



THE VOTER **LWV**

*The official newsletter
of the League of Women
Voters North Pinellas*

<https://my.lwvnorthpinellas.org> lwvnpc.info@gmail.com

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November-December 2023

2023 Holiday Open House



More than thirty members were able to attend our Holiday Open House on December 9th. It was a wonderful kick-off to our holidays. But, above all, it was our way of saying "thank you" to all our members for their dedicated hard work throughout the year.

The best Christmas gifts are the ones we've had all year: a roof over our heads, food in the fridge, and family and friends to enjoy it with. May richness of gratitude be yours this holiday season and through the coming years! We have much to be grateful for, particularly our members!

May you enjoy the company of the ones you love, and may you be blessed with peace and joy through the holiday season and into the coming year. Happy New Year to everyone!

Gayla Larson, Secretary LWVNPC



Five-Minute Almond Cake

Serves 8

- 1 Cup (1/2 stick) Butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tsp almond extract
- Powdered Sugar
- 2 Tbsp. sliced Almonds (more if desired)

1. Preheat oven to 325F
2. Cream the butter, add the flour, sugar and almond extract and mix well
3. Pour into a small (8inch) pie plate or an 8-inch cake pan, and sprinkle sliced almonds on top
4. Bake 45 minutes, or until golden brown and a knife inserted near the center comes out clean
5. Let cool, then sprinkle with powdered sugar if desired (Lois uses a sifter)

From Communitytable.com

Lois Rogers-Watson made a wonderful dessert everyone raved about. Here is the recipe that she called “embarrassingly simple.!” Everyone else called it “marvelously delicious!”



From Our President: Marti's Musings

This is the season for talking and thinking about PEACE. This year it's even more difficult than usual to sort out what's happening internationally, nationally, statewide, locally and personally with notions of peace. One version of "do unto others" is "respect everyone's dignity". That is difficult when we see people or entities who clearly do not. In today's world it's difficult to know what and whom to believe.

We see casualties of war as buildings and cities have been bombed into shambles and thousands of civilians are dead, injured or homeless.

And yet we see so many examples of kindness, compassion and caring on the news, TV ads, and appeals by mail to help the hungry, the homeless, the ill and the unschooled. While we have generosity of spirit, we recognize we have major issues with immigration, especially at our southern border. It's a challenge trying to balance reality with compassion.

Recently we memorialized the genius of Norman Lear who showed us the face of our nation through Archie Bunker and "All in the Family". We were also reminded that it was as recently as 1981 that we finally had a woman Supreme Court Justice, the late Sandra Day O'Connor.

A comment recently by a news analyst, "It all boils down to people".

My wish for you is that you find personal peace in the midst of external turmoil and that our efforts as individuals and as LWV members help with the general welfare of all.



League of Women Voters of Florida Reacts to Appeals Court Decision in Redistricting Case

Press Release: LWVFL December 4, 2024:

The First District Court of Appeals has overturned the Circuit Court's ruling in Black Voters Matter Capacity Building Institute v. Byrd, which includes the League of Women Voters of Florida as a plaintiff.

The original ruling declared the enacted map unconstitutional and enjoined the Secretary of State from using that map in future congressional elections however this overturning now allows the unconstitutional map directly diminishing the power of Black voters to stand.

Cecile M. Scoon, Esq., co-president of the League of Women Voters of Florida released the following statement following this ruling:

"The rights of all Floridians were crushed by this ruling leaving in place the governor and legislature's unfair diminishment of minority voting power. This ruling also flies in the face of the Florida Supreme Court's order that such diminishment is prohibited. This type of ruling breeds chaos and tears down the public's trust in the judiciary as the trial court refused to follow well established precedent to protect Florida's Fair District Amendments. The ruling also rewards the governor and state legislators for disregarding the voice of the people who voted for Fair Districts Amendments through a citizen's initiative process with more than 60% of the vote. In essence, our state government has thumbed its nose at the Florida Supreme Court and all Floridians when they refused to follow the law as required by every citizen in the state of Florida. This is a flagrant example of one rule for the mighty, and another rule for everyone else. We will continue this fight for fair maps."



VOTE 411

RE-REQUEST YOUR
BALLOT

Due to a change in law, all Florida voters who vote-by-mail must submit a NEW mail ballot request to their county Supervisor of Elections.

