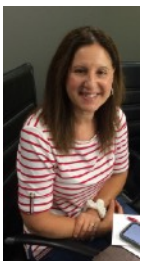


WE VOTER

Volume 28, No. 3

November 2021

PROGRAM by Cris Beuger, Program Chair



I want to thank Amy Kleissas and her Civic Education Committee for her presentation to our membership in October and for all of their hard work in educating students and community members.

Our next meeting will focus on Education. Kathy Nagle, Education Committee Chair, has put together a wonderful program for us on **November 9 at 7PM for "What's Happening in Our Schools? A Conversation with Dr. Gerald Zahorchak, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education."**

As Kathy describes, "This program provides a unique opportunity for League members to be informed on a number of current education issues, including fair funding, charter/cyber schools, covid safety and critical race theory.

Dr. Zahorchak served as the state's Secretary of Education from 2006-2010. In this role, he was responsible for the education of nearly two million school children across the Commonwealth. He is a national education leader focusing on Common-Core Standards and implementing Standards-Based Education to improve student achievement. Dr. Zahorchak is a frequent speaker at national educational conferences, symposia and other forums and is a frequent guest on PA public television and radio stations."

Click here to register for this informative meeting: <https://forms.gle/S5q8Qw2Qq2X2wwUBA>.

PRESENTATION AT CHATHAM by Amy Kleissas

On October 13, 2021, at **Chatham University**, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics (PCWP), **Doug Spindler and Michelle Grant**, members of the LWVPGH Civic Education Team presented: *"How to Be a Citizen Activist – 101 Years of Advocacy and Action by the League of Women Voters."*



This presentation was in partnership with the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) and provided the enthusiastic audience a wide spectrum of information on **Voter Advocacy Training**.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

THE VOTING RIGHTS STRUGGLE CONTINUES



The League of Women Voters has been in the forefront of the struggle for voting rights for more than 100 years. And the effort continues today. Most recently, the League has been pushing for passage of the For the People Act, a bill at the federal level that would have set national election standards, addressed gerrymandering and placed new requirements for online political ads. In fact, LWVUS CEO, Virginia Kase Solomon was recently arrested as part of the protest rally outside the White House where the group was urging President Biden to help pass the bill. It's an example of the "good trouble" in which League members have participated over the years.

Even though the For the People Act did not garner the Senate votes necessary to move forward at this time, the fight will continue. There are more bills pending, including the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. These are important pieces of legislation and our elected officials need to hear from us about our support. Calling and writing to our Representatives and Senators is one way those of us at the local level can "rally" in support, even though we may not be able to attend rallies at the White House.

Another important area for us to focus on is what's happening at the state level here in Pennsylvania. Congressional and legislative redistricting is in process right now. There have been multiple hearings across the state and League members have

testified at several. The Legislative Reapportionment Commission, chaired by Mark Nordenberg, is expected to finalize the census data soon and begin the process of drawing maps for the state house and senate. The LRC has committed to a transparent process and will be posting maps online for citizen input. Information on what the LRC is doing can be found at <https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us>.

There are several proposed bills in the state legislature governing election legislation, including potential changes to mail-in voting. And, recently, one of the State Senate Committees voted to subpoena the records of more than 7,000,000 Pennsylvania voters including driver's license and Social Security numbers with the objective of turning the information over to a third-party firm to search for fraud. LWVPA is taking an active role in pushing back against handing over this private information. To stay on top of what's happening, I urge you to look at the LWVPGH website at <https://www.lwvpgh.org> and click on the Advocacy icon at the top of the page. You can then choose Harrisburg Watch to get information on events in Harrisburg.

There's lots of voter information on our website from videos of forums that LWVPGH has hosted for candidates, to Voters Guides, including mini-guides for some of the suburban races, information about candidates for Common Pleas judges, links to check on the status of your mail-in ballot, and more. League volunteers have put in enormous time and effort to provide this information, so use it and tell all your friends and neighbors about it. An informed citizenry is the best insurance for a vibrant democracy. See you at the polls!

