

March Programs Bring Communities Together to Focus on Top Issues

On March 11 we collaborated with the Sisters of the Precious Blood to co-sponsor "A Conversation on Democracy with David Pepper." Pepper is the author of *Laboratories of Autocracy* and *Saving of Democracy* and several other works. Not only were the current threats to democracy identified, but he highlighted the importance of re-engaging the electorate by going beyond registering voters and encouraging them to vote. Voters need help to understand how being politically involved matters to them. At the heart of it all is saving democracy. Each of can use our "footprint" (networks) to serve this goal. Our League is engaged in this process and welcomes your participation.

The League recognized the critical role that Public Education plays in preserving democracy. On March 21 the League brought together a distinguished panel of experts to help identify the challenges and opportunities that currently exist for public schools. The panel was moderated by Thomas J. Lasley II, Ph.D.

Thomas Lasley is the founder, CEO emeritus, and director of policy at Learn to Earn Dayton, which leads efforts to "ensure that all children in the Dayton region are successful first in school and ultimately in life." He is a recognized authority in education and has helped to shape policy and legislation in reading and outcome attainments. He is deeply committed to ensuring that every child succeeds.

John Patterson is a former state legislator and retired teacher with over 40 years of experience. He served in the Ohio House until term limits prohibited his continued service. Patterson continues to promote and advocate for transparent and fair school funding that is based on what it costs to provide a quality education to every student in order to prepare them to participate personally, politically and economically in their communities. He noted that Ohio ranks 40th nationally on state teacher salary scales.

Judy Hennessey served as a teacher, principal, special education supervisor, director of human resources, assistant superintendent, superintendent of Oakwood City Schools and finally as superintendent of The Dayton Early College Academy, Ohio's first early college high school. She also served as a professional development consultant in over 400 of Ohio's school districts and remains deeply convinced that a quality education is the only solution to generational poverty and the many associated struggles facing young people today. Hennessey highlighted the important role that local school boards play in working to ensure that the district or school operates a successful learning organization that meets local,

state and federal laws and rules. A well-functioning school board focuses on what the students need rather than on battles about what adults want and its members will find creative ways to maintain that focus.

Susan Bodary is a former Ohio Governor's Advisor on Education and Workforce and a Partner with Education First, where she has advised and consulted with governors, commissioners and education, business, philanthropic and legislative leaders in nearly 25 states on education policy and program development. She believes the best solutions are student-centered and address student needs, value student identities and differences, and position communities with citizens who have the knowledge and skills to succeed in their chosen fields. To that end attracting-qualified teachers and retaining them is essential. Research demonstrates that students taught by qualified teachers during their early years are significantly better prepared to achieve educational and personal success.

Jeffrey J. Mims Jr. retired from the Dayton Public Schools after 35 years of service. He served as the third district representative for the Ohio School Board and is past president of the Dayton Board of Education. His work has included garnering support for equitable funding of Ohio's public schools, and his efforts helped pave the way for Ohio's New School Facilities Program. Mims was elected President of the Dayton Education Association for six consecutive terms. As mayor he is committed to making the City of Dayton and the Dayton Public Schools strong partners. Good communities require good citizens, and the goal of education should always be how to best achieve that goal.

When communities come together to support schools they enable students to become informed, educated participants in their own communities. Communities who do this are providing the foundation that is essential to the preservation of our democracy.

What the members of the League of Women Voters do through our advocacy, *Voter's Guide*, candidate forums, programs and the sharing of information serves as essential continuing education in service of democracy. The challenges are formidable; the League needs whatever time, talent or resources you are willing to share. If you think about it, we all have a footprint in saving democracy. Keep informed, engaged and share your passion for saving democracy with everyone within your shared community. Be that voice they need to hear.

~Beth Schaeffer
President LWVGA