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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



Saturday, September 16
Constitution Day

Monday, September 18
Regular Board Meeting
League Office, 4 p.m.

Tuesday, September 26
National Voter Registration Day

Wednesday, September 27
Lunch & Learn with Brandi Orth
11:30 a.m.



Monday, October 16
Regular Board Meeting
League Office, 4 p.m.

All members and guests
welcome to all events

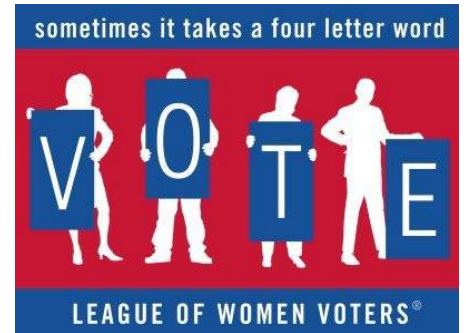


***SHE "WROTE THE BOOK"
ON VOTING IN FRESNO!***

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BRANDI ORTH
FRESNO COUNTY
REGISTRAR OF VOTERS***

She'll tell us about

- ◆ ***Whether our vote is safe***
- ◆ ***Changes coming for DMV Registration***
- ◆ ***Vote Centers***
- ◆ ***Absentee voting for all***
- ◆ ***and more ...***



Wednesday, September 27, 11:30 a.m.

Lunch and discussion

Denny's at 1110 Shaw at First, Fresno

Reservation/info: Call Jane, 431-0360

or Mary, 432-6448

President's Message



Member News
Please edit your roster



The LWVF Board attended its annual “retreat” recently. We did not escape to the Sierra foothills, the Central Coast, or a fancy hotel. We met in the lovely meeting room at the Central Valley Foundation office, near Fig Garden Village. There was clearly a business meeting; League work continues all year, and our directors are tireless in their areas of advocacy.

If you don't usually read every article in The Voter, I challenge you to read them **all** this month. There is nowhere else where you can follow local issues in detail, like you can reading our directors' and guests' articles in The Voter. I'm glad that Valley Public Radio has added local reporters over the past few years. Their excellent work is often heard here in the Valley, with some local stories occasionally included in the national NPR broadcasts. There are a couple of locally produced podcasts, but I don't know of any that follow local government. I believe this lack of coverage is one reason many of our neighbors and friends are disengaged from our community. How can you be a part of something you rarely hear about?

Contrast this, however, with organizations which regularly send and email messages to us. We are drawn, willing or not, to their side of the situation, we're kept up to date on their actions, and in a real but long-distance way, we become part of a community involved with that issue.

I hope we can create a better digital community for our members. I'm not yet ready to give up reading the newspaper, but our Civic Engagement committee has the idea that our community would benefit from improving our League's digital reach. This month we will migrate our League website to a new format, one that that will be easier for us to use, that will connect us with League work throughout the state, and that will better display the work we do.

A digital re-do doesn't get the day-to-day work of the League accomplished, however. For that we always need volunteers. Do you know of someone who is looking for a place to make a difference in our community, away from the shouting of our polarized nation? Invite them to join the League, one of the nation's most trusted organizations, for informed civic participation.

- *Marianne*

New Member

Mary Scully
5621 North Bond
Fresno, CA 93710
439-5448
mescully@comcast.net

LWVC Members...

That means you!

- ◆ Visit www.lwvc.org, click on “Sign Up.” Scroll down to see options
- ◆ Click on “Take Action.” then “legislation.” See Bill Status Reports
- ◆ LWVUS members View lwvc.org/wvonly/. Look under “Action” and “Studies and Concurrence”
- ◆ Lwvc.org, click on “League Management: explore various resources”
- ◆ What Would Alice Paul Do? Podcast includes nonpartisanship, lobbying vs. advocacy, building League leadership

League donation is a great birthday or holiday gift or as a memorial. Please make checks out to

LWVF
1345 Bulldog Lane
Fresno, CA 93710

The League is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization so your dues payments and donations are tax deductible and gratefully accepted.



Thank You!

The VOTER is a monthly publication of the League of Women Voters of Fresno

Mailing Address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 76, No. 9 Editor: Francine Farber

Join a Priority Committee!

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We have completed our series of hand-outs aimed at people who are already somewhat interested in the issues for which we advocate. We have written job descriptions for student volunteers we hope to find at upcoming volunteer fairs at CSUF and FCC. These include Observe Corps, Media Assistant, Marketing Assistant, Internet Assistant and Video Assistant. LWVC has made a new website base available to local leagues and we are participating. We re going to make our website more exciting, engaging and relevant.



Next meeting: Tuesday, September 5, 9:30 a.m.

