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The *Fresno*

VOTER



Monday, May 6, 5 p.m.
Regular Board Meeting
League Office

May 31– June 2
LWVC Convention
Pasadena

Monday, June 10, 5 p.m.
Regular Board Meeting
League Office

LEAGUE RETREAT
to be announced

MEMBERS AND GUESTS
WELCOME
TO ALL
LEAGUE MEETINGS
AND EVENTS



**Here is the new national logo
for the League's
Centennial Celebration
in 2020**

**August 26, 2020 will mark 100 years
since Congress passed the 19th
amendment**

*The right of citizens of the United States to
vote shall not be denied or abridged by the
United States or by any State on account of sex.*

The LWVF Centennial Committee is planning a year-long series of celebratory events. Included are an opening ceremony in January at City Hall with a public reception and an exhibition of portraits of the Presidents' Ladies. Other events being planned are:

- ◆ A public dinner in August 2020 with an outstanding speaker
- ◆ Media sponsor PBS will conduct interviews with local women in leadership positions
- ◆ Media sponsor KVPR will conduct programs about Fresno women who were involved in the suffrage movement.
- ◆ Black women in suffrage history will be honored
- ◆ A traveling library exhibit with portraits and memorabilia is being developed
- ◆ Concerts, student exhibitions and more
- ◆ ***We welcome your suggestions and ideas for sponsors!***

President's Message



A couple of times each week, when I have time, I catch up with news on my Twitter account. I'm not much of a "tweet-er;" my friends can live quite happily without my take on each day's events. I do see Twitter as a timely news source, however, and today I was saddened by news that came across my feed: Fresno Bee reporters Rory and Alexandra Appleton are leaving Fresno and will be working for the Las Vegas Review Journal beginning in May.

The Appletons' departure follows the exodus, earlier this year, of Mackenzie Mays, the Bee's former education and investigative reporter. Mays now writes for Politico. Why are young, award-winning reporters leaving the Bee?

As media giants like Facebook and Google consume advertising revenue that once supported local journalism, reporters like the Appletons and Mays are being asked to do more with less. Shrinking newsrooms like the Bee, have less support, fewer editors and copy editors who used to assist reporters--by checking style, grammar, clarity and fairness—before articles were published. And, these days when public figures dislike the news that's reported about them, the fallout for reporters can be extreme, from social media comments going viral to actual lawsuits.

For Fresno, the loss of able, young reporters allows elected officials to operate in the shadows, not at all concerned that their decisions will be exposed by an article in the media. It has become increasingly difficult to generate community involvement in government decisions since citizens rarely read or hear about issues that used to be regularly reported in the news.

I don't blame reporters for searching for better pay, less stress, more job security, and a better quality of life. But I do worry about how we will engage citizens in our community, absent the prying media.

Marianne

MEMBER NEWS

Please edit your roster



New Members

Janie and Christine Anderson
4051 West Weldon
Fresno, CA 93722

Jean Corey
46041 Road 415 #185
Coarsegold, CA 93614
641-2239
jcoreycg@gmail.com

New Address

Alice Powell
5555 North Fresno, #295
Fresno, CA 93710

It's always a good time for a gift to the League. LWVF is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization so your gift is tax deductible and gratefully accepted.

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Fresno, CA 93710

**We're planning for the
2020**

**Centennial
Suffrage year.**

Want to help?

Call 226-5455

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

Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 78, No. 5 Editor: Francine M. Farber

Water News

by Diane Merrill



The seven Groundwater Sustainability Agencies in the Kings Groundwater Sub-basin are engaged in preparing Groundwater Sustainability Plans required by the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Drafts of these plans will be available for public review and comment before the seven agencies submit a consolidated plan to the State of California by January 31, 2020.