Maureen Grosheider

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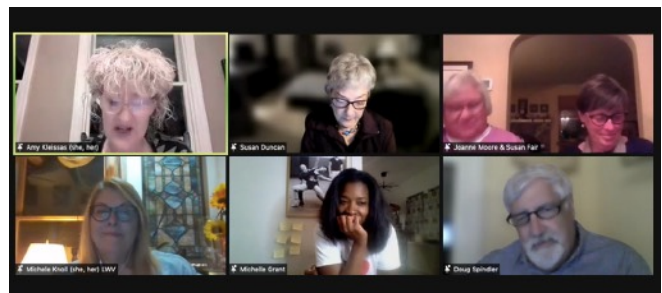
The League is a nonpartisan organization whose purpose is to encourage the informed participation of citizens in government and to influence public policy through education and advocacy.

VOTER Editor: Sue Broughton

Email: info@lwvpgh.org

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The Civic Education Team, Amy Kleissas, Susan Duncan, Joanne Moore, Susan Fair, Michele Knoll, Michelle Grant, and Doug Spindler, present their course to upgrade civic education in our local high schools, universities, and online community at the LWVPGH October meeting – a very informative meeting.

LWVGP Officers / Executive Committee		Local Area Meeting Chairs	
President	Maureen Grosheider	Pgh. Central 412-477-7572	Martha Raak
V.P.1 Development, Gun safety	Nancy Naragon	North Hills 412-779-3089	Nancy Mott
V.P.2 Program	Cris Beuger	South Hills 412-760-9642	Maureen Mamula
Secretary	Mary Molloy		
Treasurer	Preston Shimer		
Directors		Interest & Service Area Specialists	
Voter Service	Judy Clack	VOTER Editor	Sue Broughton
Membership, Naturalization	Judy Diorio	Book Club	Joan Cucinotta
Social media	Emily Ferri	Gov. relations, Outreach	Jackie Dixon
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	Terrie Griffin	Senior Housing	Nancy Mott
Publicity & Public Relations	Lydia Hatcher	Environment	Don Naragon
Civic Education	Amy Kleissias	PR, Communications, Blast	Eileen Olmsted
Advocacy	Michelle Knoll	Senior Housing	Linda Schneider
Education, Leg. Interviews	Kathy Nagle	Housing	Adelaide Smith
Webmaster	Ruth Quint	National / State Program	Carol Walton
Vote411 & Voter Guides	Annette Shimer		
Staff			
Community Information Center	Manager: Barbara Simpson	Marcellus Shale Grant	Manager: Heather Harr
League Phone Numbers, Websites, and Social Media			
Greater Pittsburgh	412-261-4284	lwvpgh.org	
Pennsylvania	717-234-1576 Ext 0	palwv.org	
National	202-429-1965	lwv.org	
Facebook	www.facebook.com	Search: League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh	



SOME LEAGUE HISTORY, STRUCTURE AND TRADITION by Sue Broughton

The word “program” has a specific meaning within traditional League structure. The League of Women Voters develops its advocacy positions from the bottom up. League *program* is a collection of consensus positions taken by the League on issues after careful study by members; it is not informational events even though they are very informative. The League by-laws state:

“Principles. The Principles are concepts of government adopted by the national convention and supported by the League as a whole. They are the authorization for the adoption of national, state, and local program.

“Program. The LWVGP Program shall consist of: a) action to implement the principles of the League of Women Voters of the United States, and b) those governmental issues chosen for concerted study and action.”

The League Unit structure is intended to support that program. The by-laws also state:

“Area UNIT Meetings: The Board shall establish local area unit meetings for the convenience of LWVGP [now LWVPGH]members and to promote actions specific to those localities.”

The bylaws then go on with detailed instructions as to how Program is to be developed – the actual study of issues by members, work – and it is work – that is initially started by a study committee gathering information, which is then discussed to reach consensus on a position in the units, sometimes over two or more months.

Continued next page

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**
4th Wednesday by Zoom.
Chair is Kathy Nagle, education@lwvpg.org or 1-814-241-8149
- ✓ **Voter Service Committee**
1st & 3rd Tuesdays, 12:30 pm. by Zoom. Additional meetings occasionally added as needed. Contact Judy Clack at 512-731-0280 voterservice@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 as changes in League programming are made.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER CALENDAR

Late October, LWVPGH co-sponsored events

29 Fri	B-PEP Candidate Forum, 6 – 8:30 pm, Letter Carriers Bldg.
31 Sun	8:30 – 9:30 am, WPXI-TV, B-PEP Candidate Forum for Pittsburgh Mayor

