



President's speech of opening plenary session of Friday, June 11, 2021

It seems as if the last convention was 20 years ago, but it's only been two years since League members from across the state met in Pasadena and left with big ideas and plans. I wanted to open this talk with a pithy statement that captures the essence of this unprecedented, unimaginable, and unpredictable biennium. One that wouldn't be just a recitation of the challenges and successes of this time. I struggled, came up with nothing--zero, and then.. one of our staff uttered the words...Boomer to Zoomer! Boomer to Zoomer!

That's it! Many of us League members are Baby Boomers; we are not digital natives...it took years before Leagues made routine use of computer technology. Yet in the space of 15 months League is using Zoom for everything, board meetings, committee meetings, candidate forums, a convention. Only something like a pandemic could move a group of people to adopt something unfamiliar so quickly. And so when I look back at 2019/2021 I will remember this is when the League members went From Boomers to Zoomers.

During the last 2 years I saw League members and staff meeting each challenge with flexibility, ingenuity, and resilience. You honored the spirit of the suffragists who worked so diligently and for so long to pass the 19th Amendment. You persisted, you were creative and you continued the work of the League. I salute and thank each and every League member.

I want to hit on a couple of highlights of the biennium very briefly. You can read much more detail in the Convention Workbook if you haven't already.

-- In a wonderful illustration of the respect the League commands, the LWVC was invited by the Secretary of State's office to advise the state government on the conduct of the General Election. In association with other organizations League of Women Voters played an influential role in ensuring a safe and accessible election for all of California's diverse voters.

--Two years ago I discussed the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy as something that was not just a project, but something that applies to all League does. And it has--in both advocacy and voter service.

League was a co-sponsor of the law that led to Prop 17's restoration of voting rights to people on parole. The League also cosponsored the Racial Justice Act that allows defendants to challenge convictions or sentences that resulted from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. The upheaval that resulted from the murder of George Floyd resurrected that bill from legislative death. Those are just 2 bills League successfully supported.

--The Schools & Communities 1st (prop 15) initiative was not just a property tax measure; it was an attempt to achieve equity for communities that lacked the resources to provide for education and basic essential services.

All 3 of the advocacy items involved the LWVC working with large and broad coalitions of organizations. Working in coalitions like this is crucial for the League. It amplifies and reinforces all the groups voices on matters of public policy. It builds and maintains the League's reputation as an organization dedicated to making California a better place for everyone.

In response to the pressing issues of social and racial justice the LWVC applied the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policy lens to our traditional voter service activities. This led to two new features, the creation of the Easy Voter Guide's Spotlight on Justice page and participation with a coalition of organizations to create the Elect Justice California website.

Both of these explained how local elected offices impact the criminal justice system and the website linked people to Voter's Edge.

In what is probably a record for us the LWVC engaged in a not frequently used form of advocacy...6 amicus curiae (friend of the court) briefs filed mostly in federal court. The cases involved the counting of undocumented residents and inclusion of them for redistricting purposes, redistricting deadlines in California, vote-by-mail in the 2020 election, and most recently, a case involving donor disclosure by nonprofit organizations, the ruling on which has implications for transparency and the disclosure of "dark money" in campaigns. All of these briefs were filed with the support of LWVUS and in coalition with other organizations including other state Leagues. Two of the cases ended up in the US Supreme Court. We don't have final decisions yet.

Involvement in litigation is important to the League, not only as a method of empowering voters and defending democracy, but because it builds the reputation of the League in the public eye...that makes the League more effective in the long run.

I could go on and on about LWVC's last two years, but I won't because I want to introduce someone to you. Two years ago we learned that it was time to replace a very good Executive Director. The Executive Director position is so impt to an organization like the League with a less than ideal budget, that is very dependent on philanthropic foundation funding, and a lot of volunteer support. While we conducted a professional search our past president Helen Hutchison served as our very capable interim executive director.

Just before Thanksgiving 2019 Stephanie Doute became our new Executive Director. She stepped in with enthusiasm, skill, endless curiosity, and a huge capacity to learn. Stephanie has guided LWVC thru the shoals of the budget, uncertainty about funding during a time when so many nonprofit organizations struggled due to lack of donations, moved operations out of the office, interacted with our many coalition partners and

foundation funders, and still managed to find time and energy to be a creative and forward thinking person who saw an opportunity to reach out to 18-24 year old black & Latinx Californians to encourage them to vote.

Very few of you have had a chance to meet her and I want to ask her to talk with us now.

President's speech in closing plenary session, Sunday June 13, 2021

Let me start by thanking you all again for your flexibility, ingenuity, and resilience in pursuing the work of the League of Women Voters through a very difficult time.

I am honored to be associated with you all.

Let's take a moment to orient ourselves.

The United States is a representative democracy. The League of Women Voters understands that such a government only works when all are represented. The League understands that better, stronger decisions are made when all voices are heard..

when all voices are contributing.

