



*Lighting the fire, leading the way,
since 1915*

OUR MISSION

Woman's City Club is committed to building a strong Greater Cincinnati community through educating, empowering, and engaging all citizens to participate in promoting the common good.

OUR VISION

We envision a just and sustainable community where all citizens are engaged as informed stakeholders in the shaping of our shared future.

OUR VALUES

Collaboration - Citizen Empowerment
- Lead Constructive Lives -
A Thriving City of the Future

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Woman's City Club welcomes new members. Visit our website, WomansCityClub.org, to learn more about us and how to join.

THE BULLETIN

JANUARY 2024

PUBLIC FORUM

NEIGHBORS, NOT NEWS STORIES:

HOW GREATER CINCINNATI WELCOMES IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25
7 PM VIA ZOOM

While news headlines focus on the immigration crisis on the U.S. southern borders, Greater Cincinnati tells a very different story.

Immigrants and refugees from many countries have come here, making a new home with the support of organizations and individuals, and contributing to both the cultural diversity and economic development of our community.

Who are they, where do they come from, why do they come here, who helps them, and what impact do they have on our area? Join us to learn more about these newcomers and the agencies that assist them from our four speakers.

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HOW GREATER CINCINNATI WELCOMES IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

PANELISTS:



Tony Stieritz, CEO of Catholic Charities, the only local agency that works with the US State Department to resettle refugees in southwest Ohio. It also serves as a major provider of a broad range of direct services and support for all types of newcomers: mental health services, immigration attorneys, housing, and the Su Casa Hispanic Center, and more.



Samantha Searles, Program Director for Ignite Peace, which coordinates the **Immigrant Dignity Coalition**, a network of 40+ organizations working to protect and assist the immigrant and refugee community with direct services, updates on policy proposals and changes to immigration programs, problem solving, building community power through leadership, and public witness and advocacy.



Bryan Wright, Executive Director at Cincinnati Compass, a collaborative project of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, City of Cincinnati, and 65+ community partners that works to advance the economic and social inclusion of immigrants and refugees to enhance the economic growth of the Cincinnati region. This includes workforce and small business development, employment authorization for asylum seekers, reducing barriers for internationally trained professionals to get licensed in Ohio and Kentucky, driver licenses, tuition equity, H1B reform, and startup visas for international founders.



Greg Landsman, US Representative for Ohio's 1st District, who will update us on federal immigration policies and actions and any support the federal government may be providing to people coming to southwest Ohio. Also, as a former Cincinnati City Council member he may be able to add to the conversation about what the Sanctuary City designation means for Cincinnati.

Our country is immeasurably enriched by the diversity of nationalities and cultures of the people who have come to live here. Our Statue of Liberty still proclaims the words Emma Lazarus wrote in 1883, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me."





WE ARE ALL IMMIGRANTS

My mother came to the United States from France. She was born in Romania because her mother traveled back there (her home country) for her birth. She was a teenager when the war began; but she and her parents managed to get through the experience. After serving stateside during the war, my father was stationed in post-war France where he met my mother around 1947. He returned to France in 1948 after being discharged from the Army Air Corps to marry her. When they came to the US, my mother went through Ellis Island and the newlyweds spent some time with my dad's family in New Jersey.



One of the interesting stories of this period is how my mother was told by my father's mother that they were "original" Americans. My mother, not skipping a beat, said, "I didn't realize you were Indians." My parents didn't stay long near my father's family which is how my brother and I happened to be born in Ohio. Alas, my mother's wry wit...

I am proud that my parents were first-generation American on one side and fifth-generation on the other. I think that helped build my perspective as a Dutch-Irish-English-French-Romanian "mutt."

The romantic story of my mother's arrival in New York by ship is shared by others who immigrated but nothing like the harrowing experience of many who escaped persecution, economic hardship and even possible death to arrive here. Nancy Sullivan, of Transformations CDC, speaks of *La Bestia*, the freight train many seek out for their escape from Honduras through Mexico to the U.S. They risk robbery, rape and death by gangs situated to make their desperate journey nearly impossible. But our Land of Opportunity comes at a high price. Though Cincinnati is so far from our Southern border, it remains a haven for many immigrants who seek opportunity.

