

The Voter

The official publication of the League of Women Voters of Roseville Area

FALCON HEIGHTS, LAUDERDALE, LITTLE CANADA, MAPLEWOOD, ROSEVILLE

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LWV® League of Women Voters
ROSEVILLE AREA
Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Little Canada, Maplewood, Roseville

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'Conversations with Constituents' event set for Wednesday, Jan. 18

Focus will be on housing, homelessness

How are our communities and schools dealing with affordable housing, poverty, homelessness? Those questions, among other issues of import, are the focus of this year's "Conversation with Constituents" event, set for Wednesday, Jan. 18 at Falcon Heights City Hall, 2077 Larpenteur Ave. W.

The event will begin at 7 p.m.; check-in and refreshments begin at 6:45. The event is open to the public.

Invited guests include members of Districts 621, 622, 623 School Boards, Ramsey County Commissioners, and the Metropolitan Council. They are: School Board Chairs Amy Jones, District 621, Amy Coborn, District 622, and Mark Traynor, District 623. "We have emphasized that any other representative from the schools who deals with homeless and low-income students would be very welcome as well," said Gladys Jones, who is coordinating the event with Barbara Leary.

Also invited are Ramsey County Commissioners Blake Huffman, Mary Jo McGuire, Janice Rettman, and Victoria Reinhardt, and Metropolitan Council Commissioners Sandy Rummel, District 11, Little Canada, Maplewood; and Marie McCarthy, District 10, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Roseville.



Roseville League challenges national on Women's March

Editor's note: The Roseville Area League of Women Voters is challenging the national League's position on the Jan. 21 Women's March in Washington, DC and other locations. President Rita Mills sent the following letter to the national.

The LWVUS position on the upcoming Women's March in Washington, DC and other locations on January 21 was recently read to our LWV Roseville Area Board. Members were most surprised by LWVUS decision not to endorse or officially participate in this event as well as the request of members not to wear League buttons when participating. Based on our reading, members noted that this upcoming March highlights women's rights, social justice, racial justice, religious freedom and civil rights – all topics on which League has strong support positions.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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Networking....timing is good for LWV

Throughout the state and country local chapters are reporting increased interest in what LWV is and does. (Follow Virtual Voter on Facebook.) Numerous chapters are sponsoring speakers and discussions, allowing members and public opportunities to “vent” regarding “what the average person can do to influence public policy.”

Our unit’s annual Conversations with Constituents provides an excellent networking opportunity to ask questions, discuss issues with our local school boards, Ramsey County commissioners, and members from the Metropolitan Council. Questions and issues concerning affordable housing will be foremost in members’ discussions.

This event on Wednesday, Jan. 18 at 7 p.m. at Falcon Heights City Hall, also provides a wonderful opportunity to invite friends, neighbors, relatives to witness the mission of League of Women Voters

in practice. Our need to educate and engage voters, particularly millennials, the disenfranchised, is at an all-time high. In addition to engaging with the elected and appointed guests, look for non-members and encourage them to ask questions and join the League. When signing in, LWV business cards and membership brochures will be available.

I am certain that our local communities have as many frustrated voters as can be found in Woodbury, Anoka, Lakeville, Eden Prairie.....And who better to offer civil, civic dialogue and involvement than LWV Roseville Area!

Women’s March on Washington

(Continued from page 1)

While fully aware of the need to always remain non-partisan at any event, we believe that the legacy of this 96-year-old organization – educating, advocating, reforming - must continue, particularly as we attempt to attract a new and more diverse membership. We are working hard at the local level to collaborate with other diverse groups and organizations and would like to see the same done in a public manner with this upcoming March at the national and state levels.

We hope that LWVUS reconsiders the position taken and thank you for your consideration of this request.

Rita Mills, president

LWV Roseville Area

Editor’s note: See page 5 for Websites you can visit to learn more about the Jan. 21 Women’s March on Washington and the Women’s March on Minnesota in support of the national event.