LWV



Potential Health Insurance Crisis in Florida

Submitted by Mina Harkins, Chair Economic Equity Committee

Healthcare in Florida isn't cheap or accessible to many. After several years of efforts to roll back Obamacare, really titled the Affordable Care Act (ACA), many on both sides of the aisle have come to accept its role in covering healthcare for millions of Americans. So, it's not surprising that millions of Florida families rely on the ACA. In fact, Florida leads the nation in ACA plan

enrollment, both in total numbers and as a percentage of the state's population, according to a recent Raymond James analysis. A significant factor in the increasing enrollment is that Florida has removed over 600,000 people from Medicaid, as the continuous coverage provided during the Covid Public Health Emergency ends and redetermination of eligibility proceeds in Florida. Florida is one of 10 states that haven't expanded Medicaid and has the 4th most limited Medicaid eligibility requirements in the nation. This lack of Medicaid expansion and increasing migration to the area are probable factors in the high rates of enrollment in the ACA plans, currently more affordable due to enhanced subsidies. Several initiatives in the Tampa area are helping families enroll in public insurance programs. However, Democratic-backed subsidies for the ACA will expire in 2025 and were not supported by any of the Florida congressional delegation. Will Republicans in Washington renew enhanced ACA subsidies or can Democrats in Tallahassee succeed in finding Republican co-sponsors to expand Medicaid? If not, many Florida residents may be priced out of their ACA coverage and remain ineligible for Medicaid. Many states have learned the financial benefit to expanding Medicaid and the lack of affordable insurance lays the financial burden of providing uninsured care on the healthcare providers in the state. The future quality and cost of healthcare in Florida for everyone may be the ultimate consequence.



You may have missed....

[Registrants for National Popular Vote: How it Works 12/6/23 presented by Floridians for National Popular Vote, and LWV of Orange County Florida.](#)

“Isn’t it time electors are guided by the majority of Americans who agree on the person who should lead the nation?” In case you missed this presentation, go to <https://www.floridiansfornpv.com/> for a brief but clear

explanation on the merits of National Popular Vote legislation.

[Florida abortion rights group ‘confident’ it has enough signatures for 2024 ballot](#)

“The group behind a constitutional amendment that would protect abortion access in Florida says it is “confident” it has enough signatures to qualify for the 2024 ballot. But even if it gets the required 891,523 verified petitions by the Feb. 1, 2024, deadline, the fate of the proposed ballot measure still depends on the state’s conservative Supreme Court.”

<https://www.tampabay.com/news/florida-politics/2023/12/20/florida-abortion-amendment-deadline-pregnancy-ban/>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/miami/news/florida-abortion-supporters-who-want-constitutional-amendment-race-to-deliver-petitions-as-deadline-nears/>

[An election redesign to restore trust in US democracy](#)

This is a brief (10 minute) overview of the status of the election system in the United States today.

https://www.ted.com/talks/tiana_epps_johnson_an_election_redesign_to_restore_trust_in_us_democracy/transcript?referrer=playlist-ted_talks_on_democracy

[LWVNPC Members in Action](#)

[Annual North Pinellas Country College and Career Fair October 2, 2023.](#)



Tanya Landry and Miriam Benitez-Nixon participated in this fair with college administrators, vocational schools, employer’s and recruiters and provided important information about voter registration. Many students are unaware that they are able to pre-register to vote at age 16 and will be automatically eligible at age 18.

Membership: New Member Orientation

On November 13th, nine LWVNPC members, including seven new members gathered on Zoom to learn more about the LWVNPC mission, activities and history. Many thanks to Linda Metzkw, Gayla Larson, Tanya Landry, Jacqueline Farrell, Marti Folwell, Diane Hall, Evvy Bernstein, Nancy Sidrow, Terri Byrnes, Conni Berns, Erika Boardman, and Pam Chapin for attending. We look forward to a successful future with the new energy of these members!

Welcome New Members

Julie Hudson
Susan Powers
Erika Boardman
Ann MacMurray
Robin Peacock

COMMITTEE UPDATES

Board Meeting - members welcome!