What are the current prospects for immigrants in Cincinnati? Our upcoming January program (Thursday, January 25) seeks to answer this and other pressing questions. Meanwhile, Woman City Club's book club is reading *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (Second Revised and Updated Edition, 2022) by Juan Gonzalez. The group meets on January 20 and I'm hoping to have finished the book by then. So far, I've found how lacking my education on the history of the United States and the Western Hemisphere has been due to the Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon focus of our history and geography curricula. This book has been an eye-opener for me even after having studied International Relations as part of my undergraduate program.

~ Jeff Dey



GET YOUR TICKETS TO THE NATIONAL SPEAKER FORUM!

We're counting down the weeks to our
30th Annual National Speaker Forum
Friday, March 22
7 pm at Memorial Hall

We hope this event is one you won't want to miss!



JENN WHITE

As you know, this year's speaker is the wonderful **Jenn White, host of 1A, National Public Radio's national broadcast radio talk show** airing on WVXU, 10-12 am weekdays, and on 460 other stations throughout the country. Her timely topic is **"Truth in Journalism,"** and how we can protect responsible reporting that is so essential to our democracy.

A basic ticket to the presentation is still just \$50. There are also several ways you can support it as an Underwriter.

- **Purchase a ticket for \$150 to the Forum and the private VIP Reception with Jenn White following her talk.**
- **Support the event at a higher level** that includes listing in the event program and bring your friends.

SUPPORT LEVELS	PRICE	VIP TICKETS
Angel	\$1,500	10
Benefactor	\$1,000	6
Patron	\$600	4
Supporter	\$300	2
VIP	\$150	1

[CLICK HERE TO BE CONNECTED TO THE WCC MEMORIAL HALL WEBSITE PAGE FOR BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND UNDERWRITER TICKETS](#)

DEADLINE: Please purchase your tickets by March 10, 2024, to be included in the program.

If you cannot attend, we would appreciate your making a tax-deductible donation to the Woman's City Club to help cover the cost of the Forum. You will be listed in the program and Bulletin as a Donor.



WOMAN'S CITY CLUB HONORS FOUR FEISTY INDIVIDUALS AT THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL FEIST TEA

The 14th Annual Feist Tea Fundraiser was held on Sunday, December 3, 2023. And, what a wonderful event it was! All attendees could feel the synergy and air of celebration as soon as they entered the banquet room. This lively, interactive, and relaxed celebration of this year's feisty honorees as well as previous honorees, past presidents, and new

members, was attended by 82 members and friends. Opening with an enjoyable social hour, the afternoon Tea offered light fare by Catered with Grace and a memorable slide show compiled by Jeff Dey, reminding us of this past year's wonderful programs and activities.

Four remarkable individuals, who embody the club's mission to educate, empower, and engage, were honored during the afternoon's event. Here are some highlights of the tribute to the 2023 honorees **Louise Gomer Bangel, Lydia Morgan, Jan Seymour, and David Siders.**



Louise Gomer Bangel was introduced by Alice Schneider.

If you aren't already providing financial support for moderate to liberal political candidates and nonprofits trying to preserve our nation's democracy, Louise Gomer Bangel urges you to do it. "It's crucial for our nation!" Bangel insists.

Louise is an independent writing and editing professional and conflict management/organizational development consultant. Scott A. Hunt, a former director of the Center for Peace Education, calls her "a leading activist and advocate on peace and social justice issues including the rights of women, minorities, the economically disadvantaged, and exceptional children."

Growing up on an 80-acre farm in southeastern Kansas, Louise's political action started early – becoming president of the Student Council in her junior and senior high school years. She topped off 1962 as Senior Queen of the prom.