November

2 Tue	Election Day. Polls are open from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm, Absentee ballots must be received by 5 pm.
3 Wed	Education Committee, 7:00 pm, on Zoom
8 Mon	Board meeting by Zoom, 12:30 pm
9 Tue	Voter Service Committee meeting, 12:30-2:30 pm on Zoom
9 Tue	LWVPGH General Meeting, 7-8:30 pm: What's Happening in Our Schools: A Conversation with Dr. Gerald Zahorchak, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education
16 Tue & 17 Wed	Straight Scoop on Shale Conference, noon-4:00 pm both days, on Zoom
19 Fri	Non-fiction Book Club meeting, Anderson Shelter, weather permitting

December

13 Mon	Board meeting by Zoom, 12:30 pm
17 Fri	Non-fiction Book Club lunch, Location TBD

That's really what the units exist to do. We used to study local issues and participate in studies adopted by the state and national Leagues. The by-laws are the last section of the Annual Meeting Workbook where you can find this description if you want to read it. The local Program, as it currently exists, is also in the Annual Meeting Workbook.

Even though we are not currently holding meetings, the units are listed in the left column on this page to maintain our traditional structure. That's why I have relabeled the column "League Meeting Structure."

Maybe this concept of positions developed by study is outdated, since women, many of whom now work, may no longer have time to do this kind of study (or may be devoting their energy to voter service and civic education, equally important endeavors). We haven't done a study locally for years. We do act on positions developed this way in the past, sometimes interpreting them to address more modern concerns. Units, once they can actually meet, might want to pick a position of local Program and do a mini-study to update that position. Over time, we could modernize our local Program.

Perhaps, however, our League is evolving into a different type of organization. If so, the members doing the evolving, which should be a significant number of members, should start with a knowledge of current League structure, vocabulary, and consistency with LWVUS structure; should articulate what kind of organization they want to become; and should suggest revisions of the by-laws, structure, and procedures to reflect their vision of our League.

The Straight Scoop on Shale

A Project of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania Citizen Education Fund

Ninth Annual Shale & Public Health Conference

Tuesday November 16, 2021
&
Wednesday, November 17, 2021
from noon to 4:00 p.m. EST

This is an online **ZOOM conference**. Login details will be provided closer to the event to all registrants.

The conference is presented by the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania and hosted by the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

The conference is free, but you need to register!

Register : www.ShalePALWV.org

Featuring new research presented by national experts on shale and public health impacts, and practical applications.

Tuesday, November 16th:

Session 1 - New Health Research

Session 2 - Research & Regulatory Policy

Wednesday, November 17th:

Session 3 - Emerging and Urgent

Session 4 - Community Voices

League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
Straight Scoop on Shale * 1-800-617-4253 * shalemarella@gmail.com

VOTER SERVICE by Judy Clack, Voter Service Chair



Upcoming Candidate Forums:

Fri. Oct. 29, 6 – 8:30 pm, B-PEP Candidate Forum: Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, Pittsburgh School Board Districts 5 and 9, and Magisterial District Judge Wards 26 & 27; **Letter Carriers Bldg., 841 California Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15212.** Moderator: Lynne Hayes Freeland. LWVPGH is a co-sponsor.

Sun. Oct. 31, 8:30 – 9:30 am, WPXI-TV, B-PEP Candidate Forum for Pittsburgh Mayor. Moderators: David Johnson and Lisa Sylvester. LWVPGH is a co-sponsor.

Last-Minute Voting Information

Drop Box: You can return **your own mail-in ballot** to the Elections Division at a drop box in the lobby of the County Office Building on weekdays, Oct. 27, 28, 29, Nov. 1, from 8:30 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sat., Oct. 30, from 8 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun. Oct. 31, from 11 a.m.-7 p.m.; and Tues., Nov. 2, Election Day, from 7 a.m.-8 p.m.

Over-the-Counter Voting: Ended on Tuesday, October 26 at the Elections Division Office, Pittsburgh.

Free Rides to the Polls: Tues. Nov. 2: Free Rides to the Polls provided by B-PEP. Call on Election Day, Tues. Nov. 2: 412-212-8775, 412-434-0919 or 412-758-2056. Or email: BPEP.Pittsburgh@gmail.com

One Stamp: Although the ballot is larger and the envelope bigger, you still need to affix only one first-class stamp for it to be returned. However, it must be received by 8 p.m. on Tues. Nov. 2.

Where's My Ballot? Check on the status of your mail-in or absentee ballot here:

<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/pages/ballottracking.aspx>

Candidate Information

<https://lwvpgh.org/> **LWVPGH Website** Go to our homepage for the most up-to-date information about the election. Scroll down.