The LWVNPC Board meets the 1st Wednesday of each month at 4:00pm. Minutes for the August 2023 meeting can be found at:



[https://drive.google.com/file/d/11uAMPh7S7FQjke0QEvTtrV1dZmgf1xl/view?usp=drive link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11uAMPh7S7FQjke0QEvTtrV1dZmgf1xl/view?usp=drive_link)

Please join us for any upcoming Board meeting to learn how you can participate more fully. Contact Gayla Larson (nblarson@gmail.com) to obtain the link to join these informative and busy meetings.

Economic Equity Committee

Chairperson Mina Harkins questioned the viability of this committee since involvement from the membership and participation has been disappointingly low. Mina will continue to keep us updated on economic and social justice issues in the state and local area.



Education Committee



The Education Committee met virtually on Monday, November 27th at 4:30 pm.

Guests included Eckerd College student, Kiley Woods.

“My Vote Counts Project”: Vivian announced that LWVNPC was invited to provide virtual mentoring sessions on the topic of “My Vote Counts” to high school Take Stock in Children students during the Spring 2024 semester. These dates will be set soon, and members will be invited to attend as observers or presenters. Members were also encouraged to consider becoming judges for the Pinellas History Fair competition that will be held at Largo High School on Friday, February 23rd and Saturday, February 24th. Pinellas County public middle and high school students compete for prizes in several formats. This year’s theme is “Turning Points in History.” A registration link for becoming a judge was provided. Judges do not need to be history experts, and they can choose to judge on Friday or Saturday, either am or pm. Feedback from members on the LWVNPC brochure that is being designed by Eckerd College student Kiley Woods was requested. Kiley will make the requested edits, and the final document will then be presented to the Board for approval.

Pinellas County School Board Meeting Report: Vivian Posey, Tanya Landry, and Sarah Peacock attended this meeting. Tanya and Sarah provided summaries of the discussion and messages from public speakers. New officers of the Pinellas School Board were announced. Laura Hine was elected chair and Carol Cook Carol Cook announced that she would not be running for election in 2024. Next meeting of the Pinellas School Board is scheduled for Tuesday, December 12th at 10:30 .Jeanne Reynolds and Niki Amarantides will represent LWVNPC. Next meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 29th at 4:30 pm.

VOTER SERVICE



January.

Linda Metzkwow requested Tanya Landry report on planned candidate forums. Tanya is the new Candidate Forum chairperson. Candidate forums are scheduled for January 9th in Oldsmar and January 10th in Bellair Beach. The City of Clearwater has forums scheduled for late January. Tanya asked for volunteers to assist during these forums. Linda Metzkwow will send a list of potential volunteers for these meetings. Belleair Beach is January 10th and Oldsmar has requested assistance on January 9th. Additionally, the City of Clearwater has candidate forums scheduled in late

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION GROUP



Bryan Beckman and Dennis McDermott are working with Clearwater Alliance for Housing, and they are planning a presentation this Saturday. This information will be sent to the membership. Individuals may join via Zoom as well, and the link will be included in the information sent to the membership. The group met last week and suggested a public forum at the beginning of February to educate people on what is happening in the Florida legislature regarding the environment. 1000 Friends of Florida is one of the groups contacted and is interested in participating in a hot topic. 1000 Friends of Florida is, according to their website, the state's leading not-for-profit smart growth advocacy organization.



Candidate Forum Volunteers. LWVNPC has been asked to assist with two municipal candidate forums in January and need volunteers. On-site training provided. Come and learn more about the candidates for local elections and how these forums are conducted. Contact: tlandry@conquestsystems.com

Are you tech savvy? Like to do Graphic Design? Chairperson Linda Metzkw is in need of someone to help with creating QR Codes, flyers, brochures and graphics for the Voter Services Committee. Contact:

lindametzkw@tampabay.rr.com



Pinellas
Continuum
of Care

Ending Homelessness Together

Pinellas County

POINT IN TIME COUNT



Volunteer with us on
Thursday, January 25, 2024

www.bit.ly/2024PIT

The [2024 Pinellas County Point in Time \(PIT\) Count](#) is in just over 5 weeks!