Her activist bent marched on:

- Marched weekly for open housing in Evanston, Illinois, in 1976-68 while teaching math at Evanston Township High School.
- Protested the Vietnam War in downtown Chicago and across the country.
- Co-organized a D.C. conference on GI Rights in 1969.
- Walked in the 1969 March Against Death in D.C. "I could move only when the mass of people moved - a bit scary!" she said.
- Worked in Dayton with AFSC for conversion of part of the military budget at war's end.
- Was the 1975-1976 Political Action Chair for Independent Voters of Ohio.
- Was a board member of Cincinnati ACLU and Women's International League for Freedom and Peace.

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WOMAN'S CITY CLUB ~ FOURTEENTH ANNUAL FEIST TEA

Louise's education activities included co-founding the Center for Peace Education (CPE) in 1979, whose programs were merged into BRIDGES for a Just Community in 2010. Bridges closed in 2013, so she founded the Center for Social-Emotional Learning to teach SEL skills. In 2004, CPE bestowed on her its Center for Peace Dedication Award for "perseverance, education and commitment."

Louise co-authored *A Year of SCRC: 35 Experimental Workshops for the Classroom*, a manual for Students' Creative Response to Conflict program and was co-editor of *Creating a Peaceful Classroom for Young Children*, a manual for preschool teachers and childcare providers in 1999.

She was a board member of Cincinnati's Lighthouse Community School, 2015 to 2018, She is a member of the Tristate Medical Reserve Corp to assist with emergency responses. The League of Women Voters of Cincinnati honored her in 2000 with its 2000 Daniel Ransohoff Civic Award.



Lydia Morgan was introduced by Jan Seymour.

When Lydia Morgan was only 6 years old, she was already practicing the art of creative inquiry, asking her mother why the end of slavery wasn't celebrated the same way the end of British rule over the colonies was. Her mother didn't have the answer; but years later, while attending a conference in Phoenix with her husband, Lydia was invited to a Juneteenth celebration. Her response: "What is Juneteenth?" Once she had the answer, Lydia kicked into high gear.

In planning her first Juneteenth celebration for family and friends in Daniel Drake Park in 1988, she learned the ropes of event planning in a public place, including garnering the right permits from the Cincinnati Police Department, the Cincinnati Park Board, and the Health Department. After a few blockbuster years, the Park Board invited her to move her celebration to Eden Park. Now, thousands of people enjoy events, including musical performances on two separate stages; a parade of flags representing the African Diaspora; a history booth with activities for kids ranging from face painting to pony rides; vendors of clothing, crafts, and information, including the League of Women Voters and Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME); new commissioned creations by artists, poets, musicians, and dancers exploring the meaning of liberation and freedom; and food ... glorious food!

As a prequel to Juneteenth, Lydia began a celebration of the artistic expression of the Black experience. Held in March at the Kennedy Heights Art Center Annex, this event features visual art, poetry, dance, and music.

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WOMAN'S CITY CLUB FOURTEENTH ANNUAL FEIST TEA

Lydia has expanded her efforts to the international stage with an event called “Wade in the Water.” This symbolic dance recognizes the significant role of water in the 400-year history of African enslavement and the quest for freedom in the Americas. Dancers from as far away as Brazil have sent videos of their participation.

In a June 16, 2023, guest editorial in *The New York Times* entitled “As Juneteenth Goes National, We Must Preserve the Local,” Dr. Tiya Miles, professor of history at Harvard University and well-known author, says, “My own memories of Juneteenth, like those of so many others, are distinctly local. They are rooted in a sense of place. When I was young, that place was Eden Park, high on the hills along the Ohio River in Cincinnati, where I would spend the day contentedly with my mother and the many other families who attended. Years later ... discovering where Juneteenth events were held, who organized them and who turned out was like holding a black light to the invisible-inked map of the present and past African American community.”



Jan Seymour was introduced by Rachel Foster.

Jan Seymour puts action where her mouth is. Her motivation and fervor are described as infectious. An honoree at this year's Feist Tea, Jan was also the presenter for Lydia Morgan, a woman she nominated. In 2022 she nominated and presented Denisha Porter. She met both working on causes dear to her and them -- the Cincinnati Juneteenth festival and All-In Cincinnati Equity Coalition.

She is a retired vice president of Gilman Partners, an executive recruiting firm. Her “activism enthusiasm” started when she was elected governor of Kentucky Girls' State while in high school. Today, she is WCC's vice president of Civic Engagement.

