

WE VOTER

League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh

VOLUME 30, No. 2

OCTOBER 2023

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Please join the LWVPGH and Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts as they present a panel of District Magistrate Judges who will discuss the role of District Magistrate Judges. See flyer.

Our panelists will be:

- Judge Nick Martini,
- Judge Kevin Cooper, Jr.,
- Judge Tom Miller.

The program is **Thursday October 12 from 6 - 7 pm**, by zoom. Register [here](#).

Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts is also presenting a workshop: **Navigating & Understanding PA Courts & Judicial Elections**, available on Zoom, October 17, 6 - 7 pm. You can register [here](#).

On October 24, 2023, from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm, Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts will host a virtual forum with candidates for Pennsylvania's appellate courts: the Supreme Court, Superior Court and Commonwealth Court. This forum is a part of Every Voice, Every Vote, a collaborative project managed by The Lenfest Institute for Journalism. Click [here](#) to register.

UNDERSTANDING MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT JUDGES

VIRTUAL PANEL EVENT HOSTED BY PENNSYLVANIANS FOR MODERN COURTS AND THE PITTSBURGH LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

**OCTOBER 12TH 2023
6:00 PM - 7:00 PM**


SCAN TO REGISTER

MODERATED BY
DEBORAH GROSS, ESQ.



PANEL OF MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT JUDGES

JUDGE NICHOLAS MARTINI



JUDGE KEVIN COOPER, JR.



JUDGE TOM MILLER



In this presentation attendees will meet Magisterial District Judges, learn what specific work they do, what criteria they need to become MDJ's, and the history of "people's court." Attendees have the opportunity to ask questions.

REGISTER AT WWW.PMCONLINE.ORG OR WWW.LWVPGH.ORG

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



Pennsylvania just made it easier to become a voter. Our State became one of 24 states that automatically registers citizens to vote when they get an ID card or a driver's license.

Does this improve the rate at which voters turnout? The jury is out on that aspect of this more accessible

form of voter registration with research being inconclusive.

Of course, some naysayers are already flagging security as a concern, even though that seems highly unlikely.

Registering voters, making voting easier with voting by mail, and creating more opportunities for voters to cast a vote all makes sense. We want a Democracy that encourages its citizens to participate fully by voting and choosing candidates at their polling place or mailbox. People who vote know more about candidates and issues, stay more engaged with their governing bodies by attending school board meetings and commenting on township comprehensive plans. Voters investigate candidates and their stances, attend forums, and show up at the polls in every election.

The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh is in the business of creating voters by registering voters at events and new citizen ceremonies, providing the most up to date information about elections on our website, and educating high school and college students on the intricacies of Civics. There is room for so many types of

volunteerism in the League at this time. If you want to provide information for voters at local food pantries, our League needs your help. If you'd like to register new citizens as they are sworn in, our League needs your help. If you'd like to search for email addresses for candidates, our League needs your help. There is always something that our League has undertaken that needs volunteers to execute. We are all volunteers, dedicated to defending Democracy and enabling voters, each in our own way. Let us join forces with our fellow League Members to help Pennsylvania's Voters easily access registration, voting, and participation in our Democracy.

Michele Knoll, President

IMAGES FROM THE KICK-OFF MEETING: GUN SAFETY IN A FREE SOCIETY



Presenters:

Preston Shimer

and

Nancy Naragon



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The League is a nonpartisan organization whose purpose is to encourage the informed participation of citizens in government and to influence public policy through education and advocacy.

VOTER Editor: Sue Broughton

Email: info@lwvpgh.org

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LEAGUE MEETING STRUCTURE

Board Meetings

- ✓ **Second Monday of the month..**
Meeting: 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.,
currently by Zoom.

