

LWV

VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF INDIANA COUNTY

WINTER 2025

Energy Forum February 22: What's Our Energy Future ?



Southwestern Pennsylvania has been a major energy producer for decades. As new technologies and new opportunities are emerging, what does it mean for Indiana County and the surrounding region?

LWVIC will host “The Future of Energy in Indiana County,” a forum on sustainable energy, at its general membership meeting on Saturday, February 22. The meeting is scheduled for 12 noon to 2:00 p.m. at First United Unitarian Church in White Township. A panel of professionals active in the fields of energy production and climate change will examine the environmental and economic challenges we face in our region.

Panelist **Andrew Bockis**, partner and environmental practice co-chair at Saul Ewing in Harrisburg, helps clients navigate the environmental permitting process and regulations for energy projects. Previously he was counsel to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board.

Panelist **Jonathan Smith**, Indiana Borough councilman, works to empower community self-direction and foster sustainable and equitable development. Co-chair of the 2024 Indiana County Sustainability Summit, his family’s fossil fuel legacy inspires him as an advisor to the community of Homer City in its economic transition amid changes in energy production.

Panelist **Jonathan Warnock** is a climate scientist and paleontologist at IUP in the Department of Anthropology, Geospatial and Earth Sciences. His work includes the history of Antarctica’s ice

and oceans and latest Jurassic ecology. He is active in community solar and other efforts, volunteering with non-profits to educate Western Pennsylvania about solar power and start dozens of solar installations.

Moderating the forum is Deanne Snavelly, administrative vice president of LWVIC and retired dean of IUP’s Kopchick College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics.

An informal lunch of homemade soups, breads, desserts, and beverages will precede the panel program. Tableware will be provided. Lunch and the forum program are free.

LWVUS New Membership System Is Launching Now

In February LWV is switching to a new membership system, utilizing an online portal called ChapterSpot, for all Leagues across the country. The changes are expected to increase membership, increase LWV’s ability to empower voters and defend democracy, and make it easier for you to manage your membership. When ChapterSpot launches, you will receive an email to log in to the portal.

Signing into the new portal, you will be asked to answer a few short questions (optional) and also given the option to sign up to auto-renew annually, LWVIC has been told. Members’ credit card information is securely processed and stored by Stripe, a trusted and widely used payment processor, and is not visible to anyone at LWV or LWVIC. If you decide against auto-renewal, your payment data will *(continued on page 2)*

LWVUS New Membership System Is Launching Now

(continued from page 1) not be stored, and you would have the ability to enter your payment information each time you renew.

Once you have access to the portal, you can log in at any time to update your contact and other information. ChapterSpot provides a high level of encryption and other security measures to protect your information.

It is our understanding that you will not be required to set a password for your account. Instead, every time you want to log in, you will get a unique code sent to your email or texted to your phone, valid for a short period of time (*two-factor identification*). Entering that code will log you into your account.

Your membership is current for one year from your last renewal. If you have already renewed this year, you will not be asked to renew again until a year after your most recent renewal. When it comes time to renew, you will receive an email reminder.

Annual dues is no longer a fixed rate but is pay-what-you-can. The recommended dues amount

for all members across the country is \$75, but members can pay any amount from a minimum \$20, including LWVIC's current dues rate of \$55. (Student memberships are no longer free.) You may still renew by check sent to our treasurer if you prefer that to a credit card transaction on ChapterSpot. Checks should be made to: **LWVUS**.

Under the new dues system, a percentage of whatever you choose to pay goes into the Stripe account of each level of the League—33% to the national League (LWVUS), 47% to the Pennsylvania League (LWVPA), and 20% to LWVIC. Any fees incurred from your choice of payment method are split in the same way between national, state, and local Leagues (which is why they prefer you use ACH over credit card—lower fees). For comparison, our local League previously received just 5% of dues paid. Additionally, some of our members choose to make a donation directly to LWVIC when they renew. If you wish to do so, you will have that choice when you pay your dues, i.e. you will be able to specify which League your donation will benefit, and it will all go directly to LWVIC.

Ceremony at KCAC Welcomes New American Citizens

On October 11, 2024, dozens of new citizens of the United States were welcomed in the annual naturalization ceremony at the Kovalchick Conference and Athletic Complex. Representatives of the U.S. Citizens and Immigration Services presented each person with citizen documentation and an American flag.