In nominating Jan, Rachel Foster said, “Jan cares about other people and what is happening in their lives. She truly wants JUSTICE (her emphasis) for everyone as evidenced by all the organizations/causes in which she participates. I can think of no one who would be a better Feist Tea honoree than my dear friend Jan Seymour.”

As evidence, Foster offered these Jan activities:

- Brought evidence of discriminatory practices at Georgia Department of Labor to the Equal Employment Commission and evidence of discriminatory operations against black applicants against several rental operations including Trump-owned Swifton Village.
- Taught English to immigrants at Catholic Charities and tutored at Rothenberg School.

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WOMAN'S CITY CLUB ~ FOURTEENTH ANNUAL FEIST TEA

- Met buses carrying immigrants arriving or traveling through Cincinnati, providing needed supplies.
- Volunteered with Interfaith Hospitality Network, Madisonville Education Assistance Center, Wesley Chapel Mission Center in OTR (board member and tutor) and Center for Homeless People released from hospitals (respite care).
- Formed a Justice ministry at the Hyde Park Community United Methodist Church that required involvement in Urban League, YWCA, All-In Cincinnati, IJPC, MARCC and, of course, WCC.
- She has been asked to serve on the United Methodist Church District Task Force to Stop Racism.

Bekky Baker, program manager of the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center, said, “Jan Seymour has been relentlessly moving her community to support the passing of House Bill 183 and Senate Bill 103 to end the death penalty. Jan has always been against the death penalty on moral grounds but has started to work actively to end it. As part of her Justice Ministry group, Seymour participated in discussion of an exoneree’s book, hosted a postcard-writing campaign and led an initiative to send holiday cards to people on death row.



David Siders was introduced by Elissa Yancey.

From his days of shelving books to his current position as Civic Engagement Coordinator of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, honoree David Siders has seen library work as a calling. And he likely came by that naturally.

“My mom would take my sister and me as kids to the library almost weekly. I often think about the time when I took a book to the counter to check out, and the librarian said, ‘You’re too young to read that,’ and my mom promptly checked the book out for me. That experience is how I always identified with the principles of a library being free and public, something for everyone, and how libraries represent democracy and all viewpoints. These principles have all been influential in my passion for my career in public libraries.” With training in both social work and library sciences, David is committed to opening doors of knowledge and democracy to library patrons and to the Greater Cincinnati community as a whole.

One example of this passion is an innovative partnership with the Hamilton County Office of Re-Entry. David and his team visit neighbors living behind bars to engage in conversations, share perspectives, and offer resources. He has seen the power of providing library cards to community members re-entering what is often a very different world after incarceration. He sees his work, especially with those who live on the margins, as an honor and a privilege. Another example is how David used his library work to benefit the community during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing essential outreach services, including free test kits; this outreach helped him earn the prestigious John Phillip Outreach and Community Engagement Award from the Ohio Library Council.

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WOMAN'S CITY CLUB ~ FOURTEENTH ANNUAL FEIST TEA

David's calling impacts workforce development, career readiness, and community education; he seeks and develops partnerships with, among others, the YWCA, Women Helping Women, and Food Business Start Up! at Findlay Market. He is the chair of WCC's Social Justice Action Group. Most recently, he has been appointed the library's representative to a new community advisory group created by the Public Defender's Office.

David feels optimistic about breaking down systems of racism, classicism, and domestic violence. He humbly credits WCC, the library and its director, and his fellow honorees for giving him the opportunity to reach out to the community in new ways that ignite and amplify social justice efforts.

On behalf of the Feist Tea Committee, we thank all of you who attended and supported the Tea and the honorees. Your generous donations, in honor of these remarkable individuals and the mission and vision of WCC, serve to support the ongoing work, programs, and operations of the Woman's City Club.

~ Laurie Frank, Christy Backley, and Jo-Ann Albers



Photos by Harriet Kaufman



COUNTING ON YOU TO SUPPORT THE 2023 ANNUAL FUND CAMPAIGN!