Local Area Unit Meetings

- ✓ **Pittsburgh Central:** Currently not meeting. Contact Martha Raak at 412-477-7572 or marbiker1@gmail.com
- ✓ **North Hills:** Currently not meeting. Contact Nancy Mott at 412-779-3089 or namott001@gmail.com
- ✓ **South Hills:** Currently not meeting. Contact Maureen Mamula at 412-760-9642 or mamula159@hotmail.com

Other Ongoing Meetings

- ✓ **Education Committee**
Currently not meeting.
education@lwvpg.org
- ✓ **Voter Service Committee**
1st Tuesdays, 12:30 pm. by Zoom. Additional meetings occasionally added as needed. Chair is Judy Clack at 512-731-0280
voterservice@lwvpg.org
- ✓ **Advocacy Committee**
Currently not meeting. Chair Michele Knoll 412-389-1387
advocacy@lwvpg.org
- ✓ **Gun Safety Committee**
Currently not meeting. Contact Nancy Naragon at 412-366-2446 or development@lwvpg.org
- ✓ **Non-fiction Book Club**
3rd Friday, 10:15 am. Meeting place determined each month, see calendar. Contact Joan Cucinotta, 412-708-2335 or joancucinotta@gmail.com

This column will be updated as in-person meetings become possible or changes in League programming are made.

August-October Calendar

October

3 Tue	County Executive Candidate Debate, WTAE, 7:00-8:00 pm, live.
9 Mon	Board meeting, 12:30 pm
17 Tue	Candidate Meet and Greet, 6 -8:30 pm at the Letters Carriers Hall
17 Tue	Workshop: Navigating and Understanding PA Courts & Judicial Elections, 6-7 pm
17 Tue	LWVPA Government Policy Update, 7:00-8:00 pm. Register to watch here . Updates are held the third Tuesday of each month.
14 Sat	Voter Education: Rescheduled North Side Food Bank, 9 – 11:30 am, Pittsburgh King PreK-8
20 Fri	Non-fiction Book Club meeting, 10:30-2:00
23 Mon	Last day to register before election
24 Tue	Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts will host a virtual forum with candidates for Pennsylvania's appellate courts, 6:30-8 pm.
31 Tue	Last day to request a mail-in or absentee ballot

November

2 Thu	Candidate Meet and Greet, 6 -8:30 pm at St. James AME Church
7 Tue	Election Day
13 Mon	Board meeting, 12:30 pm
17 Fri	Non-fiction Book Club meeting, 10:30-2:00



A shout-out to Annette Shimer for all the work she has done on Vote411. Check it out for candidate information at vote411.org.

Preserving Democracy: The Critical Role of the Media, Katelyn Polantz, CNN Senior Reporter on Crime and Justice in a conversation on the role of the media in informing the public and preserving democracy with Chancellor Emeritus Mark Nordenberg. **Thursday, October 5 at 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm.** [Alumni Hall, Connolly Ballroom / First Floor](#), 4227 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, and online. Register [here](#). Online link will be sent at registration.

LWVPGH was nominated for a Pittsburgh Community Media Award in Community Impact category by the county's public access TV stations. Award ceremony is **October 19**. To attend \$10 tickets can be purchased [here](#).

Voter Service Report by Judy Clack, Vice President, Voter Service



Live Televised County Executive Debate

The LWVPGH has been working with WTAE-TV since early July 2023 to arrange a County Executive debate and a County District Attorney debate on WTAE-TV. We have succeeded in scheduling the County Executive debate. One of the DA candidates, Steve Zappala, did not respond to multiple and repeated invitations sent

via email, telephone, and text. **The DA debate has been canceled.**

Tues. Oct. 3, 7 – 8 pm, County Executive Candidate Debate, live on WTAE-TV co-sponsored by LWVPGH. A recording will be posted on the LWVPGH website thereafter.

League of Women Voters guidelines will be followed. Candidates will be questioned by members of the media. Follow-up questions and rebuttals will be allowed at the discretion of the moderator. There will be no commercial interruptions.

Voter Education

Sat. Oct. 14, 9 – 11:30 am, Rescheduled North Side Food Bank, “Walk Up” at Pittsburgh King PreK-8, 50 Montgomery Place, Pittsburgh, 15212. **Need 1 more.** [Sign up here.](#) Questions: Kathy Herbst, Chair, kathy.herbst@lwvpgh.org.

Two Candidate Meet and Greets

The Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) is leading the planning for two Candidate Meet and Greets. The LWVPGH is one of main co-sponsors among other nonpartisan partnering organizations.

Candidates for the following offices have been invited to attend both nights: County Executive, District Attorney, County Council at Large, County Controller, County Treasurer, County Council Dist. 10, City Controller, City Council Dist. 1, and City Council Dist. 7. Candidates will each have three minutes to introduce themselves and describe the key issues they plan to address and why. There will be no separate questioning of the candidates.

