

From the March 2025 Voter



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Climate Change and Babies in the River—Responding to the Wildfires

Our hearts go out to the victims of the horrific wildfires, who continue to experience disrupted lives after January’s disasters. Many of those affected are members of our League. They lost their homes, were forced to evacuate, suffered power outages for days, and found their furniture and yards covered with toxic ashes when they were finally allowed to return. Almost all of us in the west San Gabriel Valley were exposed to

contaminated air. As trucks remove layers of toxic waste, those who have lost everything wonder, while submitting paperwork and plans, what the long-term prospects for rebuilding will entail.

Although wildfires and other disasters have occurred in California, in the United States, and globally for years, and although they are getting more frequent and intense, we do not always pay that much attention to them when they happen elsewhere. They are tragic, but for the most part they seem like disconnected events. But when they occur in our own backyard, our attention is riveted and our experience sharply painful. Finding a place to live, repairing what is possible, and rebuilding—these are the first things on people’s minds. They must be; humans have no choice but to try to survive.

The second thing on our minds is how to *adapt* in preparation for the next disaster—how to manage our forests; fortify our buildings, homes, and hillsides; and improve water and power infrastructure.

These two things—recovery and adaptation—remind me of a parable that seems to fit our world situation in the face of climate change:

A woman is hiking uphill in the mountains and comes to a roaring river, where she sees babies being propelled down the river by the rapids and people rushing into the water to grab them and carry them to shore.

The woman doesn’t stop but takes off at a run as a man shouts, “Wait, where are you going?” “I’m going up the river to see what is causing this,” she yells back.

This parable of the babies in the river always makes me tearful. The situation is so sad and the response so humane—witness the response of so many citizens across Los Angeles County who have generously stepped forward with time, money, supplies, shelter, and deep compassion for those affected.

Let us not forget, however, that we must also consider the cause of the wildfires, like the woman in the parable who ran uphill to find the source. We must include the drought and winds that made the fires so overwhelming for our first responders and for those whose property and lives have been destroyed. Climate change—which scientists worldwide agree is fueling the ongoing rash of extreme weather events—is with us for the foreseeable future. We must make people aware that the severity of our recent wildfires was caused by climate change. No amount of adaptation can fully protect us; we must race up the river and *mitigate* these disasters before our earth is irreparably damaged and our existence irreparably impaired.

Mitigation, then—after recovery and adaptation—must be the third step in our response to the fires. Mitigation means reducing and eventually eliminating most of these crises. How can we do that? The answer is to curb the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere by replacing fossil fuels with clean energy sources! Otherwise, babies will continue to come crashing down the river.

Be sure to attend the March 22 presentation by Michael Cacciotti of the South Coast Air Quality Management District, “SCAQMD: Air Pollution, Health Effects, Wildfire Impacts, Challenges to Electrification, and Incentive Programs.” [Register here](#). And if you would like to attend our Natural Resources Committee meeting to learn more about how to mitigate this existential crisis, we would welcome you! Contact me for details.

—Kitty Kroger, Natural Resources Committee, kkroger@sbcglobal.net

Sustainable Reconstruction of Pasadena Buildings Destroyed by the Eaton Fire

On February 11, 2025, Kathy Berlin and Cynthia Cannady of the Natural Resources Committee attended meetings of the Environmental Advisory Commission and the Municipal Services Committee of Pasadena. Both meetings included a presentation regarding rebuilding in Pasadena after the Eaton Fire, which destroyed 185 structures in Pasadena, according to the mayor’s office.

However, during the presentation nothing was mentioned about sustainability. Kathy then introduced a letter from the Pasadena Area League, signed by Karen Roberson, President of LWV-PA, and with the support of Martha Zavala, Advocacy Chair, concerning the need for sustainable rebuilding. A lively discussion ensued at both meetings regarding the pitfalls of relying on fossil fuels instead of carbon-free energy sources such as solar power, supported by batteries.

The idea was advanced that PWP purchase the solar energy and lease it to the members of the community, thereby forming a microgrid (a small grid that can operate independently and be connected to a larger network, if needed). The interim director of PWP, David Reyes, attended both meetings and said that PWP would investigate that possibility.

We will observe what follows from these discussions. One thing, however, is clear: Without the encouragement of the League, it is doubtful the question of sustainable reconstruction would have arisen at all! The members of the MSC, EAC, and PWP displayed a strong respect for the League of Women Voters.

—Kitty Kroger and Kathy Berlin, Natural Resources Committee



(Courtesy L.A County Fire Department)