A Delicate Balance

By Florence Sprague

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

The drafters of the United States Constitution packed a lot of punch into the First Amendment. Many of the rights that could be most widely named by the person on the street are tucked into that list. However, they are also often widely only superficially understood, and asserted to justify many personal expressions of faith, which makes them worth pondering.

Free exercise of religion was, and continues to be, a significant factor behind immigration to the U.S., both as a push factor and a pull factor. While many early colonizers were seeking economic gain, most school children could tell you that the Pilgrims and the Puritans came to North America for free practice of their version of the Christian religion. (We tend to conflate these groups, but they actually had different attitudes about whether to separate from or reform the Anglican [Church](#), among other things)



https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjb2IuItv7PAhXHq1QKHRxWBMcQFgfmAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.quora.com%2FWhat-is-the-difference-between-Puritans-and-Pilgrims&usg=AFQjCNG2Qgzy37hcgCHnpfHHSNiDOC30gw&sig2=zqiE7HmR7Zhg57WZc-Z_gQ What we tend to forget, is that once here, they were not very tolerant of divergent viewpoints, shunning, punishing or banishing those who refused to follow the new orthodoxy. So we are fortunate that the Founders did not stop there.

Perhaps less often recalled is that as early as 1654 there was a Jewish congregation in New York City and that very early on the era of colonization synagogues were built in Rhode Island and Charleston, South Carolina. This was long before the large influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia, were pushed to emigrate from their shtetls by pogroms and bigotry.

Founding Father Thomas Jefferson, was not a traditional Christian. His beliefs have been described as Deism, rational religion or Unitarianism.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwib99qvqoDQAhXjyVQKHbAzCf4QFggkMAI&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FReligious_views_of_Thomas_Jefferson&usg=AFQjCNHwzeYTtLusr-GENqUwf9Mzr8qD1Q&sig2=_GDawAU-UmiZqaSWKAaDDg&bvm=bv.136811127,bs.1,d.amc

The Native Americans have their own spiritual beliefs or religions. While some have converted to or adopted European sourced religions, most still deeply value their traditional beliefs which are foundational to their worldview and fundamental to their spiritual health.

There have been mosques in the US for a hundred years with early Muslim immigrants from the region of Syria arriving as early as the 1870s and from south Asia to the west coast in the early 1900s. Some of the earliest mosques were built in Maine in 1915, and North Dakota in 1920. (<http://pluralism.org/religions/islam/islam-in-america/early-american-mosques/>)

Today there are millions of Americans who follow Buddhism, Hinduism, animism and a wide variety of other religions, or follow a spiritual path that does not fit into an organized religion. Millions more are agnostics or atheists.

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Windows and Mirrors

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Despite this broad and longtime diversity of faith as practiced in North America, it is often heard that “America is a Christian country,” and this may be spoken with anger and resentment at any limitations on public practice and support. This leads me to ponder what kind of Christianity the speakers mean.

Anyone living in the United States cannot miss that Christianity is not monolithic. Those who claim that same affiliation can differ radically in their beliefs on social issues, worship practices and politics. So what kind of “Christian country” are we supposed to be?

Where I grew up, religious diversity was whether you were Catholic or Protestant, with the Catholic kids walking one direction down the block to the parochial school and the Protestants walking the other way to the public school. It doesn't take a deep knowledge of history to know that as ethnicities that were largely Catholic came to the US, like the Irish and the Italians, they were not easily accepted, so do people mean we are a protestant country? (Remember the claims that if John Kennedy were elected the Pope would be calling the shots? And before that, Al Smith?)

Of course, today, many of the strongest Christian churches are evangelical, not the old mainline Protestant sects tied to the early immigrants. I go to church most weeks. I would identify myself as Christian in many contexts, though I cannot express belief in a literal resurrection, or any literal miracles. I find the moral construct helpful and the focus on helping others and thinking beyond myself important, but I am deeply uncomfortable with many styles of Christian worship and with the beliefs of many sects within it. The diversity of belief and acceptance under that umbrella term is huge.