Tues. October 17, 2023, 6 -8:30 pm at the Letters Carriers Hall, 841 California Avenue, Pittsburgh, 15212.

Thurs. November 2, 2023, 6 -8:30 pm at St. James AME Church, 444 Lincoln Avenue, Pittsburgh, 15206.

We need LWVPGH members to help as greeters or timers. Volunteers should arrive at 5:15 pm. Contact Judy Clack, voterservice@lwvpgh.org to enlist for either day.



Two super-energetic students, Seren Spence (left) and Seven Hackett (right), from the University of Pittsburgh’s Leading Women of Tomorrow joined the LWVPGH in our voter registration efforts at the annual Recovery Walk – Pittsburgh on September 16.

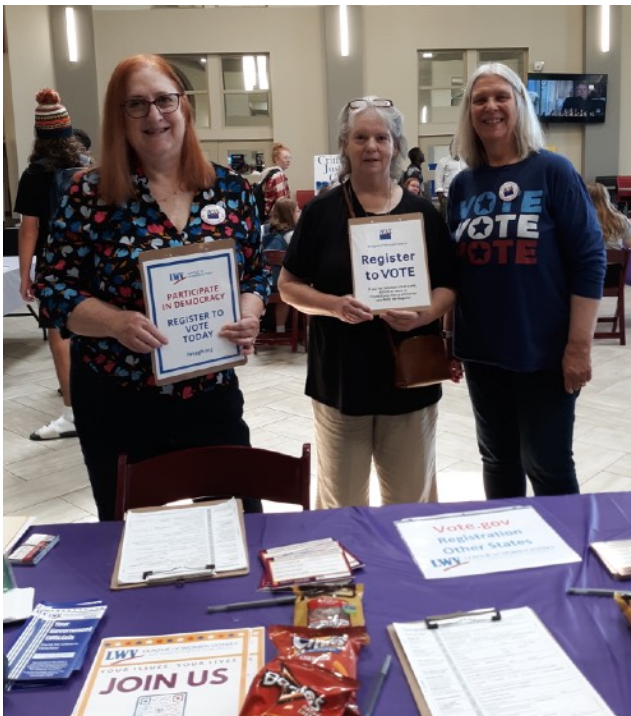
More photos next page



These four volunteers, [left to right] Cheryl Rampelt (FDPA), Martha Raak (LWVPGH), Seven Hackett (U Pitt, Leading Women of Tomorrow), Seren Spence (U Pitt, Leading Women of Tomorrow) assisted LWVPGH Team Leader Kathy Scheuble (not pictured) at the Recovery Walk on September 16. The LWVPGH supports this event each year. Some attendees are “returning citizens,” formerly incarcerated individuals, that do not realize they can register and vote in Pennsylvania.



Kathy Scheuble, left, was LWVPGH Team Leader at the Annual Recovery Walk – Pittsburgh on September 16. Kathy mentored each of the volunteers and brought all the materials. Pictured here are Seren Spence (left) and Seven Hackett (right), super-energetic students from the University of Pittsburgh’s Leading Women of Tomorrow who joined the LWVPGH in our voter registration efforts.



Peggy Schmiedecke, on left, leads the LWVPGH outreach to LaRoche University. She was joined at the September 6 Activity Fair by Kathleen Flaherty and Cris Graham. (Karey Kluesner is not pictured.)



Karey Kluesner explains the voter registration process to a student at the LaRoche University Activity Fair on September 6.

CIVIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

by Amy Kleissas, Director, Civic Education in Schools and Community



ACLA (Allegheny County Library Association) and Carnegie Libraries

The August 15th and 17th in-service workshops for librarians were presented by Amy Kleissas, with help from Judy Clack, and were recorded. Librarians are being encouraged to conduct their own voter registration drives during **National Registration Day, September 19, 2023**. Libraries have also offered to share our social media content throughout this election cycle.

National Voter Registration Day and “[Train the Trainer](#)” Slide Deck

This voter registration slide deck was shared with organizations like *Goodwill, Action Housing, PERSAD, and others (26 in total)*. The Civic Education teams are available to conduct the presentations ourselves, but we hope that with the detailed information in this slide deck, these organizations can train their own members to run voter registration drives.