Stone Soup

Chair: Marianne Kast fourkasts@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Now that schools are back in session, the committee is looking forward to visiting local charter schools and compiling the results of our members' observations. The committee will decide on the criteria it will be checking at each school and how the information will be used. Our second Lunch & Learn will



feature a panel of charter school personnel and advocates. As a result of contacting Fresno Unified Communications Department, a video has been made to explain to the public how to address the Board of Trustees at its meetings.

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 6, 4 p.m.

752 E. Buckingham, Fresno

Chair: Kay Bertken Kayb@csufresno.edu



HOUSING

Next meeting: September, date to be decided

Co-Chairs Marianne Kast fourkasts@gmail.com

Nyla Zender nylajz@comcast.net

Among other activities the committee is following Senate Bill 2, which for the first time would provide a permanent source of funding for affordable housing. It would provide for a \$75 tax on each real estate transaction which would be sent to the State Controller to be put in a special fund for this purpose. See Affordable Housing report on page 7, this issue.

DR. JUAN TOUYA

We note with deep regret the passing of Dr. Juan Touya in Menlo Park at the end of July. He was a specialist in internal medicine.

He and his wife Clara opened their beautiful home and gardens for many years for the League's holiday parties and ice cream socials.

CCLS

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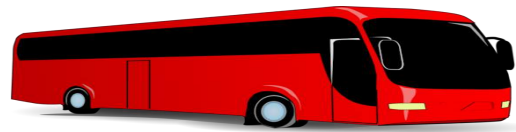
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Transportation

by Mary Savala



The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Round Table meeting in July focused on discussion of the comments on the draft plan. The comments included recommendations for new priorities for the Plan's Vision and new goals and objectives. The priorities are:

- ◆ Public health
- ◆ Transportation equity as a core value
- ◆ Access to employment and affordable housing
- ◆ Protection of habitat, agricultural land and other natural resources
- ◆ Equitable access to effective transportation options for all
- ◆ Stronger language to encourage local jurisdictions to provide incentives to promote alternative transportation

Comments also highlighted the need for better definition for transportation equity, environmental justice, disadvantaged communities and vulnerable groups. In addition, comments asked that the RTP:

- ◆ Promote integrated land use and transportation planning particularly the availability of affordable homes near jobs
- ◆ Prioritize effective strategies that reduce congestion but better meet air quality and climate goals
- ◆ Add a goal that prioritizes road and bridge maintenance
- ◆ Include a policy that focuses on “first mile/last mile” solutions
- ◆ Adopt a ten-year target and identify near-term investments to contribute to statewide goals of tripling biking and doubling walking by 2020
- ◆ Modify active transportation goal to include a commitment to improving pedestrian and cyclist safety infrastructure and bring pedestrian and cyclist deaths to zero in 10 years



COG staff recommended that these comments and suggestions be incorporated into the policy document as follows:

- ◆ Incorporate public health into the Vision, but not identify it as an explicit priority
- ◆ Not incorporate transportation equity into the Vision as it is a “difficult and expensive task” to commit to
- ◆ Update the Vision to include all housing types instead of just affordable homes
- ◆ Incorporate “protection of habitat, agricultural land and other natural resources” into the Vision
- ◆ Include assurance that planning for projects that benefit disadvantaged communities and vulnerable groups is transparent and actively engages affected communities
- ◆ Support healthy and safe routes for children to schools and activity centers
- ◆ Promote accessible and effective transportation options for seniors and persons with physical disabilities
- ◆ Encourage growth patterns to consider the availability and quality of water resources for human consumption
- ◆ Incorporate environmental justice goals in development and land use decisions
- ◆ Modify policy to minimize the loss of groundwater recharge areas and other natural working lands with regard to transportation projects
- ◆ Prioritize alternative solutions over roadway expansion to reduce congestion by promoting alternatives to single-occupancy driving
- ◆ Support and encourage Best Management practices for local streets and roads
- ◆ Revisit “first mile/last mile” solution after High Speed Rail and Bus Rapid Transit are fully operational

The Round Table adopted all staff recommendations to send to the COG policy board.

Education

by Kay Bertken



NEXT FUSD BOARD MEETING

WEDNESDAY, September 13, 5:30 P.M.

VIEW IT STREAMING ON YOUR COMPUTER

Summer has not been quiet in Fresno Unified. The Trustees agreed that Bob Nelson, the interim superintendent since Mike Hanson departed in the spring, would be their choice as the next District superintendent.

Controversy over board president

Contract negotiations are proceeding. Challenges await him in the stalemated negotiations with the FTA as well as the very public controversies surrounding Board President Brooke Ashjian: 1) his comments regarding the districts sex education program that alienated local and national LGBTQ organizations and members of the FUSD staff and community; 2) his business conflicts of interest that have led to complaints to the State Fair Political Practices Board and cancelled contracts, increased building costs and at least one law suit; and 3) increasingly combative relationships among the FUSD Trustees.