We need your help on Thursday, January 25th to end homelessness in Pinellas County. By volunteering for just 3-hours, you can help:

- Secure millions of dollars for critical resources - including affordable housing - in Pinellas County.
- Influence local, state, and national policies and advocacy efforts.
 - Guide local planning and resource allocation; and
 - Ensure Pinellas County's most vulnerable residents have the resources that they need to thrive.

Wanted: LWV Members For: Sharing What You Know and Love!



Do you have a special skill or talent? Did you travel to a unique location this summer? Are you engaged in community service or have an occupation that teens will find interesting? If so, the Take Stock in Children virtual mentoring program is a great place to share what you know with some very talented students in Pinellas County schools.

The Take Stock in Children (TSIC) Scholarship is a statewide program supported by the Florida Department of Education that awards college scholarships to qualified, often first in the family to attend college, Pinellas County students. The program is funded through the

Pinellas Education Foundation. The students who are accepted into TSIC attend weekly 30-minute virtual meetings to learn about their community, careers, and future opportunities to help others.

Requirements Include:

- ✓ 30 minutes of your time
- ✓ A computer, phone, or tablet with internet access
- ✓ An engaging presentation or “story”
- ✓ An interest in helping teens prepare for life after high school

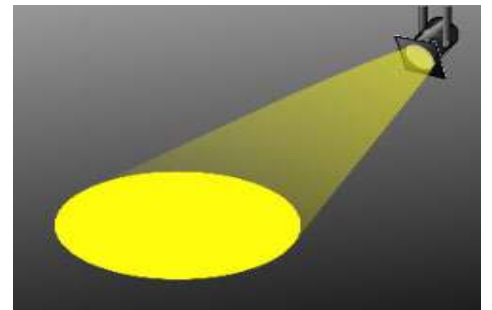
You can schedule your 30-minute presentation on a day and time that is convenient for you. To find out more about the program, and to schedule a time to speak with a group of TSIC students, contact Patti Muscaro (727-488-4816), or Elizabethmuscaro@pinellaseducation.org.

Your time and expertise will be most appreciated by the Pinellas Education Foundation and these very deserving students!

Spotlight: Introducing Bryan Beckman



Bryan Beckman is the LWVNPC chairperson for the Environment Committee. He took a circuitous route across the country before coming to Florida and the LWVNP. Bryan is from Lansing, Michigan. He is married to Kathleen Beckman, a Clearwater City Councilwoman and a fellow LWVNPC member. Of note is that Bryan and Kathleen have been a couple since 9th grade and even attended the same university!



Bryan’s professional background is in Information Systems. He initially worked for General Foods in Lafayette, Indiana, and then moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where he continued his work in information systems at a gelatin manufacturing plant. (Who knew that gelatin was made from animal skins?) While living in Boston, Bryan became very aware of environmental issues arising from the local tanneries, which were found to be leaking contaminated water into the area, causing serious health problems, ultimately resulting in lawsuits and multimillion payments to defendants.

After Boston, the Beckmans moved to Illinois for Bryan’s work at Kraft foods, where he added international travel to his responsibilities. He feels that international travel gave him a valuable new perspective of the world.

Bryan and Kathleen retired seven years ago, and came to Clearwater, primarily for the weather. They are both outdoor enthusiasts, love the parks, and especially the water. Bryan quickly became involved in volunteer work. He was impressed by the Sierra Club’s advocacy for clean energy at the municipal and state level. He is particularly interested in clean energy and renewable energy sources and is proud that five cities in Pinellas county have adopted resolutions for increasing the use of clean energy incrementally in the coming years. For those who are unfamiliar with these terms, “clean” or “carbon-free” energy is used to refer to the electricity that is generated by

facilities that do not directly emit greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide during the generating process.¹ Renewable energy is energy from a source that is not depleted when used, such as wind or solar power.² Clean and renewable energy reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, such as coal, oil and natural gas, which contribute to pollution and global warming.

Bryan continues to be active in advocating for positive environmental change and helping residents, small businesses, non-profits, and churches reduce their energy bills and carbon footprint. He became a League member because he respected our work in championing voting rights, citing that he is very aware of marginalized groups such as women and African Americans who fought hard for the right to vote. He believes in voter education, informing people about the issues, and helping them to understand how much their vote matters.