League members attended the April meeting of the North Kings Agency Advisory Committee and learned about outreach efforts to inform and receive comment from water users about the act and plan development. The initial round of public outreach is focused on residents and businesses on individual household or irrigation wells in areas not served by a public water system. A workshop was held in December 2018 for residents in the area northeast of Clovis. A May 2 workshop is planned in an area southwest of the City of Fresno. The target audience is rural residential water users on parcels under five acres.

The Asian Business Institute and Resource Center, lead by former Fresno City Council member Blong Xiong, received a grant from the California Department of Water Resources to provide information and outreach about the Sustainability Act to Southeast Asian farmers in the North Kings agency. Many of these farmers live in Fresno or other cities and farm on leased land in unincorporated areas. Special outreach efforts are needed because these farmers are not included in mailings to landowners.

A March workshop was hosted and facilitated by Dr. Ruth Dahlquist –Willard, Small Farms and Specialty Crops Advisor with University of California Cooperative Extension. The discussion included techniques to increase water use efficiency on small farms. UC Cooperative Extension also provided a map of Southeast Asian farms in the North Kings and neighboring agencies.



Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



Board members visited the Conservatorship team RISE (Recovery with Inspiration, Support, and Empowerment) and team SHINE (Self-Healing & Improvement through Nurturing & Engagement). Conservatorship occurs when an individual is deemed “gravely disabled” due to mental illness or severe alcoholism, and is unable to provide for or make use of food, shelter, and/or clothing. Often the individual is placed in a locked Mental Health Recovery Center where s/he is treated and cared for until mentally stable and able to return to the community.

Currently, there are more than 300 individuals on Conservatorship in Fresno County with half in locked facilities and the others living in the community with support. The RISE Team provides intensive services to assist individuals to live successfully in the community until released from Conservatorship; as improvement occurs, the less intensive SHINE Team becomes the primary service provider.

The quarterly Housing Update included information about the Independent Living Association (ILA) that is seeking to improve the quality of Room and Board homes. Providers who join ILA will develop homes with higher standards, and will receive referrals for clients of the Department of Behavioral Health and its contractors. The Department and the Housing Authority have submitted applications for No Place Like Home funding to build permanent supportive housing for individuals with mental illness. The Department is seeking to generate a list of development sponsors for partnership in the development of additional housing units.

The Department is required to develop a new Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) plan every three years, with an update each year. Throughout the year information is collected from stakeholders in the county to assist in creating and updating the Plan. The draft of the Annual Update was posted on April 12. There will be a 30-day public comment period, with a Public Hearing conducted by the BHB prior to its regular meeting on May 15.

League members are encouraged to read the plan and comment: <https://www.co.fresno.ca.us/departments/behavioral-health/mental-health-services-act/mhsa-three-year-plan-and-annual-updates>.

evansalca@comcast.net

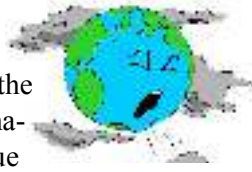
OUR PRIORITIES FOR 2019-2020

Reports from committees you can join



CLIMATE CHANGE

Global climate change is one of the most serious threats facing our nation and planet today. The League calls for prompt action to cut greenhouse gas emissions, freeze construction of new coal-fired power plants, invest in clean energy and help the world's poorest countries tackle the challenge of climate change. Our most powerful action is our knowledgeable vote. We are studying the League toolkit about climate change and legislation to cut greenhouse gas emissions. We plan to share a bibliography and what we learn on the LWVF website and offer a lunch and learn or a series of casual "coffee talks" for the public. Since the LWVC advocates a "price on carbon", (the most ubiquitous gas that is warming our world), we watched videos recommended on its website.



Meetings: First Wednesday, May 1, 4:30—6 p.m.
Co-Chairs: Andrea Farber De Zubiria/Connie Young
afarberdezub@gmail.com/cyoungnrn@sbcglobal.net



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

The Education Committee is completing its work on last year's focus on charter schools and has been asked to present its recommendations to become an official position at the state convention at the end of this month which it hopes will be approved by the LWVC membership. Meanwhile our committee has decided to focus on early education availability in Fresno in terms of what spaces are available in the zero to 5 range, how many are being used, and what other related needs might be. Our members are gathering information through First Five, the Children's Network, the Children's Movement and other local sources.