Allegheny County Jail — Presentations and Voter Registration (9.26, 9.27, 9.28)

Plans are now finalized for a second initiative, LWVPGH’s visit to the jail to conduct voter registration with a dash of civic education. A preview of the program will be presented to incarcerated juveniles on September 18th. Amy Kleissas and Lorraine Cross (B-PEP) will present to about 20 individuals who are younger than 18 years old.

The **presentation team of volunteers** includes two LWVPGH High School Outreach team members, and volunteers from the Black-Political Empowerment Project, West End P.O.W.E.R., the Rankin Mon Valley Pittsburgh Section of the National Council of Negro Women, and the National Council of Jewish Women.

A **script, handouts, and a video of the presentation** have been created for the tablets in the jail pods. Jail staff members have been responsive throughout.

- A new web page, “[Voting Rights for Incarcerated and Reentering Citizens](#)” has been created to contain all the resources the LWVPGH has created for these folks.

Pittsburgh Public Schools – Continuous Voter Registration and Student Voice Subgroup

The third initiative that has developed over the summer is the partnership with the Pittsburgh Public School K-12 Social Studies coordinator and the Director of Student Voice for the 2023-24 school year.

The PA Youth Vote model of **continuous voter registration** is being adopted by PPS. Last year, our team was invited to PPS Carrick High School to register eligible students. This school year, our High School Outreach team has been asked to participate with **monthly visits to one or two assigned high schools** beginning in October. With the help of High School Outreach team members and Student Voice participants, eligible students who will turn 18 before the next election will have the opportunity to register to vote in their own high school at the same time each month.

We have also been asked to take on the role of **adult allies** for the **Student Voice voter empowerment subgroup**, which is composed of students who will lead this effort in each of the high schools. The kick-off for Student Voice will be held on September 29th and the LWVPGH has offered to underwrite the cost of pizza for this committed group of students. Amy Kleissas will present.

The possibility of conducting our **high school classroom lessons** in one or two PPS high schools is being considered as a “pilot.” Scheduled meetings with PPS and LWVPGH Civic Education continue.

Continued next page

February 2024 Teen Workshop

The Civic Ed team was invited to partner with the National Council of Jewish Women, PA Youth Advocacy Network, and PA Youth Vote to coordinate and plan a **February 2024 Teen Workshop**. This workshop is designed to be *conducted by youth leaders, to train youth leaders in voter empowerment*. LWVPGH resources like the “**Train the Trainer**” and “**Youth as Advocates**” slide decks may be used for recruitment and training of youth leaders, which will begin in October 2023. (Find these slide decks on the [Slide Decks for Speakers](#) web page.) Recruitment of student leaders is underway. Please forward to any interested student: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdwrPwDLdvCq1fshRHLmlQrTmeuZ1KuMoOssuloovhlwhpGjA/viewform?pli=1>

High School Outreach and College-University Team: Classroom Presentations

The “[Youth as Advocates](#)” presentation with [Toolkit](#), builds on LWVPGH presentations made in the past at colleges-universities and adapts information from the PA Youth Advocacy Network’s model (a subgroup of the Jewish Health Foundation). This new slide deck is the presentation that will be used in 2023-24 on college-university campuses.

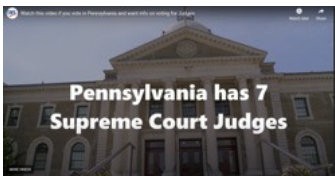
- High School presenters will conduct the first presentation at **Point Park** on **October 4th, and October 6th**. Plans are being made to present “[Why Vote](#)” in classrooms at **McKeesport High School**. The first HS Outreach team meeting is being planned.

Video Team

Kudos to Michelle Grant who has completed an amazing number of *equally amazing new videos* this summer! We have one new member, Ashika Henry Richardson, and are looking for even more members for this creative team. We need help to find more effective ways to push out our videos and resources on social media. Both the library coordinators and Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts have promised to share our resources.

Complete:

- New Municipal Election video: https://youtu.be/9l5ml_DPpqq;
- Voting After a Move: <https://youtu.be/iBxfs2udGsA>
- Attn: Young Voters: <https://youtu.be/TqilQg4nvyw?feature=shared>
- 3 New Mis- Disinformation Videos:
<https://youtu.be/MOY80HT0eA> ; https://youtu.be/Sl_z6AnziJ4 ; <https://youtu.be/GN9vYz-XObM>
- PA Online Voter Registration video: <https://youtu.be/5DwxjZevuUE>
- "Ask the League" Series videos: the first one features Judy Clack: <https://youtu.be/l8lf3knHAIQ>
- A new LWVPGH YouTube Landing Page video: <https://youtu.be/OY6Cm-wUqD4>
- The Video Library web page has been updated at www.lwvpg.org/video.