Each year LWVIC has been on hand to provide voter registration applications and encourage the new citizens to become voters. “We didn’t register anyone this year, but did manage to speak with a few and answer their questions,” said Karen Ross, who organizes our participation. Working with Karen (*top center*) at the League’s table were Kate Geiger, Joan Rittenberger, Sandy Whitson, and Ellen Chinn (*standing*) and Kay Smith and Cindy Rogers (*seated*). Also helping were Joyce Rizzo and Donna Cashdollar.



Get Ready for Lobby Day—Meet With Your Legislators

Monday, May 5 is Lobby Day in Harrisburg this year. That's the day leaders and members of local Leagues will meet with their state senators and representatives to discuss important issues that affect their constituents. At the state League, The Social Policy and Government Policy committees are now working to determine the issues on which meetings with legislators will focus.

Lobby Day begins at 10:00 a.m. at the Keystone Building. Breakfast and lunch vouchers will be provided. LWVPA is reserving a small block of rooms at the Crown Plaza for LWVIC and members of other local Leagues who want to travel to Harrisburg on May 4. Space is limited, so members who plan to stay overnight are encouraged to contact jackie.roos@palwv.org to secure a room. Meanwhile, online training sessions in Lobbying and Advocacy are being offered to League members at 10:00 -11:30 a.m on the following

Pennsylvania LWV Convention

The LWVPA Biennial Convention is scheduled for June 13 - 15, 2025, at the DoubleTree Resort in Lancaster, PA. Planning is going on now for the weekend's events and break-out sessions. Information about selecting delegates, purchasing tickets, and booking hotel rooms will be available in the next few weeks, and LWVIC will share that information as it comes to us. However, we can share the cost of tickets and hotel accommodations.

Convention ticket prices will be as follows:

- Early bird ticket price (until May 2, 2025): \$140
- Regular ticket price (May 3-June 13, 2025):\$170
- Student ticket price: \$35

Hotel accommodations: LWVPA has reserved blocks of rooms at the DoubleTree and at the Marriot:

- Rooms at the DoubleTree, with rates ranging between \$199 - \$219/night
- Rooms at the Marriott, with rates of \$239/night

Watch your email for updates. Convention details will be available in the spring edition of the Voter.

Saturdays. Recordings of each session will also be available. Contact info@palwv.org.

- January 18, PA Legislative Process & Calendar
- February 15, Researching Legislation & Legislators
- March 15, Working with State Agencies
- April 19, Preparing for Lobbying & Lobby Day

To register for one, some, or all of the sessions, you can use this form:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLS-fiPwv7Mnss6Tf4a-CjzoCfze24Rr-OeJGpap7dYvDc20IV_A/viewform



Reducing Gun Violence— A Public Health Approach

On Tuesday, February 25 at 7:00 p.m., the Leagues of Women Voters of Bucks County and Greater Pittsburgh will present an informative webinar about a public health approach to reducing gun violence. LWVPGH will share their research and the results of their statewide study.

LWV of Greater Pittsburgh has adopted a Gun Safety Position that is broader in scope than the current LWV Gun Position. It rejects the assertion that the Second Amendment prohibits the regulation of firearms and that gun violence should be addressed primarily as a law-enforcement problem or by “hardening” schools, government buildings, public transportation infrastructure, and public venues. Instead, LWVPGH endorses a public health approach to reducing gun violence. This program presents their position and the research underpinning it.

You are invited to register for this free, virtual event at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_I527rTmGTWGup2OiFUWxiA?link_id=10&can_id=97b1606bab32a842c267ffcf5b4b036&source=email-the-communicator-january-updates-from-the-state-league-5&email_referrer=email_2586608&email_subject=the-communicator-january-updates-from-the-state-league#/registration

County Voters Can Correct Errors on Ballot Envelopes

by Joyce Rizzo

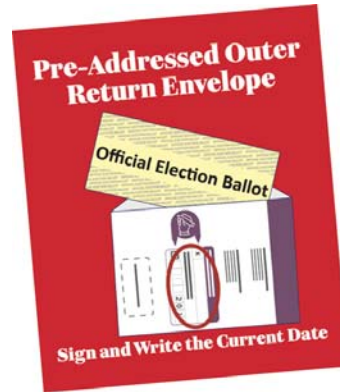
On Wednesday, October 23, the County Election Board met to discuss voting issues in anticipation of the 2024 general election on November 5. Kay B. Smith represented the League of Women Voters of Indiana County during the public comments period, communicating the League's viewpoint that citizens who vote by mail should not be disenfranchised for errors on the outer envelope, such as a wrong date, no date or no signature. She emphasized the point that a vast majority of the counties in Pennsylvania (70%) allow election officials to notify voters so they can correct their error or cast a provisional ballot at the polls on Election Day.