Sisters Across the Straits: My Trip to Cuba

By Niki Amarantides

We all get too many emails, and because we do, we scan quickly and move on. I did that recently only to sit up a day later and say: “Wait a minute. Did I get an email telling me that the League of Women Voters Florida was announcing a trip to Cuba?” Even though I was reading the email in Seattle, was there really a 5-day guided trip to Havana with itinerary, lodging, and meals arranged being offered? What an opportunity! When I responded (belatedly), the trip was filled. But fortunately (for me), a cancellation occurred, and I had the chance to become part of LWVFL’s 11-member group of life-long learners and activists.

Only ninety miles away and $\frac{3}{4}$ the size of Florida, Cuba often seems a distant, mythical extension of dramas involving Spain, England, the US, and Russia. Some of us carry images of Fidel’s iconic cigars and fatigues, childhood memories of Ricky and Lucy Ricardo, or experiences of under school-desk drills spurred by the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. I think it’s fair to say, most of our group came with fragmented knowledge and TV/movie impressions of Cuba. But thanks to Sisters Across the Straits founder Annie Betancourt, who began this unique LWVFL project in 2011, she provided us pre-departure materials to read and watch--plus time with scholars and diplomats during our trip.

Our learning was varied and included artistic, historical, political, and economic perspectives. On arrival day, our first stop was at visionary artist Jose Fuster’s studio and community project—which was covered in fantastical mosaics that surprised and delighted us at every turn. Later, we had a guided visit of the Fine Arts Museum vibrant Cuba Collection. We took in iconic Cuban sites such as El Malecon, the sea wall built by the US Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1900s that protects Havana from the pounding surf of the Gulf of Mexico. We couldn’t miss seeing the brightly painted vintage American cars cheering up the Havana cityscape-- but they were also a vivid reminder of the US embargo that began in 1962 to which Castro responded by banning American cars and parts.

Pristine and crumbling neo-classical and Spanish architecture could be seen all over Havana. So were monuments honoring communist power, with the most impressive one being a tribute to Cuba’s national hero,

¹ <https://www.constellation.com/energy-101/energy-innovation/what-is-clean-energy.html>

² [https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-renewable-](https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-renewable-energy#:~:text=Renewable%20energy%20is%20energy%20derived,that%20are%20constantly%20being%20replenished.)

[energy#:~:text=Renewable%20energy%20is%20energy%20derived,that%20are%20constantly%20being%20replenished.](https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-renewable-energy#:~:text=Renewable%20energy%20is%20energy%20derived,that%20are%20constantly%20being%20replenished.)

Jose Marti. Marti was not so much a military hero but a poet, whose writing explores themes of freedom, liberty, democracy, and love. The frequently recorded song "Guantanamera" is based on one of Marti's poems.

We attended a Shabat service at Temple Beth-Shalom where we learned that only 1,000 Jews remain in Cuba today. In 1924 there were 24,000; then 15,000 prior to Castro's rise to power. We visited Ernest Hemingway's estate, and along the way, we noted the shells of construction projects begun and abandoned. We also stopped at a farmer's market and saw the limited offerings that day, as well as lines of people waiting to buy food and gas. At a reception at the British Consul's residence, we had conversations regarding current realities, how US elections and presidents impact Cuba, and how quiet diplomacy can make inroads.

We learned so much during those remarkable five days. I am grateful for the Sisters Across the Straits project of the LWVFL for deepening my understanding of Cuba's complex history. I hope that future trips and exchanges can occur so that more of our members can realize the common humanity we share with our sisters across the Straits of Florida.



Spotlight on education

The public is invited to a community conversation about the future of Florida public schools on Tuesday, Jan. 30, at the Tampa Theatre, hosted by the Tampa Bay Times. In the second installment of the Spotlight Tampa Bay series, Times journalists will moderate a discussion by experts, followed by a panel featuring students. Tickets are \$20; \$10 for students. Proceeds benefit the Times' Journalism Fund. [To purchase tickets, click here.](#)

Marchers Needed!

LWVNPC has accepted an invitation to march at the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. parade in Tarpon Springs on January 13, 2024. This is a great opportunity to present our organization to the community. Marchers are also invited to the breakfast, although not mandatory. **We need you!**

Please RSVP to jacquelinefarrell20@gmail.com or lindametzko@tampabay.rr.com

See below.



