

President's Report, November 2018

Early voting has started with a very strong turnout locally and across the state. This election may end on November 6 with record or near-record numbers of voters for a non-presidential election. Besides conducting voter forums before the election, the LWVOR provides monthly opportunities to meet with state legislators at Breakfast with the Legislators once the Legislature is in session.

While the LWV was formed to inform and encourage citizens to actively participate in government, it also studies and takes positions in areas such as voting, judicial organization, education, healthcare, government financing, and juvenile justice.

The newest position, adopted by LWVTN in 2018, is, "Support of government policies that promote broadband, wireless, and other means of high speed internet deployment throughout the state; access to high-speed internet, without charge, through schools and libraries; state efforts to protect the open, neutral and nondiscriminatory nature of the internet; adequate television channels regardless of the provider of TV / video services to Tennessee residents; government provision of opportunities for citizen participation in decisions regarding community access."

After some research online, I learned that in 2018 about 800,000 Tennessee residents (13% of the population) lack access to high-speed broadband internet service. Chattanooga has perhaps the best internet service in the country, provided by its municipally-owned Electric Power Board of Chattanooga (EPB). It's also very reasonably priced. According to [Tech.Co](#), "An [independent study](#) published by the University of Tennessee noted that EPB's new network directly led to the creation of between 2,800 and 5,200 new jobs. Furthermore, the economic benefits have earned the small city around \$1 billion. The fast, reliable internet has also helped to lure multinational corporations such as Volkswagen."

By encouraging public and private partnerships, and providing some funding, Tennessee is working, albeit slowly, toward the goal of having all its residents connected with access to high-speed broadband internet service. The LWVTN supports these efforts.

Legislation enabled the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development to make available \$10 million in grants and \$5 million in tax credits each year for three years to both private businesses and public service providers for broadband expansion, beginning in 2017. The department funded nine of 66 requests in 2018 and is taking applications for 2019. There is a lot of information available online about this topic, including [here](#) and [here](#).

~Harriett McCurdy, President, LWVOR