A new video about PA’s Court System: <https://youtu.be/Qzy8eh4kN70>

Civic Education in Schools and Community Bandwidth

The new initiatives this summer resulted in a review of the Civic Education teams’ “bandwidth.” The call went out for help and our terrific volunteers responded!

- Thank you to new High School Outreach team members Eileen Brennan and Karen Bolden who will be joining us.

Continued next page

- Thank you to the new **College-University Coordinator, Jenn McCarthy** from Pitt-Cyber, who will also help us meet the increasing demands of our successful Civic Education teams! The first meeting is scheduled for **Monday, September 11, 6:30pm**.
- **A second pass-through grant from LWVPA and Eden Hall for \$10K** has just been received for continuing our Civic Education work in 2023.
- Joanne Moore and Amy Kleissas have submitted a planning document for **programs and projected expenses for 2024** to the Development Team.

Happy 18th Birthday Posters – “Tube” Stuffing - August 16

Joanne Moore once again coordinated this extremely effective project which is being duplicated by Leagues across the country, like the LWV's of Alameda, CA and Sonoma, CA. Letters to high school principals in five counties—**Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Washington, and Westmoreland**—were sent before the poster tubes were mailed. Last school year, many requests from Westmoreland County for high school classroom presentations resulted from this initiative. We learned that posters showed up in public areas in the Fox Chapel, North Allegheny, Shaler, and Chartiers Valley High Schools. All principals also receive monthly emails of relevant voter and election information with links to our civic education resources.

Ready-Set-VOTE Bag Stuffing – Completed on August 22 and 24 (9am - 2pm)

See September **VOTER** article.

4000 RSV bags of voter information were “stuffed” at the home of Amy Kleissas by 20 wonderful volunteers who donated **145 hours to this effort**. We will give RSV bags to the PPS schools we visit this year but also will send RSV bags to smaller under-resourced high schools like East Allegheny and others. In addition, RSV bags were distributed to B-PEP, AKA, VEEEM, JCC, and West End P.O.W.E.R. Over six elections, our Civic Education team and volunteers have created and assembled **22,000 Ready-Set-VOTE bags** to schools and community.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE ON NPR?

by Preston Shimer, VP Administration



The office took a call from Connor Donevan, a producer for National Public Radio's “All things Considered Weekend Edition.” Calls like this usually go to the President, but Michele Knoll was in Europe, so I responded. It turns out that Connor was looking for “old people” who could participate in an in-person round table discussion about how people the same age as the two likely Presidential Candidates felt about voting for someone who was their age. When my wife Annette heard about it, she said angrily: “LEAGUE MEMBERS AREN'T OLD.” Connor was sincerely asking for our help to identify some people he could interview for this segment who would represent a variety of viewpoints. I asked several of our members if they were interested in participating and some were contacted. In the end, Susan Hughes and I made the group. I think we were included because we represented “Conflicted Republicans” and “Democrats.”

Susan and I drove to a Lutheran retirement community in Zelienople for an hour-long recording which ended up being an 8-minute segment (preceded by a 3-minute introduction) broadcast on Sunday afternoon, September 24th. If case you are interested, the broadcast is available as well as a text version at this NPR link: [how-older-voters-feel-about-voting-for-older-presidents](#) NPR “All Things Considered” host, Scott Detrow, and Connor Donevan met us there with two residents of the retirement community, John Fuller and Rosalie Bablack, representing “Democrat/Independents” and “Republicans.” In the end, I think the four of us presented typical Western PA viewpoints. A closing question didn't make the final broadcast. “If the contest for 2024 is Trump vs Biden, who will you vote for?” Biden 3, Trump 1.

BOOK CLUB REPORTS by Joan Cucinotta

NEXT MEETING

The book selected for October is *Solito* by Zamora Javier.