Join us in commemorating the life and vision of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Annual Birthday, Parade, and Festivities
January 13, 2024

Breakfast at 8:00 AM at First United Methodist Church
Line-up at 10:00 AM, Parade begins at 11:00 AM

The event will begin at the intersection of **Levis & Tarpon Ave.**, and will end at **Dorsett Park.**

Festivities will include:

- a breakfast
- a parade
- performances and family activities in the park

RSVP to either J. Lake, Jr. at (727) 415-1382 or Rev. M. Smith at (727) 798-5718 if you wish to participate in the parade.

Sponsored by the committee of the **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Events and Scholarship Foundation**



Pinellas Trail Adopt-A-Mile Program: January 27, 2024 9:30 Am: Clean-up with League Social!

On Saturday, January 27th, the LWWNPC will be participating in the Adopt- A- Mile Program for our second cleanup.

This program is sponsored by Keep Pinellas Beautiful and allows individuals and organizations to adopt an area and participate in clean-up and beautification four times yearly. This is a great opportunity for our members to be visible in the community while helping our environment. Following the clean-up activity, we will hold a League social with coffee and refreshments!

Come out, enjoy a lovely morning outdoors and meet fellow League members while we share a cup of coffee or tea! Our mile is Union Street from Douglas Avenue to Powderhorn Drive in Clearwater. Stay tuned for more instructions via email. For more information, contact Tanya Landry at tlandry@conquestsystems.com

Want to leave a Google Review for LWVNPC? Go To

<http://search.google.com/local/reviews?placeid=ChIJW4V5OYDxwogRIIzWPBfytgg> and look to the LWVNPC description on the right side of the page. Look toward the bottom of the page to: "Reviews."



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| Wednesday, January 3, 2024, 4 pm | LWVNPC Board Meeting Via Zoom |
| Tuesday, January 9, 2024 | Oldsmar Candidate Forum |
| Wednesday, January 10, 2024 | Bellair Beach Candidate Forum |
| Saturday January 13, 2024 8 AM | Martin Luther King Day Annual Breakfast and Parade, Tarpon Springs |
| Monday January 15, 2024 | Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Holiday |
| Monday January 15, 2024 6 PM | Voter Service Committee Meeting Via Zoom |
| January 23 and 24, 2024 | League Lobby Days Tallahassee, Florida |
| Saturday, January 27, 2024 9:30 am | Adopt a Mile Cleanup and League Social |
| Monday, January 29, 2024 4:30 PM | Education Committee Meeting |
| Tuesday, January 30, 2024 5 to 8 PM | Spotlight on Tampa Bay: The Future of Florida Public Schools |

For Zoom links to meetings, please contact Gayla Larson at nblarson@gmail.com



Reflections

by Gayla Larson

We live in incredible times. We have access to medical care for ailments that would have taken our relatives to an early grave. We have education standards to allow our children to learn much more than we'll ever know. We have transportation abilities that bring our far-flung friends and family together within hours of an expressed yearning or need.

BUT we also live in fraught times when social media can send us down a "rabbit hole" of misinformation and confusion about happenings in our world. We have Constitutional rights far surpassing those of some countries that our "misleaders" would like us to forego. We can and should love how our hearts direct us, and we should and do worship as our beliefs tell us.

In my very personal opinion, we live in the greatest country ever founded – conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all (men and women) are created equal. (apologies to Mr. Lincoln.) But this country needs to be guarded from those who would weaken that liberty and draw us into authoritarian rule to preclude our beliefs and long-lived freedoms. Democracy is not guaranteed without our participation by registering and voting each and every election. Every election matters! We must do all we can to see that those who have been disenfranchised in the past are brought to the present with full enfranchisement.

Our country is not perfect. We have made mistakes, and we strive to correct those errors. We must guard against the wills of those who would continue those mistakes or increase the errors. No one – no matter what color, what religion, what belief system to which they adhere – should be deprived of these freedoms. Too many people have fought and died to ensure that those rights continue.

During this holiday season of gratitude and celebration, I celebrate all of us who continue to move toward full voting and living rights for all people. God bless us everyone! And may the future bring us to that time of peace and grace.