Annual Fund Drive

We thank all those who have contributed to the 2023 Annual Fund Campaign.

Jo-Ann Albers
Deborah Allsop
Christy Backley
Clare Blankmeyer
Ann Bowers
Janet Buening
Ruth Cronenberg
Melissa Currence

Jeff Dey
Carole Donnelly
Barbara Elleman
Linda Fabe
Rachel Foster
Laurie Frank
Carol Friel
Rebecca Gibbs

Sarah Gideonse
Louise Gomer Bangel
Judith Green
Chara Jackson
Laurie Johnston
Amy Katzman
Harriet Kaufman
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Francie Pepper

Jeanette Rost
Alice Schneider
Beth Sullebarger
Marcia Togneri
Margaret Tojo
Donna Tukel
Christine Weber

If you haven't yet made a contribution, please consider doing so. Whether it is a one time or monthly basis, our website, womancityclub.org/donate, is the easiest and fastest way to donate. You can also mail a check to Woman's City Club or call our office at 513-751-0100 on M/W/F from 10 am to 2 pm to donate by credit card.



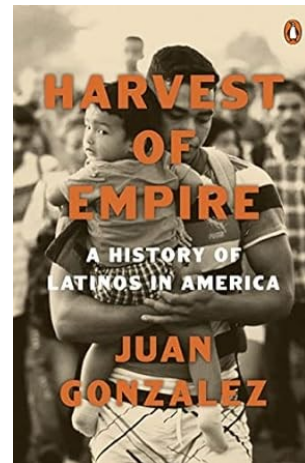
JOIN THE CONVERSATION

WCC Book Club

HARVEST OF EMPIRE **A History of Latinos in America** **By Juan Gonzalez**

Second Revised and
Updated Edition (2022)
Make sure to get this edition!

Saturday, January 20, 2024
10 am by Zoom



Latinos are now the largest minority group in the United States, and their impact on American culture and politics is greater than ever. With family portraits of real-life immigrant Latino pioneers, as well as accounts of the events and conditions that compelled them to leave their homelands, Gonzalez highlights the complexity of a segment of the American population that is often discussed but frequently misrepresented.

Members and their friends, or others by invitation, are welcome, but you must RSVP to obtain the link: Sarah.Gideonse@fuse.net

WATCH FOR THE FEBRUARY BOOK CLUB ANNOUNCEMENT SOON!



20 WAYS THE WORLD GOT BETTER IN 2023

- The Inflation Reduction Act set aside \$1.5 billion for urban tree planting.
- Washington is the first US state to put money toward climate change education in K-12 public schools. At least 11 other states are following suit.
- A women-led company is recovering between 100 and 200 metric tons of waste monthly from Lagos' waterways.
- Over 10,000 physicians across Canada have written "green" prescriptions, instructing patients to spend more time in nature.
- Volunteers have given new life to 100,000 abandoned bicycles, shipping them across the globe to people who need them.
- Four-day work weeks helped reduce commuting hours by 10 percent in the UK and 27 percent in the US, leading to a decrease in carbon emissions.
- Eighty percent of new cars sold in Norway are electric.
- A New York program switching public housing tenants from gas to electric stoves led to a 35 percent drop in indoor CO₂ concentrations.
- US solar and wind capacity continues to grow at a pace that keeps the country on track to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- In Lagos, Nigeria, 115 students are paying their school tuition with recyclable plastic bottles instead of cash.
- In California, a 400-acre oil field is being transformed into a nature preserve.
- A recent report shows that renewables could supply 50 percent of electricity worldwide by 2030.
- New Zealand banned the use of single-use plastic produce bags – preventing the use of an estimated 150 million plastic bags annually.
- Drones are planting seeds in Canadian forests at a rate of five pods per second, helping wildfire-scarred areas recover quickly.
- The Hunger Project is serving about 35,000 people in Uganda — fighting hunger by teaching them how to grow their own food.



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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT 2024

Civic Engagement

As we look forward to a new year, we can see opportunities for engaging in critical legislative challenges. The Ohio legislature continues what many see as efforts to undermine public education, obliterate home rule, and dictate medical procedures.

