



<http://www.lwvutah.org>

The League of Women Voters  
of Utah

230 W. 200 South, Suite #2114  
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

(801) 272-8683

Email: [office@lwvutah.org](mailto:office@lwvutah.org)

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[@LWVUtah](#)

July 2020

## League Looks Ahead to Budget Cuts, Turbulent Times

By Vickie Samuelson, LWV-UT Co-President

Here we are six months into 2020 and what a first half of the year we have had! We started off with an earthquake that rocked the valley just as COVID-19 was really taking hold of Utah. That took everything that was normal and tipped it upside down. We've locked down businesses as well in an attempt to stop the spread of this very contagious disease. That caused a big hit to Utah's state budget. At interim meetings in May, the Legislature came up with a formula of 2, 5 and 10 percent that most departments would be cut by.



Some departments were moved around on the priority lists, but Education and Social Services were really hurt. There was no mention of using the Rainy Day Fund to help with these cuts but a special session was to be called in June to address them.

Fast forward to Thursday, June 18.

"The Legislature] went through all the budgets and made sure they were being fair and focusing on the things that are essential to Utah," Senate President Stuart Adams said. Gone is all the new money from last year's General Session. Cuts for the 2021 fiscal budget which starts July 1, will commence with a 1.7 percent cut. But other budgets will see much bigger cuts, some as high as 18 percent. Infrastructure and General Government budgets were cut, so any new buildings are off the table.

The Education budget got a little increase. Weighted Pupil Units (WPU) went up 1.8 percent and the budget also approved \$50 million to assist with expected growth in the student population. Also, \$125 million in

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federal coronavirus relief money is headed toward educational needs like infrastructure and information technology.

Lawmakers shifted ongoing money that was slated for construction projects to bonding and tapped the State's Rainy Day Fund of approximately \$100 million. Our sales tax number came in a little higher than expected, suggesting the rebound is showing stronger results but we have a long way to go yet in regard to budgets. The Legislature is treating any money from the Rainy Day Fund as a loan and hopes to pay it back by July 2021.

Then came the protests over the death of George Floyd and so many other people of color who have lost their lives to police. Saturday was a really rough day to watch because of the violence and damage to our city. I cried when the news showed the damage to our Capitol. But after Saturday, all the protests became constructive and good conversations were happening with the protesters, police, city officials, and the governor. Out of all this came H.B. 5007 (Peace Officer Amendments) which prohibits training peace officers in the use of chokeholds or restraints that may cause unconsciousness and prohibits the use of such a restraint. There is still more to do and address but it's a good first step.

*"Get into trouble — necessary trouble" — U.S. Rep. John Lewis*

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## June Interim, Special Sessions Respond to COVID-19

**By Emily Walsh, LWV-UT Legislative Action Director**

The Utah Legislature met for both interim committees and a special session this month. COVID-19 was a major theme in the meetings and bills. Bills were made public through the various committee pages and received public hearings in interim committees prior to the convening of the special session. Many of the COVID-19 related bills were fixes to bills run in the previous special sessions. Twenty-seven bills were numbered and 23 of those bills passed.

The most notable bill to pass during the special session was [HB 5007](#)'s Peace Officer Amendments sponsored by Rep. Sandra Hollins, D-Salt Lake, and floor sponsors Sen. Luz Escamilla, D- Salt Lake and Sen. Evan Vickers, R-Cedar City. The House spent a lengthy amount of time discussing and debating the level of *mens rea* (criminal intent) required in the bill. Overall the conversation on the floor of both legislative bodies was encouraging. The bill passed the House with five representatives voting no: Rep. Norm Thurston, R-Provo, Rep. Marc Roberts, R- Salem, Rep. Carl Albrecht, R-Richfield, Rep. Rex Shipp, R-Cedar City, and Rep. Phil Lyman, R- Blanding. The bill passed the Senate with a unanimous vote and no debate.



### Local League Presidents

#### Davis County

Nickie Nelson

[davispresident@lwwutah.org](mailto:davispresident@lwwutah.org)

#### Grand County

Carey Dabney

[grandpresident@lwwutah.org](mailto:grandpresident@lwwutah.org)

#### Salt Lake

Jeanine Kuhn-Coker

[president@lwwsl.org](mailto:president@lwwsl.org)

#### Weber County

Terri McCulloch

[weberpresident@lwwutah.org](mailto:weberpresident@lwwutah.org)

Interim committees are held after the general legislative session ends. The committees are meant to educate and prepare legislators for the next general session. The general session makes more sense when you have been paying attention to interim committees. Fascinating data can be found in some of these meetings.

The Economic Development and Workforce Service Interim Committee opened a bill file to increase state employees' access to telecommuting. The decision was based on air quality data studied by the University of Utah's Department of Atmospheric Studies. [The study](#) showed a 36-57 percent decrease in nitrogen oxides in Salt Lake County from March 15-31 as compared to the 2010-2019 average for the same dates. The decrease is due to a significant drop in cars being on the road. The Utah Department of Transportation reported a 40-50 percent reduction in traffic for the same time period. Most of the traffic decrease was in cars not trucks. Dr. Logan Mitchell of the University of Utah asserted the data proves the goals laid out in the "Utah Roadmap," released by the Gardner Institute earlier this year, are attainable. The U of U will continue to study data regarding surrounding counties and report back.