Municipal Elections Impact Our Communities

May 20, 2025 is the municipal primary election. While municipal elections don't have the intensity of presidential elections, they include state and local officials whose decisions have direct impacts on our lives and communities. Statewide in 2025, judicial candidates will run for seats on the Commonwealth Court, Superior Court, and Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Among the offices in Indiana County, we'll be voting for district magistrates, county treasurer, municipal auditors, township supervisors and members of councils, and school directors. We'll also be voting for judge and inspector of elections—the people who help ensure the security and integrity of our elections.

Vote411.org is a non-partisan site where you can find information about the candidates running for these offices. LWVIC invites candidates to furnish the information they wish voters to know about them and their positions on issues. The information each responding candidate provides goes onto the www.vote411.org website unchanged. If you don't see your candidates' information on that website, you might want to encourage them to provide it.



Representatives of two other local organizations, the American Association of University Women and the Indiana County Democratic Committee, as well as three other Indiana County citizens made similar arguments by public comment.

One point emphasized was that people sometimes make mistakes when they vote. At the polls on Election Day, voters who make an error can notify a poll worker who can allow them to receive another ballot; the privilege should be extended to people who vote by mail.

County Commissioner Sherene Hess made the motion to allow election staff to notify voters who make mistakes on the outer envelope to come into the election office at the courthouse to correct their mistake or to vote by provisional ballot on Election Day. After back-and-forth discussion among the three commissioners and the county solicitor, Matthew T. Budash, the motion passed by a vote of 3-0. The meeting was truly an example of democracy in action.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF INDIANA COUNTY • BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Editor, *Voter*: Donna Cashdollar

MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS

The LWVIC hosts board meetings on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. using the Zoom platform. LWVIC members are welcome to participate. To request the Zoom invitation and meeting agenda, please send an email to: lwvindicounty@gmail.com.



2025 Shale Gas and Public Health Conference

On Thursday, February 27, the Shale Gas and Public Health Conference will take place in the Power Center at Duquesne University, 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The conference will feature sessions on health studies, radiation and waste, water resources and contamination, plastics and hydrogen, and community outreach. Conference sponsors are Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania League of Women Voters, and the Department of Environmental and Energy Engineering at Duquesne University.

This conference grew from a study of natural gas hydrofracking initiated in 2009 by LWVIC. Concluding that fracking harms the environment, LWVIC brought the issue to the LWVPA convention in June 2009. Several Leagues statewide then reached consensus on this issue after visiting drilling sites and organizing study groups, public

forums, webinars and other presentations. In 2011 the LWVIC Environmental Issues Committee, supported by the LWVPA Citizen Education Fund, wrote *The Straight Scoop on Shale Drilling*, which was adopted by LWVPA and LWVUS to educate the public about gas extraction and its environmental and health effects.

Since 2013 LWVPA has supported the Straight Scoop on Shale educational initiative, which provides an opportunity for scientists, public health professionals, industry, and advocacy groups to present and learn more about the development of unconventional oil and gas, environmental impacts, and health risks.

Sessions will also be streamed online. This annual event is free and open to the public. You can register to attend at: www.shalepalwv.org.

League Co-Sponsors Sustainability Summit VII in 2024

On October 18, 2024, a day of presentations at the Kovalchick Conference and Athletic Complex demonstrated how sustainability-oriented development can spur significant cost savings for local governments, area businesses, county agencies, and homeowners. Co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of

Indiana County and supported by the Pennsylvania League, the Summit featured a keynote address by Cindy Adams Dunn, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Panels discussed finding opportunity in environmental challenges and collaborating for community revitalization and economic development.



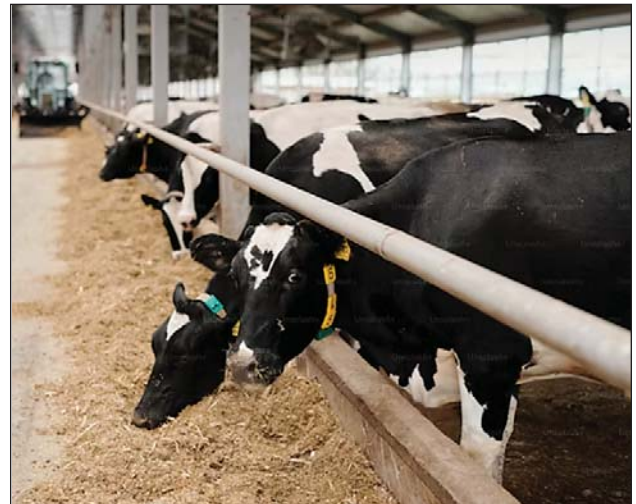
The Power of Methane

by Ellen Chinn

As you may know, methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, trapping 80 times more heat than carbon dioxide. Methane is emitted at a much lower rate than carbon dioxide but, because of its potency, it accounts for about 30% of observed global warming. The good news is that methane is short-lived in the atmosphere (7-12 years, compared with centuries for carbon dioxide), reacting with other molecules and lost to the stratosphere *via* the methane cycle. For this reason, reducing methane emissions could be a way to quickly and substantially slow global warming.