In 2023 WCC and many other grass roots organizations successfully passed a reproductive rights amendment giving Ohio women and their physicians the ability to make decisions regarding reproduction and contraception.

The same kind of effort will be necessary in 2024 as we work for fair districts to elect our representatives. The campaign has already begun to get the Citizens not Politicians amendment on the ballot next November. You will be hearing more about this effort and how you can get involved.

Coming soon will be our January forum on immigration. This program will focus on local issues with immigration, but we will also learn how we can work for needed immigration reform.

Along with other WCC members, we will continue working in neighborhoods to increase voter registration and education. We were heartened to see Gov. DeWine's veto of the bill denying gender-affirming care to trans children. He wisely stated that these medical plans should be left to parents and doctors.

Unfortunately, the General Assembly overturned his veto, as the bill was passed by a supermajority. It would be helpful to write to Gov. DeWine to let him know that many are grateful for his brave move despite the veto's overturn.

~ Jan Seymour,
VP Civic Engagement



20 WAYS THE WORLD GOT BETTER IN 2023

- After New Jersey banned single-use plastic bags, 37 percent fewer ended up on its beaches.
- Over 2,000 companies are using a platform that connects those with plastic waste with those who want to recycle it.
- A 1,500-square-foot Boston greenhouse that yields 2,000 pounds of produce a year is fully powered with geothermal energy.
- *Zero Foodprint* has funded 96 projects impacting over 7,000 acres with a benefit equivalent to restoring over 80,000 tons of emissions.
- A 1,100-panel solar farm is saving the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe \$10,000 per year.
- For more, [CLICK HERE](https://reasonstobecheerful.world/the-year-in-cheer-2023/?utm_source=Reasons+to+be+Cheerful&utm_campaign=0387eb081d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_22_04_40_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_89fb038efe-0387eb081d-389864757) or go to: https://reasonstobecheerful.world/the-year-in-cheer-2023/?utm_source=Reasons+to+be+Cheerful&utm_campaign=0387eb081d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_11_22_04_40_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_89fb038efe-0387eb081d-389864757

~ Jeanne Nightingale, Chair



CRYSTAL KENDRICK

WCC's membership roster enticed Crystal Kendrick to join us. "I realized every woman in the region I respected was a member," she said.

Kendrick, a WCC member for about a year, is president of The Voice of Your Customer, a marketing consulting firm, and publisher of The Voice of Black Cincinnati, a media company designed to educate, recognize and create opportunities for African Americans in the region. Before becoming an entrepreneur, she held management positions at General Cable, Fifth Third Bank, and Meritor.

Kendrick spent her early years in Cincinnati while her mother studied at the University of Cincinnati. Kendrick completed her middle and upper grades in the suburbs of Philadelphia and her undergraduate studies at Babson College in North Philadelphia. She returned to Cincinnati to attend graduate school and later built her career.

Following the example of her mother, Crystal invested a lot of time in her education: She earned a B.B.A. in marketing from Temple University and an M.B.A. in business administration from Northern Kentucky University. She completed minority business executive training programs at Dartmouth College, Babson College, and the University of Wisconsin.

Kendrick serves on the boards of directors of the Spring Grove Funeral Home and Public Media Connect-CET/Think^{TV}. She is a diamond life member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. and

the past national recording secretary of The Links Inc.

A 2016 Cincinnati Enquirer Woman of the Year, Kendrick was named a YWCA Career Woman of Achievement and A Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scouts of Western Ohio. She received the D. Parke Gibson Award, the highest individual award of the Public Relations Society of America, for a PR professional who contributed to increased awareness of PR within multicultural communities and participated in the promotion of issues that meet the special informational and educational needs of these diverse communities.

She enjoys the arts, independent films, travel, history, current affairs, distance walking and Cincinnati sports. She has a small immediate family with a niece, nephew and cousins she "adores." She said what gives her the most joy in life are "faith as a cradle-Episcopalian and family."