When we talk about Muslims, they are all lumped together. While the terms, Sunni and Shia are used, I doubt that many understand and if we get to Sufi, Wahhabi and others, the mystification of the general public is clear. We need to acknowledge that just as we can see that not all Christians are alike, so not all Muslims are the same. Many things done in the name of either religion may have little connection to the fundamental truths or tenets of the faith.

What would establishment of religion look like? It could be a requirement that all citizens participate in the state religion. It could be a preference for a state religion, giving benefits to that one and placing burdens on others. It could be actually banning all but a state religion. Most often here this law has been used to challenge a favoring of one religion-read Christianity-in such a way that could make others feel burdened, or even fearful. It does not apply to personal expressions, in personal space, of faith, but to public entities and public spaces and public power. Majority adherence to a particular faith neither constitutes, nor justifies, governmental support for that faith. For many years, a majority was large enough in many communities to support the expression of faith on public property (e.g., crèches, the 10 Commandments). Then when the 1st Amendment is enforced and they are removed there is a strong feeling of grievance. Today that feeling of grievance is aimed at Muslims, but I can remember when the people most often seeking such change were atheists. (Remember Madalyn Murray O'Hair?)

Have faith. Personal faith. Study it, practice it, and honor it. May it bring you guidance, comfort, and peace. The strength of your belief, whichever it is, needs to be within you. Maybe I'll agree with you, maybe I won't. If you want the freedom of your beliefs, well, so do I and all others. (And don't forget the millions of atheists and agnostics!)

Free exercise of religion is highly compatible with religious diversity when we trust in ourselves and we don't let fear interfere.



Editor's note: Florence Sprague is a member of the Roseville Area League of Women Voters.

Homelessness increases in Ramsey County

A total of 1,787 people were identified as homeless in Ramsey County in 2015, a 14 percent increase from 2012. Thirty percent were children with parents; 20 percent were unaccompanied youth, ages 12 to 24; 39 percent were adults ages 25 – 54; 11 percent were adults over 55.

Those were among the findings of the most recent survey conducted by the Wilder Foundation and presented to the Roseville Area League at its Nov. 15 meeting by Wilder researcher Ellen Shelton.

The increase in Ramsey County compares to a statewide decline in homelessness. Wilder has yet to determine why, Shelton said. She listed some of the reasons people become homeless:

- Lack of employment
- Lack of affordable housing
- Mental illness, chronic health conditions, substance abuse disorders, traumatic brain injury, domestic violence, prior incarceration
- Childhood trauma and abuse
- Racial inequities

A few strategies for ending long-term homelessness are:

- Outreach
- Treatment
- Availability of affordable housing
- Connections to mainstream services and support.

The Roseville Area League is conducting a study of affordable housing and its availability in the cities of Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Little Canada, Maplewood and Roseville. . On Feb. 21, we will host a panel of housing experts who will discuss “How to have fair housing for all our community members.” The meeting is co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of St. Paul and Centennial Methodist Church.



Ellen Shelton

Want to know more about the Jan. 21 Women’s March on Washington and Minnesota? Visit these sites:

Washington:

WEBSITE: <https://www.womensmarch.com/>

FACEBOOK PAGE: <https://www.facebook.com/Womens-March-on-Washington-1338822066131069/>

TWITTER: <https://twitter.com/womensmarch>

INSTAGRAM: <http://www.instagram.com/womensmarch>

Minnesota:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1798874673734173/>



Judy Berglund, editor
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Calendar

January

18 VIP Event, 6:45 p.m. Falcon Heights
City Hall, 2077 Larpenteur Ave. W.,
Falcon Heights

February

21 Housing panel: John Slade, MICAH;
Dr. Ed Goetz, CURA; Rep. Alice Haus-
man; 6:30 p.m., Centennial Methodist
Church, 1524 County Road C-2 W., Ro-
seville