That is the basis for incorporating the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy in our bylaws. It informs our work, it reminds us to seek out the whole community, to include the whole community.

The issues for advocacy and education--climate change, housing & homelessness, criminal justice and Making Democracy Work in CA --that we just adopted are complex, intricate issues that affect everyone in the state of California. In grappling with them, the DEI lens guides us in the way to approach education and advocacy.

And all of these are not just state level issues. All of them involve both state and local League activity.

Yes, bills related to these issues are passed and signed in Sacramento, that's where LWVC advocacy is at work. But never forget that the ultimate decisions that impact your communities rests in your cities and counties. Those are the entities that make decisions about zoning, permits, and developer fees. They make decisions on transportation planning and on any number of things that impact the housing supply and the environment in your communities. They make decisions about the criminal justice administration in the community.

This is where the Leagues up and down the state come in. This is League's opportunity to serve our communities...

to empower them with knowledge of the issues and the impacts on their communities...

to join together in community partnerships, particularly with diverse groups, to bring out the voices of all the people impacted. Let's be allies for the people in our communities. The League cares about the issues because of the people impacted. WE will always remember to center their voices so that decision makers hear from everyone.

Many of you are already doing that in terms of Redistricting, both legislative districting and local government redistricting. Our Redistricting Directors Chris Carson and Helen Hutchison are impressed with your energy in setting up educational opportunities to explain what redistricting is, why it's important, and what a community of interest is! Keep it up.

You've attended the workshops over the past week. You've heard about the toolkits, issue committees, and list serves to help Leagues seek and share information. Please reach out to the committees if you have questions...if you are exploring a potential issue forum or educational event. League members work together, we share information because that's the way League accomplishes its mission.

Speaking of tools and useful things: you've already heard of the Homelessness Action policy to provide a framework and support for your education and advocacy efforts. There was a workshop on that. Look up the recording.

And now I'm happy to announce there is a new position relating to implementation and enforcement of academic, equity, transparency and financial standards for the authorization and reauthorization of charter schools. You might remember this was talked about two years ago. The position was created by concurrence with a Fresno League position. The board of directors concurred with it after a careful review by a committee of League members from across the state led by Eleanor Yick of SW Santa Clara Valley to make sure that the underlying study supported it, that it was applicable statewide, and to make it consistent with existing LWVC positions. The text will be released in our updates.

Many thanks to the multiple League members who worked with both of these projects. Your service is greatly appreciated.

We cannot let our time together this weekend go by without acknowledging the ongoing threats to our democracy. Secretary of State Weber brought it up on Friday. Leagues across the state and country are fighting against voter suppression and to ensure voting rights for all people.

Here in California our Deputy Director Dora Rose is deeply engaged with a coalition of organizations and with legislative staff to perfect several bills to protect voter access, to combat intimidation of voters around voting facilities, and to perfect the use of vote by mail for all registered active voters in future elections. One the best ways to aid fellow Leagues is to lead by example...to urge California lawmakers to ensure voter access, voting rights, and free and fair elections...to help produce laws that can serve as templates for other states' elections.

There are counties in California where attempts to roll back hard won access to the ballot in the last election are occurring. We have seen militia type individuals pressuring local governments to change their voting processes. We have seen them attempting to harass voters and county elections officials. Shasta County League members have spoken out about this at a board of supervisors meeting. The San Luis Obispo League issued a statement in support of the County Clerk-Recorder in their county who was maligned with anti-Asian hate.

If your local elections officials are being harassed or your local Boards of Supervisors are changing rules to adversely impact voters' access to voting please let us at LWVC know. We are keeping track of such things and can offer advice and talking points to help your advocacy efforts.

In addition to the League's work on issues for emphasis we can't forget that there is background and foundational work needed to support it. In the next 2 years, the LWVC board of directors will engage in planning to identify strategies needed to advance the League mission. We know that diversity, equity and inclusion policy will be a vital part of them.

We also recognize the realities of funding projects ...things like Voters Edge, the Easy Voter Guide and advocacy work. We need all hands on deck to financially support the future of these projects - they are flagship offerings that make a difference for Californians - but we've learned that grant funding is not plentiful for these. We had a little discussion of what it is and takes to receive grant money in terms of the SnapChat/TikTok project yesterday. This is an ongoing challenge and one that we will strive to meet.

One thing that is very apparent over this convention week is the appetite and need for offering tools and resources to support the mission of the League. This convention included workshops to do just that. We hope you came away from them energized and eager to use what you gained in the work of your League. We will strive to continue to provide the infrastructure to build and expand our knowledge and skills.

As we move through the next two years, let's remember that we went from Boomer to Zoomer, that the League is up to the challenges of working under difficult circumstances. We will continue to remember that the League is most effective and impactful in our voter service and advocacy work when the League looks like California, just as our government works best when all are represented, all voices heard.

Let's get to work!