Methane is produced from many sources, but most emissions come from farming, landfills, and leaks from fossil fuel extraction and oil and gas infrastructure. Finding and fixing these leaks would be a win-win for everyone since no one benefits from these leaks, including fossil fuel companies. It's what they extract and sell so they are losing profits into the atmosphere to the tune of \$2 billion a year.

What can we do about it? Luckily these leaks are relatively inexpensive and easy to fix, and the incentive to reduce these "fugitive emissions" is high. The first step is



finding the leaks. One company called LongPath Technologies is making low-cost methane-monitoring equipment and setting up a methane-emissions monitoring network across all the major oil and gas basins. The modular systems can be quickly and economically installed using local expertise.

We have another tool too: MethaneSAT, a powerful methane-detecting satellite launched in March 2024, which is capable of measuring methane pollution from millions of small sources all over the world. MethaneSAT data is public, so governments, agencies, advocacy groups and others can use the data to track and cut methane emissions as quickly and efficiently as possible. This satellite was the first developed and funded by an environmental non-profit, the Environmental Defense Fund.

Using available technologies, the oil and gas industry alone can achieve a 75% reduction in methane emissions globally, two-thirds of it at no net cost. Together with other organizations and governments, this is an opportunity that is "ripe for the picking" to quickly and effectively slow global warming.

<https://www.climateactionnow.com/>

<https://www.edf.org/methanesat>

<https://www.edf.org/issue/methane>

<https://www.edf.org/whats-fastest-way-slow-global-warming-bill-nye-has-answer>

<https://lwvindianacounty.org/climate-change/>

Microplastics in Our Drinking Water a Threat to Health

by Kathy Cook, *Plastics Campaign Lead*
Food and Water Watch Pennsylvania

Food and Water Watch's national campaign called STOP MICROPLASTICS NOW! aims to put microplastics on the FDA list of water contaminants that it monitors. Here in Pennsylvania, this campaign is bringing together environmental advocacy organizations and citizens to contact Governor Shapiro's office and ask him to join the Governors' Petition to the EPA asking that microplastics be included in the upcoming Sixth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule ("UCMR 6") so that microplastics can be appropriately monitored and ultimately regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act ("SDWA").

Under the SDWA, the EPA is *required* to begin this critical monitoring of microplastics if it receives a "Governors' Petition" signed by seven or more governors unless doing so would prevent addressing other contaminants of a higher public health concern.

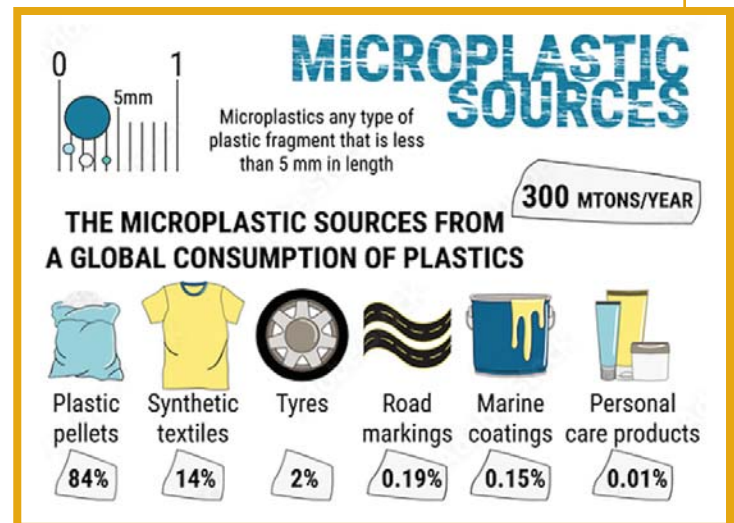
The EPA has already acknowledged the emerging threat of microplastics: Now is the time to act! If EPA fails to include microplastics in the UCMR 6, it will mean years of delay on this known and rising public health threat.

