surprisingly easy: We need only ask ourselves "Where is this information coming from" and, if confirmed to be valid, "Does this affect others, and not just myself?" With this relatively small amount of consideration added to our thinking process, further decisions are drastically altered to include consequences for larger populations than our own immediate circles.

Once said interpretation has taken place, we must next prevent any possibility of misinformation by actively consuming more information. We are already well practiced in consuming information in the form of entertainment and gossip, and we can easily sate our hunger with well-crafted narratives surrounding politics, science, culture, and the world around us. It falls on us to both recognize and pursue such narratives, and redistribute this information accurately and eagerly to our fellow consumers. We will both gain and spread a better understanding of the world around us and prevent short-sighted reactions to potential problems in the coming years.

These solutions are meant to play not on the active effort of few or many – rather, they are mere adjustments to existing mental states of empathy, curiosity, and social compulsion. Our natural inclination for storytelling has, until now, acted as a wonderful tool for uniting, celebrating, and galvanizing. We have developed a taste for information, and our culture has tragically

glutted us with more than we can handle. By first learning to filter and interpret information, then consume and spread accurate information on a regular basis, America has a chance to pursue a Democracy that can be controlled by its citizens. Citizens which regularly overrules the selfish interests of an elite few in favor of the elevation of many.



Abbie Spencer – Chugiak High, Margaret McDonagh – LWV of Anchorage, Ryan Horton – UAA, and Jacqueline Cason – UAA

Recall Dunleavy Initiative: As you may or may not be aware, there is a citizen-driven initiative trying to collect signatures to recall the Governor. We have received many questions regarding this initiative and felt the need to clearly state our position. **The League of Women Voters of Anchorage is a non-partisan organization.** This means that the LWV of Anchorage will not take any official position on this initiative process and the LWV of Anchorage's name should **never** be associated with it in any fashion. Individual

members, of course, may decide whether or not they wish to sign the petitions circulating around. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact a Board Member.

Looking to Get More Involved? The LWV of Anchorage wants **YOU!!** We have a lot of exciting ideas for events coming up! We also need more members to get involved! Keep an eye on your email inbox in the coming week or two for invitations to provide input or to volunteer! It could be something simple like attending an Assembly Meeting and then giving a report on the events of that meeting. You could join the member of the Program Committee in planning a fun all-member event! You could take on a pressing issue like the Census or Redistricting. The opportunities abound! Our Board cannot be everywhere; we need you to join in the fun!

Learn More: Attend a Monthly Board Meeting! Our Board meets once a month to discuss issues and business and upcoming events. All members are welcome to attend a Board Meeting and ask questions. We would LOVE to see you there! Our meetings are held at the BP Energy Center (unless otherwise noted) on the third Tuesday of the month at 6pm. Upcoming meeting dates are:

October 15th

November 19th

December 17th

January 21st

February 18th

March 17th

Save The Date: Wednesday, December 4th

**LWV of Anchorage Annual Holiday Party
A Roaring 20's Fund Raiser for LWV of Anchorage**

**At the Home of Beth Nordlund
3230 W. 31st Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99517**

6pm

**Come enjoy some Roaring Holiday Fun!!
All proceeds go to fund Centennial Celebration Events!!**