It has links to mini-voters' guides for common pleas judges, some school boards, and the contested magisterial district judge races.

[Vote411.org](https://vote411.org/) – enter your home address. See your whole ballot, one race at a time.

<https://lwvpgh.org/common-pleas> - has video and text answers from candidates

<https://lwvpgh.org/forums> - has links to many forums.

www.lwvpgh.org/pa-courts - has information on the state court races and local judicial races

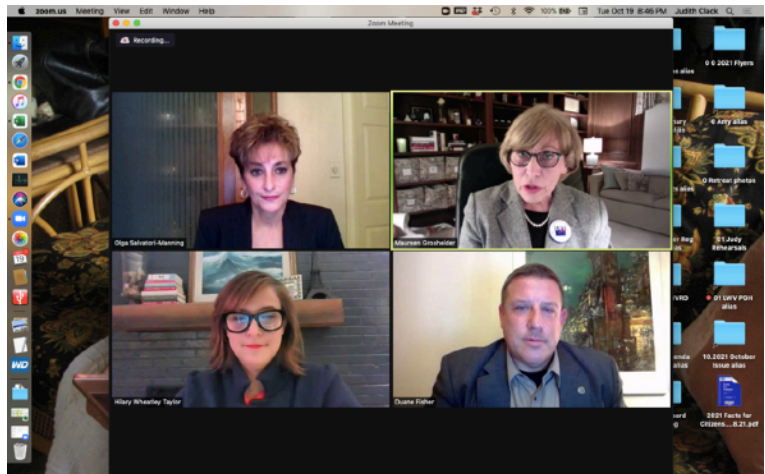


Photo of the Zoom screen from the Mt. Lebanon/Dormont Magisterial District Judge forum. The three candidate names are on the photo. Maureen Grosheider was the moderator.

Voter Service Committee Meeting: Tues. Nov. 9, 12:30 – 2:30 pm on Zoom. Review of all efforts taken prior to the November 2021 election. What should we continue or change for the Spring 2022 primary election? All members are invited. Zoom invitation is on the Member Hub Calendar. Email Judy Clack to receive the Agenda with Zoom Invitation: voterservice@lwvpgh.org.

New ELECTION RESOURCES ON THE WEBSITE:

VOTE411 “MINI-GUIDES” by Ruth Quint

If you take a look at the homepage this week, you'll see our November 2021 Voters Guide, along with several new Vote411 “Mini-Guides.” Each Mini-Guide covers just one of these races: the three contested magisterial judge races, the crowded Court of Common Pleas race, and four high-interest school board contests. Most of these races are not included in the print version of the Voters' Guide, which covers statewide, and countywide races, along with local races within the City of Pittsburgh.

Cost and logistics keep many high-interest, suburban races out of the print Voters' Guide, but pixels are free! This fall, we'll keep track of how many voters use the mini-guides. With a week to go before the election, we have had almost 1,500 downloads of the mini-guides, vs. only about 250 downloads of the main guide. Many more copies have been distributed by libraries and community organizations who download and forward the document itself, rather than the link.

Some of the guides have gotten many more views than others. For instance, the Mt. Lebanon School Board guide has been downloaded over 500 times, vs. the Bethel Park School Board with only 55 downloads. What is the difference? A LWVPGH member posted a link to the Mt. Lebanon guide on a community Facebook page, where interested people can find it. Please help us spread voter information by posting a link to one of the guides on a Facebook or Next-door page for your community. If your school board or magisterial race is not covered, you can highlight the Common Pleas mini-guide, which applies to the whole county, or the digital version of the main 2021 Voters' Guide. All guides are available on the homepage at www.lwvpgh.org, or you can share them using these links:

November 2021 Voters' Guide Municipal Election: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=883294.