In WCC, Kendrick has enjoyed the book club and "learning about advocacy through the 2023 election season." She believes WCC does great work. To make a difference in Cincinnati life, Kendrick said she "hopes to help spread the word about WCC and increase diverse membership."



~ Jo-Ann Huff Albers



ARE OHIO'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS AT RISK?

The Ohio General Assembly passed two controversial measures related to Ohio's K-12 schools as part of the budget bill in May: The legislators made vouchers available for all K-12 students for private school tuition, and they transferred to the Governor's office most of the powers of the Ohio Board of Education—policymaking, oversight, and most administrative functions, essentially overseen by politicians.

The legislation enacts major changes in the governance and funding of public education in Ohio, and critics are sounding alarm. Why did the governor and the legislature propose these measures? Should we be worried? Or do they present important reforms benefiting both educational decision making and families seeking the best education for their children?

To help our community understand what's happened, we invited three experts working in the education trenches to tell us what the state is up to with these initiatives, what the measures entail and their status, and what the likely impact will be for each:

Dani Isaacsohn, an Ohio State Assembly representative from Cincinnati, whose committee assignments include the Ohio House Finance Committee that sets the budget as well as the ranking member and lead Democrat on school funding issues;



Dani Isaacsohn

Katie Hoffman, a long-term educator, labor leader, and progressive Ohio Board of Education member from our area, elected in November 2022;



Katie Hofmann

Bill Phillis, executive director for the Coalition for Equity & Adequacy in School Funding, who is leading the lawsuit against universal vouchers.



Bill Phillis

Susan Noonan served as the skillful moderator.

Isaacsohn told us some of the history of the budgeting process last year before April. A coalition of Republicans and Democrats in the House voted to increase school

funding to reflect actual costs caused by inflation, but as he pointed out, Ohio is digging out of a big hole because of extensive cuts during Republican dominance of the government since Ted Strickland was governor, going from among the top 10 states in the nation in school funding to the mid-30s among states and falling rapidly.



In exchange for funding public schools more generously, Republican majorities in both houses demanded the passage of the so-called “backpack bill” that would offer vouchers for all students to attend private schools. For several years vouchers under Ed Choice were restricted to students in failing school districts and schools and/or were low income. Although Democrats contended that parents already have a choice and money should be allocated to public schools, the “backpack bill” makes vouchers available on a sliding scale to students in families of all income levels. Most of the students taking up these vouchers are already in private schools, so the act essentially subsidizes private schools. The majority of families can receive as much as \$8,000 plus \$3,000 for auxiliary costs per student, about double spent by the state on public school children. The cost of subsidizing children in private schools, already over a billion dollars, is likely to increase, as the private schools are both raising their tuition and encouraging families to apply for the scholarships.

Moving on, Isaacsohn says the Assembly must address the problem that the universal vouchers act did not incorporate accountability measures and require transparency of information. These private school students are not required to take the same tests as the public school children do. The schools can choose which students they accept and can discriminate against children in low-income families, in wheelchairs, and with low test scores and other factors. The next step is to assure accountability: require private schools to report how much money they receive and how they are spending it and prohibit them from discriminating against certain students. Students' progress (or lack thereof) needs to be evaluated the same way as public school students.

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ARE OHIO'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS AT RISK?

This, in exchange for the large amounts of public money they are receiving. Isaacsohn said there may be an appetite for these changes in the legislature because so many Republicans are from more rural areas that don't have private schools.

Katie Hoffman spoke about "the whirlwind" she has experienced since being elected the previous November to the State Board of Education along with other progressives. Not two weeks later, Senate bill 178 was introduced in the lame-duck session, essentially moving most of the functions of state board to the Governor's office and renaming the Education Department the Education and Workforce Department. It didn't pass at the time, but in the new year, Hoffman reported, Senator Andrew Brenner, chair of the Education Committee, came to a board meeting early in her tenure to threaten the board with his intention to pass the bill, now SB 1, in any way that works, including incorporating it in the state budget. At another meeting a "diatribe" by the Senator presented all the board's and Department of Education's failures over the last many years. When the House failed to join the Senate in passing the bill, the Senate incorporated it into the state budget.