BOOK COMMENTARY FOR *The Shadow Docket: How the Supreme Court Uses Stealth Rulings to Amass Power and Undermine the Republic* by Stephen Vladeck

“Who knows what evil lies in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!”

That famous introduction to the radio program “Detective Story” serves well the message that Stephen Vladeck sends in his *The Shadow Docket: How the Supreme Court Uses Stealth Rulings to Amass Power and Undermine the Republic*. Vladeck has had dealings with deliberate government obfuscations in the past. He is a professor of law at the University of Texas School of Law, with a focus on constitutional law, national security law, and most relevant here, the legal scope of federal jurisdictions. He is also a nationally recognized expert on the role of the federal courts in the war on terrorism. With this book, Vladeck voices his concern: the shadow docket, a procedure that had once been minimally used for efficiency’s sake, is now a device used to create law with no accountability in its creation.

The first half of the book is an historical review of how the Supreme Court began and evolved over the years. This may be fascinating to students of the law, but it is hard going for a lay reader. The book becomes more accessible once the difference between a “merit docket” and a “shadow docket” is made clear. Most of the rulings the Supreme Court has handed down over the years have been “merit dockets.” When the Court hears a case that results in a merit docket, the justices have gone through a full briefing from the lower courts, heard oral arguments, and submitted signed opinions by each of the justices. There is clear transparency in merit dockets because they are explicit in their exact reasoning and accountability of the legal proceedings. Obviously, this necessitates considerable time for such thorough legal work. The shadow docket, on the other hand, had been created for emergency situations when time constraints prevented a full gathering and rendering (for example to issue a stay when an execution date is coming due). Because they are used for expediency in time sensitive cases, they do not include the extensive explanations or internal considerations in their renderings. Just the final judgment.

Vladeck notes that historically the Court has attempted to stay out of making political rulings through various methods. By being selective and strategic in its case selections, the Court could avoid controversy. The Court has not been apolitical at all times but frequently made an effort to keep itself out of a political fray. But this started to change in 2017 when the government’s lawyers aggressively pursued an unprecedented number of applications for emergency relief via shadow dockets. While it is understandable for any administration’s lawyers to take advantage of a tactic in support of their party’s success, the Supreme Court is meant to transcend immediate politics so that it can render true justice and fair laws. Since 2017, however, there has been a dramatic shift in the Court’s use of the shadow docket and in its refusal to take up specific cases that would address recent restrictions developed by state legislatures regarding social or voting issues (for example, the Texas Heartbeat Bill). To prove his point, Vladeck enumerates case after case in which, collectively, the Court has been demonstrating a clear political agenda. For example, cases involving religious rulings, Covid testing mandates, voting rights, and abortion rights have been treated via shadow dockets. And the problem with this, as Vladeck says, is that the Court is “deciding so much while saying so little.”

This is a frightening book in terms of how this Supreme Court has been actively avoiding cases on progressive issues and passing rapid rulings via the shadow dockets that consistently support a conservative agenda. The fate of American jurisprudence and democracy is now in jeopardy with this little-known shadow docket, and its constant deployment is a deliberate act to obfuscate and ram through legal decisions that cannot be examined in the open.

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We should all be concerned about this since it affects a critical branch of American democracy. Even some Justices are sounding the alarm. As noted by Justice Kagan after the Court’s refusal to block the infamous Texas Heartbeat Bill (which banned abortions after six weeks), “the majority’s decision is emblematic of too much of this Court’s shadow-docket decision-making—which every day becomes more unreasoned, inconsistent, and impossible to defend.” The problem, Vladeck asserts, is not that the Court has been issuing decrees with which he disagrees. Vladeck actually wants the Supreme Court to be staffed with justices with whom he does disagree. He believes in a democratic society in which issues are debated, and he just wants the Supreme Court's opinions and reasoning to come out of the shadows, as it were, and be more transparent.

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Budget	Ellie Siegal	Vote411 & Voter Guides	Annette Shimer
		Vote411 & VG assistant	Michelle Zmijanac
<u>Staff</u>			
Community Information Center	Manager: Michelle Grant	Marcellus Shale Grant	Manager: Heather Harr
<u>League Phone Numbers, Websites, and Social Media</u>			
Greater Pittsburgh	412-261-4284	lwvpgh.org	
Pennsylvania	717-234-1576 Ext 0	palwv.org	
National	202-429-1965	lwv.org	
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