School Boards Races Mini-Guides

Bethel Park: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=882661

Mt. Lebanon: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=883323

North Allegheny: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=882662

Pittsburgh Public: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=882663

Judicial Races Mini-Guides

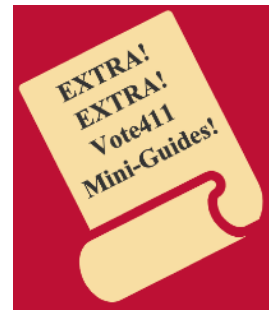
Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=877161

Magisterial District Judges -

District Dormont/Mt. Lebanon: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=883425

District. Pittsburgh Wards 26/27: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=882694

District. Fox Chapel Area www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=883331

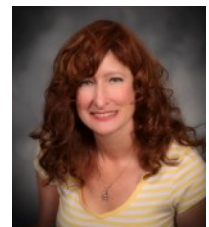


MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH EDUCATION ADVOCACY by Kathy Nagle

The parable of the hummingbird is an inspiring story of courage, compassion, action and responsibility. One version reads as follows:

One day a blazing fire engulfed the forest. Animals, abandoning their homes, quickly fled toward the edge of the forest. Feeling helpless, all the animals but the tiny hummingbird watched as the fire burned and destroyed their beloved habitat. This particular hummingbird made a decision to do something. Suddenly, a flash! A dart. A flit. The animals saw the hummingbird flying from the stream carrying water in her tiny beak. In collective astonishment the animals uttered, “You are too little to make a difference. It’s only a drop. It won’t make a difference.” The hummingbird replied with great wisdom, **“I cannot control everything, but I do what I can. I do my best to make my part of the world better.”**

Individually, and even collectively, we cannot control everything. We can, however, work together to effect change. Your drop of water helps me. My drop of water helps you. Together, our collective drops of water empower those that we touch in our communities.



Continued next page

Along those lines, I invite you to participate in our Education Committee. The Education Committee meets monthly to discuss, study, and plan advocacy activities. Our basic premise: every child deserves a quality education; education is essential to the progress and growth of our society. Through your involvement, you can carry your drop of water at the local level; you can make a difference.

At our September 29th meeting, we identified these focus areas: Support of Fair Funding; Use of ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) Funds; Elimination of Racism in our Schools; Charter and Cyber Charter School Reform. I will be providing updates for you in the months to come. **Looking ahead, our next meeting is November 3rd at 7PM via Zoom.** Please email me for the agenda and Zoom link. We also encourage your attendance on November 9 at 7PM at the League's monthly meeting. We will be welcoming Dr. Gerald Zahorchak, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education as our distinguished speaker.

Once again, I welcome your participation on the Education Committee. My email address is education@lwvpgh.org. I look forward to hearing from you.

MY PLANT-A-TREE BILLBOARD: THE STORY AND BACKSTORY

by janet jai, MLA, League member and writer/artist

The Story

I won a billboard in a charity auction and am using it to encourage Pittsburghers to plant trees. Planting trees is one of the most effective ways to combat climate change, and Autumn in Pennsylvania is one of the best times to plant a tree. My billboard includes two pairs of hands, one pair black and one pair white, supporting a golden oak tree. The billboard will be up for 4 weeks (through November 7) on the hillside along Pittsburgh's Bigelow Boulevard between the Bloomfield Bridge and Herron Avenue as you travel toward downtown. If you can't plant a tree yourself, I encourage you to support a tree-planting nonprofit like Tree Pittsburgh locally, the Arbor Day Foundation nationally, or any of many other worthy organizations that are helping to save the planet by planting trees. My firm, Vision and Values (vision-and-values.com) focuses on solutions and is dedicated to "Communications That Make a Difference."



The Backstory

In Summer 2020 the pandemic had settled in, and many people were hurting economically. It seemed to me that it would be great for the City or some other group to launch a tree-planting campaign—hiring people to plant trees—a win-win for the planet and for local residents who needed work. I made a few calls, but nobody appeared to be doing that. I knew I couldn't do such a campaign myself, but it popped into my head that I could do a billboard to encourage people to plant trees. I even went so far as to check out billboard prices. Unfortunately, way out of reach for me. So, I shelved the idea and went on.

Then this summer (2021) Sojourner House, a nonprofit in East Liberty that provides in-patient residential treatment for addicted mothers and their children, held a Victorian tea with a silent auction. Lo and behold, their auction included a billboard! The beginning bid was much lower than the billboard's normal cost. So, I attended the tea, bid on the billboard (which included the services of a Lamar Advertising graphic designer), and won!

Then I worked closely with Lamar designer Brittany Altman. I wrote the copy, devised the creative approach (fully grown golden oak tree emerging from soil being held by black and white hands), and worked with Brittany to create a billboard that was "beautiful and minimalistic." The billboard company pays for access to licensed images that they can use on client billboards, so Brittany added a golden oak tree to black-and-white hands holding soil and gave me exactly what I wanted. Thank you, Brittany, Lamar, and Sojourner House for providing this opportunity to help save the planet.