The board's elected members consulted a constitutional lawyer about possible recourse. He identified three errors in what happened: The bill didn't have three hearings, the bill doesn't belong in a budget, and, most importantly, it overrode a citizen-led initiative constitutional amendment from the 50's establishing the board and the department. On this basis, the board members sued to prevent implementation. But in the meantime, the board is now a teacher licensure committee only.

Katie Hoffman is hopeful that the Citizens not Politicians initiative will rid the state of gerrymandered districts and ultimately lead to the election of representatives and Senators who will reconsider these two bills.

Early on in his remarks, Bill Phillis referenced Milton Friedman, the libertarian economist at the University of Chicago who many years ago began advocating providing parents vouchers to send their children to private schools. In 2006 Friedman added that government should have no role in education aside from providing private school vouchers. This is the goal of what Phillis calls the Puppet Masters (likely American

Legislative Exchange Council or ALEC) who want parents to fund their children's education, not just in Ohio but across the nation. This is the direction Ohio is going with universal vouchers. In answer to a question, Phillis agreed that vouchers are indeed an existential threat to public education.

The Ohio Constitution, to which public officials take an oath to uphold, requires the legislature to make provisions, through taxation or otherwise, to create a system of thorough and efficient common schools throughout the state. Phillis contends that Ohio has never come close to funding such a system, although the fair funding plan started a few years ago comes close. He pointed out that private schools are already receiving funds through support of auxiliary services and provision of transportation. He conjectures that the voucher system will cost even more than Isaacsohn projects. There is already talk of providing capital funds to build more schools, in rural areas for example.

Studies are showing that children receiving vouchers through Ed Choice, controlling for demographics, are generally not doing as well in private schools as children in public schools, and so, as Phillis pointed out, there is no academic reason for them to attend private schools. The judge reviewing his coalition's lawsuit about universal vouchers did not dismiss it so it's making its way through the legal system. He expressed some optimism because the arguments in the suit are so compelling. For him, the best way to engineer reform is through litigation rather than legislation because of his experience in working with the legislature over many years. Reported elsewhere, the governor offered this rationale for universal vouchers: it empowers every family to choose the learning environment that best fits their children's needs.

By reallocating to the governor the control of the majority-elected State Board of Education's oversight, policy and most administrative functions, critics point out that the legislation in effect removes the voice of practitioners and constituents on the state educational matters. The director of a new Department of Education and Workforce will also report to the governor. The administration's rationale: to streamline the implementation of the governor's policies.

~ Sarah Gideonse



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CALENDAR

UPCOMING EVENTS

WCC Book Club

Saturday, January 20, 10 am via Zoom. See Page 10 for more information

WCC January Public Forum - Neighbors, Not News Stories

Thursday, January 25, 7 pm via Zoom. See page 1 for more information.

Annual Speaker Forum

Friday, March 22, 7 pm, See page 4 for more information

WCC MEETINGS All meetings are online, via Zoom, unless otherwise noted.

Program Committee: Wednesday, January 24, 7 pm
Committee usually meets monthly on fourth Wednesday but is subject to change.
Contact Janet Buening: wccpresident2018@gmail.com

Social Justice Action Group: Wednesday, January 24, 7 pm
SJAG usually meets most months on second Thursday.
Contact David Siders: dbsiders@gmail.com

Communications Committee
Tuesday, January 30, 5 pm
Committee meets monthly on the last Tuesday.
Contact Sarah Gideonse: SarahGideonse@womanscityclub.org

Membership Committee: Wednesday, February 7, 5:30 pm
Committee meets monthly on first Wednesday.
Contact Nina Lewis: eninalewis@gmail.com

National Speaker Forum Committee
Monday, February 12, 4:30 pm
Contact Beth Sullebarger: wccpresident2020@gmail.com



CINCINNATI CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS: For an updated list of City Council sessions and committee meetings, go to the City website at cincinnati-oh.gov/council/.

The monthly *Bulletin* keeps us connected with our membership, our network, and our community. Please submit all material as they are ready to Sarah Gideonse at sarahgideonse@womanscityclub.org.