Plastics are made from fossil fuels and over 16,000 different chemicals. Because plastics are produced from fossil fuels the lifecycle of plastics has a huge carbon dioxide footprint and is a driver of climate change. Only 2,400 of the chemicals in plastics have been researched, and the majority of these chemicals are carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. Plastics constantly leach these toxic substances and have been linked to a variety of cancers, Parkinson's Disease, cardiovascular disease, attention deficit disorder, and a variety of immune disorders.

All the plastic that has ever been produced is still on this earth. Plastic does not readily decompose. It can take from twenty to five hundred years to decompose. Plastics break down into smaller particles called microplastics and

nanoplastics. Microplastics have been found in almost every drinking water source in the United States, but there is no federal testing or regulation for this harmful substance.

The Pennsylvania Green Amendment in our state constitution guarantees our right to a healthy environment. Therefore, we must understand the level of this threat in our water and work to correct sources of contamination.



The Governor's Petition can force the EPA to start monitoring and regulating microplastics, but it will take all of us to push Governor Shapiro to act. We urge all Pennsylvania residents and organizations to call on Governor Shapiro to join the Governors' Petition calling on EPA to monitor our drinking water for microplastics.

Organizations can sign this short letter to Governor Shapiro:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1AjhQkww-WXpbdBxcMpzWlK4dNwnsNjgQwbB-mAkuX0B0k/preview>

Individuals can sign this petition to send a message directly to Governor Shapiro:

<https://fwwat.ch/40BwyWE>

Safe Drinking Water Act:

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/US-CODE-2023-title42/pdf/USCODE-2023-title42-chap6A-subchapXII-partE-sec300j-4.pdf>

LWVIC Meets High School Civics and Elections Classes

In October 2024 Anne Simmons and Kay Smith met with students in six 11th-grade Civics and Elections classes at Indiana Area High School. Supported by a PowerPoint titled “Elections and Voting,” the women presented the history and mission of the League of Women Voters in the United States and the importance of citizens making their voices heard through the vote.

LWVIC has been working with Indiana County school districts for four years to educate senior students about voting, encouraging them to register as soon as they are eligible. People who begin voting early as adults often vote in every election throughout their lives. Last year LWVIC provided voter information cards to 820 high school seniors in Indiana County, as well as materials for high schools to participate in the Pennsylvania Governor’s Civic Engagement Award program. Since 2018 three Indiana

County high schools have won Gold Level School Awards for their voter registration efforts.



LWVIC in Campus Programs Preceding November Election

In October 2024 two officers of the LWVIC board took part in non-partisan campus programs for IUP students before the presidential election.

Deanne Snavelly, LWVIC administrative vice president, was a discussion facilitator at “Election Decisions: Policy or Character.” Discussion with students followed a screening of the film “The Choice.” The event was organized by professors Gwen Torges and Alea Perry of the Department of History, Political Science, Philosophy, and Religious Studies and by Donovan Daniel, director of student leadership, Student Affairs, IUP.

Sarah Wheeler, LWVIC secretary and associate professor of Political Science at IUP, was a guest speaker at the Six O’Clock Series program “Voter Behavior and Election Dynamics.” Panelists reviewed the functions of different branches and agencies of government and how elections work in different states. Panelists Wheeler and Stanley Chepaitis, who chairs Fair Districts of Indiana County, described what is necessary for democracy to work and emphasized that our votes elect officials whose policies directly impact our lives.

LWVIC Winter-Spring Calendar

February 15 – Webinar: Legislative Process

March 15 – Webinar: State Agencies

April 19 – Webinar: Prep for Lobby Day

See page 3 for times and registration link.

February 17 – LWVIC Board Meeting

March 17 – LWVIC Board Meeting

April 21 – LWVIC Board Meeting

On Zoom, 7:00 p.m. To receive the Zoom link, email: lwwindianacounty@gmail.com

February 22 – The Future of Energy in Indiana County, 12:00 noon – 2:00 p.m., First United Unitarian Church, White Twp.

February 25 – Webinar: A Public Health Approach to Reducing Gun Violence
7:00 p.m., See page 3 for the registration link.

February 27 – Shale Gas & Public Health Conference, 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Power Center, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh
Register at www.shalepalwv.org

March 1 – SENSE-Sational: Family Fun Fest, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Indiana Mall

May 5 – Last day to register to vote in Municipal Primary (www.vote.pa.gov)

May 13 – Last day to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot (www.vote.pa.gov)

May 20 – Municipal Primary Election
7:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m., polls are open. Mail-in and absentee ballots must be received by the Indiana County Board of Elections Office by 8:00 p.m.