BOOK CLUB REPORT by Joan Cucinotta

UPCOMING MEETINGS

11/19 *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimerer. There are many unavailable copies in the library system. Half-Price Books has some for ordering.

NB - we hope to meet in the shelter for this meeting ("we've worn blankets before," the intrepid members insisted, apparently relying on global warming), but hold your bets. I'll send out the reminder the Wednesday before and be directed by the weather report in case we have to Zoom it.

12/17 Lunch - This seems to be shaping up as a pot luck. Stay tuned. I will confirm the details for you after the next meeting.

NB - I've been informed that December is a non-reading month so no reading is scheduled.

1/21 *The Sum Of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* by Heather McGhee. The library has many copies available currently.

2/18 *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* by Robert D. Putnam. The library has several copies available.

Also, this book title has come in for the group's consideration--*After the Apocalypse: America's Role in a World Transformed* By Andrew Bacevich

BOOK REVIEW: *Humankind: A Hopeful History* by Rutger Bregman

Relax, sceptics and pessimists: *Humankind* is not a sermon on the fundamental goodness of humans. Rutger Bregman, a Dutch historian, freely admits that there's plenty of evil in the world, but asserts that the good can prevail.

Bregman first takes issue with the idea that violence was hardwired in early humans by using early archeological evidence. Early humans did resort to violence, he argues, but it was isolated and unorganized until the advent of agriculture and the shift from hunter/gatherer to farming societies. The rise of civilizations, with their promise of peace and prosperity, only brought disease, war, and slavery.

Bregman then advances his position about the essential peacefulness of humans by correcting common misconceptions about five separate modern events, events often cited to prove that humans naturally tend toward violence: (1) the story that the original Easter Islanders caused their own extinction, (2) the reputed ease with which ordinary people turned into sadists in the Stanford Experiment, (3) the real life *Lord of the Flies* scenario called the Robbers Cave Experiment, (4) the shocking Milgram Experiment, and (5) the Bystander Effect based on the infamous Kitty Gervase murder. What Bregman reveals is that the facts in each case had been distorted to align with assumptions about innate human violence needed by the experimenter or reporter. In each case, the people who did terrible things to others had been manipulated by the observer or the details of the case had been twisted for a good news story.

To explain the violence in human history, Bregman argues that while we do trust and like the people in our own "tribe," we don't feel that way toward others on a global level. Of course this inherent "negativity bias" did help us survive life in the jungle, but in the long term, combining that bias with "availability bias" (we readily believe what we see/hear in our own circles) has brought out our more Hobbesian reflexes.

Enlightenment philosophers determined that the damage our bellicose actions cause us can best be managed by elevating Reason as a guide to human affairs. Reason was the path away from governance by religions and towards governance by laws. Most laws, however, are retributive, based on payback, and thus written with Alexander Hamilton's premise in mind that "every man must be supposed a knave." Laws, therefore, are made to address human inclinations to evil. Bregman feels this is a negativity bias that must be countered.

Continued next page

He asks readers to decide whether they side with “the will to doubt” (Bertrand Russell) or “the will to believe” (William James). Bregman says that “availability bias” will allow more violence by making good people go along with wrongdoing even if they really don’t agree just to avoid exclusion or shame. The “will to doubt” the inherent good in people serves well in these groups. Bregman comes down on the side of “the will to believe” as the one element that can break the downward spiral of lemmings following each other over a cliff; it can bolster an individual in difficult situations.

Incentives, like bonuses or prizes to change behavior, are unsuccessful extrinsic motivators since people will stop the desired behavior the minute the bonuses end. If we start with the premise that people will generally try to do their best, that people can do good if they are intrinsically motivated, we can build a better society. One model that has achieved this was begun in Porto Alegre in Brazil; its model of participatory budgeting brought trust to the political systems and redefined democracy. This direct participation by the citizens has had the effect of lifting all boats in towns that took it up and has been proven successful in countering prejudice and racism. Personal contact, experience with others outside our own group, makes other people more recognizable and acceptable to us. As Bregman says, even trolls have someone at home whom they love. We believe that our enemies are “malicious sadists...[but] In reality, our enemies are just like us.”

He ends the book with 10 rules to live by, all based on his “will to believe.” All of these rules are ones we could probably predict, except for number 7: “avoid the news.”