The Utah State Board of Education reported on data collected during the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis. It reports the number of emergency meals for children served in April were 7,765,067, growing to 7,809,479 in May. They also reported they do not have statewide numbers regarding student access to the internet from home. However, the board is working on getting these numbers and cooperating with community partners throughout the state to treat broadband access as an equitable condition.

The Natural Resources Agriculture and Environment Interim Committee heard a report from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) about a pilot study testing wastewater in Utah for COVID-19. The study tested 10 wastewater treatment plants from mid-April through May. Those treatment plants service about 40 percent of Utah. The virus was found at all 10 facilities. The pilot study found: the largest concentrations of virus are at facilities servicing urban areas, tourist communities have a higher concentration of the virus than similar sized cities, and they were able to detect the outbreak in Cache Valley. DEQ believes this testing process could be an important tool in fighting COVID-19.

There will be no interim meetings in July. The Legislature took measures during the special session in an attempt to avoid another special session until August. The Legislative Action Committees' ability to meet in person in August will depend on the status of the pandemic in our state at that time. You may read detailed reports on interim meetings in the Legislative Action Google group. Email [actioncorps@lwvutah.org](mailto:actioncorps@lwvutah.org) if you would like to join the Google group.



## **Utah League**

### **Co-Presidents**

Vickie Samuelson  
& Catherine Weller

[presidents@lwvutah.org](mailto:presidents@lwvutah.org)

### **Executive Director Emeritus**

Sandy Peck

[sandypeck@xmission.com](mailto:sandypeck@xmission.com)

### **Voter Editors**

Charles R. Bernard  
Erin Franey

[thevoter@lwvutah.org](mailto:thevoter@lwvutah.org)

### **Office Consultant**

Peggy Carrico

[office@lwvutah.org](mailto:office@lwvutah.org)

## GPI, GNH, and Utah: How do we Measure Happiness?

By Ann O'Connell, LWV-SL Natural Resources Chair

First of all, some definitions [courtesy of Wikipedia](#):

Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) is an attempt to measure whether the environmental impact and social costs of economic production and consumption in a country are negative or positive factors in overall health and well-being.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is a philosophy that guides the government of Bhutan. It includes an index which is used to measure the collective happiness and well-being of a population.

It has been suggested that the League of Women Voters study the concept of Gross National Happiness. As is always the case, a League study, whether for consensus or for education only, requires a committee and some research and writing.

The Utah Genuine Progress Indicator (2011) is a good starting point. This GPI was done by Professor Gunseli Berik, Ph.D., University of Utah Economics Department and Erica Gaddis, Ph.D., now the Director of the Utah Division of Water Quality. It can be found on the website of the Utah Population and Environment Council. The executive summary is a good description of Utah's GPI and of what a GPI is and easily understood. The study itself is long and scholarly. Not so easy to digest. The executive summary can be found here: [GPI Utah](#).

Vermont, Maryland, and Oregon have adopted a GPI as a standard measure of improvement. Realistic questions must be asked, however: is it time for Utah to follow the lead of these other states? Probably not too likely. Would Utah consider a GNH right now? Probably not.

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## Grand County Initiates Public Lands Transfer Study

By Carey Dabney, LWV-GRC President

The LWV of Grand County is currently developing an educational study on the Transfer of Public Lands Movement for the LWV of Utah.

What has happened in Utah over the past decade is a continuing effort to transfer U.S. public lands into state ownership that could then be a model for other states to follow.

Understanding the role of Utah legislators and the history of public lands transfer legislation is critical to



## Threat of Voter Suppression Grows

"The voter suppression threat is clear and growing. President Donald Trump and his allies are devoting unprecedented resources to [efforts to obstruct voting](#), including fighting off lawsuits brought by Democrats and voting rights advocates. In some states, Republicans are doing all they can, egged on by the president, to fight any extension of mail-in voting, potentially forcing voters to risk their health at the polls."

[Read more...](#)



understanding the extent to which this movement has taken hold in Utah, and across the West.

In 2017, the LWV of New Mexico initiated a study on the Transfer of Federal Public Lands and in 2019 developed a position that was adopted at their 2019 Convention. Because the LWVNM believes “there is significant risk that this issue may arise with little advance notice in any state with federal public lands” they asked for LWVUS Concurrence at the National LWV Convention in June 2020.

By an overwhelming majority, their position was approved and adopted as a LWVUS Position which allows all Leagues across the country to speak with one voice in opposing the transfer of U.S. public lands into state ownership.