A couple of important research reports have come out recently related to our local League work on this year's priority focus on charter schools. First, Stanford's Ed Next Poll results were reported and showed a decline in public support for charter schools and a softening of opposition to public support for private schools.

Charter school support down

Support for charter schools was down 12% overall, from a scant majority of 51% in 2016 to 39% in 2017, a number still higher than the 36% who expressed opposition. A quarter of respondents had no opinion. Support fell approximately by the same amount among Democrats and Republicans, Hispanic and African American respondents.

With respect to private school choice proposals, opposition to programs that provide to low income students fell from 55% to 49% while support rose the same 6% from 31% to 37%. When considering universal vouchers to anyone electing a private school alternative, opposition declined from 44% to 37%. 45% of those surveyed supported the option of universally available private school vouchers as a choice'

In July the NAACP released its Task Force on Quality Education Hearing Report, the results of a national series

of hearings that gathered opinions about public and charter schools. The conclusion of the hearings was that students needed to be protected from poorly performing schools, no matter what their structure and that a "hodgepodge of choices" was not the answer. The report lists five recommendations:

Recommendations from NAACP

- ◆ More equitable and adequate funding for all schools serving students of color
- ◆ Reform school finance in ways like California, to favor challenging schools with large populations of at-risk students
- ◆ Invest in low-performing schools with significant opportunity to close the achievement gap
- ◆ Mandate a rigorous authorizing and renewal process for charter schools, a weakness in the current processes that allow for poor-performing charters to continue.
- ◆ Eliminate for-profit charter schools.

Our education committee will continue to investigate the local charter school offerings. We will meet again in September to plan our visits to local charter school sites. We are also planning another Lunch n' Learn this fall to inform ourselves and the community about the charter school landscape in Fresno.

Congratulations
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to our
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Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



The monthly Behavioral Health Board (BHB) meeting included a report on the progress of the housing work group. Currently the group is meeting with Board and Care operators to determine the support that they need in order to provide care for clients who require more intensive care.

Severe housing needs

Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) recommends tiered levels of housing to meet the needs of all clients. There is a severe lack of housing available for clients being released from acute psychiatric facilities. Many client are not stable, yet do not meet the criteria to be held in hospitals.

It was noted that Board and Care operators will need larger budgets

for more staff members, as well as more professional mental health support staff from DBH.

DBH Director Dawan Utecht spoke in response to interest in Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT), i.e. Laura's Law. DBH is collecting data from other counties to determine the success of their programs. There are mixed reviews on the programs, with advocates on both sides of the issue. Some counties have begun pilot programs to gauge the law's effectiveness. Several members of the public spoke in favor of implementation in Fresno County.

Opioid safety

Program reviews included Functional Family Therapy and Bright Beginnings for Families, provided by Comprehensive Youth Services. BHB conducted a site visit prior to this meeting, and found an enthusiastic, passionate staff doing great work with children and their families. Concerns were raised about referral sources and dropout rates. More data will be forthcoming.

BHB is continuing its support of the efforts of the Central California Opioid Safety Coalition and Central

California Health Collaborative to engage large chain pharmacies in the distribution of information regarding safe storage and disposal of prescription medications. Additionally, BHB is concerned about the abundance of liquor licenses in Fresno, especially those south of Shaw Avenue, and will be drafting a letter to the Mayor, City Council, and Fresno Police Department.


Lastly, DBH is in the midst of its annual Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Community Planning Process, receiving concerns, ideas, and suggestions through focus groups, community meetings, and individual input forms.

League members are encouraged to participate. Meeting schedules and input forms are available on the DBH/MHSA web site.

Public hearing scheduled

A public hearing on the 2017 MHSA Annual Update will be held on October 18 at 1:30 p.m., prior to the October BHB meeting.

Next Behavioral Health Board Meeting
Wednesday, September 20
2:30 p.m.
Sierra Building
1925 East Dakota, Fresno



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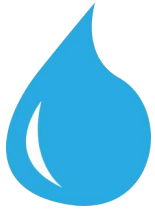
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Water News

by Diane Merrill



LWVC has joined 45 organizations in signing a letter of support for SB 623, the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Act. This follows LWVC's past support for California's Human Right to Water law. SB 623 would create a new fund to address barriers to accessing safe and affordable water.



It is a far reaching and complex bill aimed at addressing a hard-to-solve and long-standing problem. Hundreds of communities throughout California, many of them in the San Joaquin Valley, are unable to consistently provide safe drinking water to their residents. Contaminants include nitrates, pesticides, and arsenic. The letter identifies major barriers to accessing safe and affordable water.

"High treatment costs put clean drinking water out of reach for many disadvantaged communities, especially those with small and lower income ratepayer bases. Many residents of these community

are forced to pay both a water bill (for unsafe drinking water) and for bottled water."