GROUP DISCUSSION

The discussion first focused on the series of infamous events Bregman debunks (Milgram, Kitty Gervase, etc). Some felt he was cherry picking these most scandalous events to support his premise regarding our intrinsic kindness. The sad truth is that The Other scares us. Look at the aftermath of the Tree of Life horror. Where has that initial outpouring of solidarity with all of humanity gone? We do seem to default along tribal lines, but some felt that the divisions are more deeply drawn now. Wars and tragedies can bring us together spontaneously, but long lasting peace takes work. Negativity bias is still so apparent. One only has to look at the firestorm that surrounded the creation of the Woodland Hills School District.

Quality education is key to addressing discrimination, but minorities are kept out of the Ivy League pipeline that can guarantee a high level job. While a program like Inroads, which promotes internships for minorities, helps, it is not enough.

The group also noted that the book disparages education policies that have evolved only to reduce play time, an activity where children learn the best. The group pushed back on this. As experienced teachers and parents, many group members can attest that play is a good tool, but not a magic bullet.

Quality education depends on zip code unfortunately. Therefore Housing is a crucial part of the path to quality education. Washington state has developed a potential model for housing (the Rainier Vista Housing Authority) that assures diversity in housing and support for community based programs.

Bregman has assembled an impressive pile of data to support his argument, but the fact that he easily debunked so many examples and experiments has made us now somewhat wary of testing data from psychologists. Even the model town he cites, Porto Alegre in Brazil, for its achievement in participatory democratic action seems questionable in light of the actions of Brazil’s, President Bolsonaro.

Several also found his Rousseauvian premise attractive, but were put off by the “Christian” tone of the ending.



NEW MEMBERS

North Hills

George Kniss

george.kniss@verizon.net

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The following article was requested by the LWVGP Advocacy Chair, Michelle Knoll, and submitted for the VOTER. LWVPGH has no specific position on the issue presented, although there is a LWVUS position that can apply. Members can advocate for the bills mentioned as individuals, but may not speak for the League. The Board could decide to support the bills on the basis of the LWVUS position.

Advocating for Safe Nurse Staffing Standards in Pennsylvania – The Patient Safety Act

by Susan McCarthy, MSN, RN, Nurses of Pennsylvania, Member

"Nurses who are on the fence about leaving the profession altogether are watching to see if leaders are really listening and willing to tackle tough issues — or just going through the motions," Jeff Doucette, DNP, RN, chief nursing officer at Press Ganey.

We have all heard the news and read the headlines about the current nurse staffing crisis taking place across our nation and Pennsylvania. The pandemic exacerbated the already short nurse staffing situation that existed before Covid-19. As nurse wages and benefits make up a large portion of hospital costs, over the past few decades, hospitals and nursing homes have understaffed or reduced staffing to the bare minimum as a means to reduce costs and increase profitability. The PA Department of Health Hospital Regulations, Chapter 109.4, states, "A sufficient number of registered professional nurses shall be on duty at all times to plan, assign, supervise, and evaluate nursing care as well as to give patients such nursing care as requires the judgment and specialized skills of a registered nurse." For a long time now, nurses from all across the state have been sounding the alarm that we do not have enough nurses at the bedside for safe care at all times. This summer after years of advocacy and for the first time in thirty years, Governor Wolf and the Department of Health are increasing nursing home staffing standards. We are also advocating for safe nurse staffing laws for our hospitals. Nurses are now engaged in a public awareness campaign to gather support from our friends, family, and community, asking all to contact their elected Senators and Representatives in Harrisburg and tell them it is time to commit and pass the Patient Safety Act.

Pennsylvania House Bill 106 and Senate Bill 240, collectively known as the Patient Safety Act (PSA), have been proposed in Harrisburg and have gained bipartisan support. The proposed bills will improve patient and nurse safety. When enacted, the law will establish the appropriate number of nurses to care for patients at all times, transparency and accountability by publicly reported staffing levels, and committees with frontline caregivers to annually review the staffing plans. The PSA provides nurses whistle-blower protections for speaking out and advocating for their patients and will establish a process to report issues or instances of unsafe staffing to the state.

The PSA is based on years of research evidence that supports the need for legislation as a solution to achieve safe nurse staffing standards. Providing nurses with work environments that enable them to care for our patients as we were trained to do is essential for recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced nurses. The impacts of inadequate staffing include decreased quality of patient care, decreased nurse satisfaction, high turnover rates, and financial burdens to our health care provider organizations. These impacts, now further exacerbated by the pandemic, as evidenced by the current nursing staffing crisis, could have been prevented, or alleviated if we had safe nurse staffing laws in place.