The purpose of our study is to examine:

- the Transfer of Public Lands Movement in Utah;
- the history of U.S. public lands and Utah statehood;
- the origins of the public land management agencies and the economic value of public lands to the state of Utah;
- visitation to U.S. public lands in Utah, and
- ramifications to public access to these lands if the state of Utah succeeds in convincing the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene, or the U.S. Congress to transfer federally owned public lands into state ownership.

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## League Participates in Women Wear Orange Event

By Kathryn Fitzgerald, LWV-UT

Student board member Dhathi Oomman joined me in representing the League of Women Voters as we participated alongside Moms Demand Action and other pro-gun control organizations in their Women Wear Orange event on Saturday, June 6. The purpose of the annual event is to commemorate lives lost to gun violence and to protest unfettered gun access.

Most poignant were the testimonies of the courageous survivors who described the emotional and physical pain that they suffer forever due to a suicide of a child or sibling by firearm or a random murder by a mass shooter. People representing March for our Lives, the Gun Violence Prevention Center, Students Demand Action, the League, and others talked about how they work to help the survivors of gun violence heal or, like the League, to make our homes and streets safer from firearms.

More than 50 people participated by Zoom. If you would like to become more active in fighting gun violence, visit [Momsdemandaction.org](https://momsdemandaction.org).

## Panel Discusses California, Utah Redistricting Reforms

KCPW hosted a panel discussion examining the details of California’s redistricting process and offering advice on how Utah’s commission can be most effective. On the panel are Commissioner Peter Yao and Commissioner Stan Forbes, of the Independent Redistricting Commission for California. Also answering questions on the panel is Blake Moore, the Republican co-chair of the Better Boundaries initiative.

[You can listen to it here.](#)

## Salt Lake Considers Safety in Planning Program

**By Jeanine Kuhn-Coker, LWV-SL President**

In view of social distancing, the Salt Lake League is faced with the consideration of how to be resilient and relevant in 2020. We plan to partner with ASUU at the University of Utah to register voters and promote our brand, and to wear masks and practice social distancing at events scheduled for students. In addition to taking a more active part in observing our city and county governments, we are going to look at effecting changes to combat systemic racism.

We will hold a virtual 5K fundraiser in September and will look at creative ways to use social media and Zoom to raise money. We will go forward with promoting ranked choice voting in elections. We still plan on having a robust program for 2020; there will be relevant general meetings and unit meetings on Zoom.

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## Salt Lake League Unveils 2020 - 2021 Programs

**By Donnie Davis, LWV-SL Program Director**

The Salt Lake League's 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting took place over Zoom, with many eager LWV-SL members in attendance. Kathy Biele welcomed us for her last time as president and spoke of the many accomplishments the Salt Lake League achieved in the past year. The list is impressive, and some of the events will carry over to this next year. Thank you Kathy for your superior service to the Salt Lake League. We are grateful for your time and energy and for the skills that you brought to the office. We know that you will continue to work in another position for the League.

The 2020-2021 Program was presented from the Program Planning General Meeting held at the end of May and enhanced with suggestions from the Annual Meeting. Study ideas included; SL County money in politics/campaign finance regulation, with Kathy taking the lead along with Gigi Brandt; voter registration and rural demographics, which does not have a lead at this time; and Shauna Bona is interested in leading a study on rural/urban issues.

The program suggestions for 2020-2021 are timely, varied, and in line with the Salt Lake League's vision. They are as follows; a civic education teacher's presentation, the Constitution at risk, homelessness and the pandemic, missing and murdered Indigenous women, media/computer training, how to transcend party differences, and the Inland Port. Look for all of these topics in the coming year at General Meetings and at special speaker presentations.

The suggestions for unit meetings are: agricultural sustainability; how the coronavirus has influenced the outlook of world trade, international travel and international economic interconnectedness; the mayor and police department on policing policies; race relations in Utah; the history of



### LWV Welcomes New President

Deborah Turner, MD, JD,, will serve as the 20th president of the League of Women Voters of the United States and chair of the Board of Trustees of the League's Education Fund. She was elected board president at the recent 54th National Convention and will serve until June 2022.

African Americans in Utah; the LWV-WA voting methods survey; and how the Utah Inland Port is dependent on world trade.

As you can see, we have an abundance of programming planned for 2020-2021, an ample amount of work, studies and education to accomplish and I am excited to see the creative ways in which we achieve our goals in these unusual times.

## SAVE THE DATE

### *Election Day is Near!*



VISIT [VOTE411.ORG](https://vote411.org)  
ELECTION INFORMATION YOU NEED!



### **Make Sure Your Candidates Have Answered**

Yes, the Primary Election has come and gone, but we are gearing up for the General Election in November. Please check out our online voters guide, and if your candidates have not responded to our questions, reach out to them. These are difficult times in which we need candidates who truly represent their constituents and are willing to speak out on the issues.

Stay up with the League on all our social media platforms - and our website - for up-to-date information on the elections. Primary results may be delayed during the count, but we're on top of it.



Thanks to the Girl Scouts of Utah for their generous in-kind donations to the League of Women Voters of Utah and the League of Women Voters of Salt Lake.