"In other cases, high drinking water treatment costs results in unaffordable and burdensome water rates for residents of disadvantaged communities."



"In particular, the greatest barrier preventing communities from providing safe drinking water is the lack of a continuing funding source to support ongoing operations and maintenance costs for drinking water treatment."

The letter goes on to describe another major feature of this legislation:

"Limited enforcement protection for agricultural dischargers conditioned on both targeted funding to communities impacted by nitrate contamination and compliance with regulations designed to reduce nitrate loading."

The challenging task of working out funding details is continuing. The bill passed the Senate and is now in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. There are several legislative hurdles if it is to reach the Governor's desk by the September 15 deadline for this year's legislative session.



Tax credits for affordable housing

by Nyla Zender

The Housing Committee recently met with Jim Fusselman, a local builder and landlord of affordable housing units. In 1986 he learned about Congress' "Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Bill" designed to provide builders with incentives to build affordable housing.

Under this bill the Federal Government covers 90% of development costs with tax incentives. He owned

several plots of land in Selma and in Fresno, all of which were infill properties. He drew up plans for some single-family homes and several small apartment buildings and then submitted applications for the tax credit program with the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee. This group issues both Federal and State Tax Credits. The application is a lengthy process and can take a year or more to be processed. Fusselman

was surprised that so few builders took advantage of this opportunity.

Under the law a builder, if approved, cannot sell the property for 15 years and is required to maintain the affordable housing designation for at least 30 years. If the property is sold, the new owner is bound by law to maintain the designation for the duration of the 30+ years.

Unlike many affordable housing landlords, Jim has had no tenant problems.

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



New York Times special reporter Elizabeth Rosenthal has recently published a wonderfully thorough investigation of our off-the-rails health care system. Her *An American Sickness* should join T.R. Reid's *The Healing of America* and Steven Brill's *America's Bitter Pill* as essential reading for people who want to advocate for change.

You should read the book!

Regrettably, *An American Sickness*, in its detailed portrayal of our bloated and self-serving medical bureaucracy, can induce nausea, vomiting, depression, seizures, cardiac rhythm disturbances, and kidney damage. Deaths have been reported. But surviving readers experience a 50% or greater improvement in their confidence to expound on health care reform, and 15% feel fully competent to lead small group discussions on the subject.

In *Adam Ruins Hospitals* (from the *Adam Ruins Everything* series on truTV), comedian Adam Conover asks the most important question in health care reform today: "Why have politicians spent decades arguing about how to pay the bill instead of asking why the bill is so high?"

The bill is so high because the guiding hand of Adam Smith's

free market forces is playing no role in modulating health care costs. On the contrary, hospital systems

are competing on the basis of the newest and most expensive technologies and the elegance of their facilities. The idea of an American hospital touting its lower costs might be the punchline of a *New Yorker* cartoon.

Hospital consolidation

Rosenthal points out a disturbing trend toward consolidation of hospital systems into regional monopolies that further disable health plans' bargaining power, inevitably leading to higher premiums and copays. Sutter Health, for example, is a prominent force in 100 Northern California cities; it is the sole provider for key health care services, for which it has minimal or no competition in the auction for fees. A long history of anti-trust actions against health systems shows that these litigations are exceptionally complex and play very little role in controlling costs.

Our government is not inclined to stand up for cost control. It is dead on arrival as a campaign message. Medicaid and Medicare now spend over a trillion dollars annually for about 130 million annuitants (80 million on Medicaid, 50 million on Medicare—about \$9000 per person per year, compared to the average of \$3800 overall in the other developed de-

mocracies). Growth rates in spending are expected to average about 5% annually over the next decade.

Congress ignores advice

The Medical Payments Advisory Council, a board of 17 health care experts, has submitted advice to Congress twice yearly since 1997 about improving efficiency and reducing costs in these public programs. Congress has steadfastly ignored their advice.

The Affordable Care Act created the Independent Payment Advisory Board, which would have broader powers to act on behalf of the fiscal integrity of our government programs. It faces broad opposition among health care providers and is now slated for the scrapheap by bipartisan opposition even before any board members have been appointed.

Universal system is long-term

In the current political environment, it is more difficult than ever to imagine our country adopting a universal, digitally interconnected health care system. The national economic benefits of a well-architected universal health care system are broadly appreciated by the experts, but implementing it will require long-term ardent advocacy and possibly generational change.



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What do you get when you join the League? All for one fee, you become a member of the Fresno, California and National Leagues and receive their newsletters. You may participate in League studies of issues; receive leadership training; hone your public speaking skills; become knowledgeable about local and state issues; learn more about government, natural resources and social policies as your time and interests dictate. You will also meet some interesting and friendly women and men who represent diverse backgrounds but find common ground in keeping abreast of current issues.

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