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Nursing and healthcare quality research findings conclude that adequate nurse staffing improves patients' health outcomes and saves lives. For every patient beyond a safe limit, risk of death for surgical patients increases by 7 percent. PA nurses routinely report having 3-4 patients beyond a safe limit. Higher staffing levels have been shown to significantly reduce infections, heart attacks, respiratory failure, deaths, falls, bedsores, medical errors, ER wait times, length of hospital stays and readmissions. When a patient is discharged and readmitted within a month, the hospital loses money. (Sources:Aiken, Clarke, Sloane et al. Hospital Nurse Staffing and Patient Mortality, Nurse Burnout, and Job Dissatisfaction. JAMA, 2002, Blegen et al. Nurse Staffing Effects on Patient Outcomes, Med Care 2011)

Inadequate staffing is driving nurses to leave. A study published Feb. 4, 2021 in JAMA Network Open, reports that, prior to the pandemic, in 2018, 30 percent of nurses reported leaving their jobs due to burnout, as compared to 17 percent in 2007. In Pennsylvania, nurses who reported leaving or considering leaving their job from burnout also reported a stressful work environment and inadequate staffing. California was the first state to legislate the number of nurses to patients in 1999. California nurses report a much lower level of burnout, increased job satisfaction, and decreased job-related injuries.

The American Nurses Foundation conducted a survey, Pulse on the Nation's Nurses COVID-19 Survey, February 2021, to learn of the impact of the pandemic on U.S. nurses. Pennsylvania nurses reported: 51% experienced exhaustion, 69% said increased staffing will better prepare nurses for future healthcare crises, and 45 % indicated insufficient staffing is a reason to leave their position.

Nurses are burning out and fleeing the bedside because of unsafe conditions brought about by unsafe staffing. Burnout is a leading cause of caregiver turnover and costs the health care industry as much as \$4.6 billion per year. Prior to the pandemic, a study showed that 33% of new nurses leave within two years. The cost of replacing a single nurse can exceed \$80,000. Post pandemic vacancy rates for direct care nurses in PA hospitals are soaring as nurses leave due to stress, retirement, moving to non-patient care positions or the higher paying jobs in agency or travel nursing, and leaving the profession all together. Patients cannot be admitted to a hospital bed if a nurse is not there to care for them.

In response, hospitals are now reconsidering the value of nursing and increasing investment for nurse recruitment and retention. Western PA Hospitals are now offering high sign-on bonuses of \$15,000 and triple incentive pay to work extra hours. Temple University Health System in Philadelphia is investing \$5 million for nurse staffing and recruitment to close its 9.1% vacancy rate. Nurses believe the recent offers of high sign-on bonuses and incentive pay, although now necessary, serve as temporary, band aid approaches to a long-standing nurse staffing challenge. Far too often, decision makers refused to listen, continued to ignore the evidence, and claimed that safe staffing standards cost too much money.

The truth is, having standards like this is not a new concept. It is imperative that we demand a healthcare system that is centered around safety, just like we do in other fields. A good example of this is in childcare. PA sets a safe maximum number of children who can be safely supervised by childcare providers. When parents take their kids to daycare, we know there will be enough caregivers to monitor and keep them safe. Why should we expect less when parents take their kids to the hospital?

Good news! For the 18th year in a row, the public ranked nursing as the most honest and ethical profession in a 2020 Gallup poll. PA does not have a true nursing shortage, only a shortage of nurses who want to work at the bedside in unsafe conditions. The pandemic has made people more aware of the stressful conditions that nurses work in. Without enacting staffing standards, the nursing shortage on the frontline along with its negative impacts on patient and nurse safety will continue. Although it's nice to be called heroes, we would rather see the Patient Safety Act passed in Harrisburg.

What can we all do right now to help pass the Patient Safety Act?

Email and call your State Representative and Senator and ask them to take action and pass the PSA. Front line nurses, who led our community through the Covid crisis, need our fellow community members, as voters, to tell their elected officials that we want enough nurses in our hospitals to provide the safety of care we all deserve.

Nurses of Pennsylvania is a non-profit, bipartisan organization of 25K nurses, who for the past four years has, by partnering with other top nursing organizations and unions, is leading the advocacy efforts to win safe staffing in PA and improve the quality of care in our state. (<https://nursesofpa.org>)