Next Meeting: May 3, 4 p.m.
752 E. Buckingham, Fresno
Chair: Kay Bertken: kayb@csufresno.edu

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We met in the Lowell-Community Development Corporation (CDC) at what had been identified as the worst apartment site in the Lowell area. The CDC worked with the Housing Authority to refurbish the site into what is now an attractive, clean, healthy and safe place to live. Even with the upgrades, the units remain affordable. There are at least 10 CDCs in Fresno, and Keith Bergthold (Metro Ministry) has a goal to have 50 – 60 such areas scattered across Fresno. One model Bergthold discussed was Community Land Trusts where the community owns the land and the residents own the housing



The David Wallace Wells book "Uninhabitable Earth" maintains that climate change will cause millions to become climate refugees. The same publication outlines what makes alternative housing models successful. "Each model aligns with the vision that housing is a human right, not a commodity to maximize profits. and includes community control, affordability, permanence, inclusivity, health and sustainability."

Next Meeting: May 9, 3-5 p.m.
Chair: Nyla Zender/nylajz@comcast.net

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Voter Services

by Liz Shields and Sue Goldman

Thanks to League members and friends who unfolded ballots and answered the phone bank queries for the March Special Election which included a Fresno County Board of Supervisors race, Clovis City Council elections and a referendum for the city of Coalinga.

We helped to monitor the ASI election at Fresno State and to verify the online vote count after the election. Thanks to Jane Worsley for recruiting volunteers to help with the election.

Brandi Orth presented a resolution to the Board of Supervisors proclaiming April 15-26 as “High School Voter Education Weeks”. The last two weeks in April and September each year are designated as High School Voter Education Week as part of California’s Education Code. The League has found that May is a better time to visit the high schools after the standardized testing for seniors is over.

I have emailed FUSD and CUSD teachers about presenting information on the new Voters Choice model that has been adopted by Fresno County and registering eligible high school students in May. We will be meeting with members who expressed an interest in working on Get Out the Vote, an important priority topic given the education needed for the new voting model to be used next year.

Our committee is represented on the Fresno 2020 Complete Count Committee. Every state has money allocated to ensure that the 2020 census includes all residents, with a particular focus on the hard to reach populations (e.g. undocumented immigrants, rural populations, bilingual people, persons without computer access, etc.). There are ten community based organizations partnering with California Complete Count. Every county has formed or is in the process of forming Complete Count Committees to assist with this process. . Funding is being funneled to county offices as well as Administrative Community Based Organizations. In our area the funding was awarded to the Sierra Health Foundation.

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121143pvct@att.net

Education

by Kay Bertken



Based on the Education Committee’s work on charter-schools, we have prepared a charter school position for consideration at the State League convention this month. Work to make that happen and organize a caucus around the topic has occupied considerable attention

The FUSD Board of Trustees continues to hear budget recommendations by staff, most of which suggest minor shifting of allocations rather than major new investments. Facilities issues were another major interest of the trustees this month as they reviewed renewed long-range site plans for Fresno High and Edison. Both these plans were triggered by potential investments in new career technical education facilities that are eligible for current bond expenditures and matching state funds.

A special meeting of the Board was held to determine priorities for the expenditure of the remaining \$170 million in Measure X funds. A list was prepared by the Operations Division of the district that included identified needs mentioned in the bond measure and by the Board in various meetings. The list included projects that exceed funds available in the current bond. An initial evaluation of unmet facilities needs in the district done in advance of Measure X’s predecessor bond Measure Q identified more than a billion dollars in facility needs. Measure Q and X together raised about half of that amount.

The meeting did not result in any priority agreements , although a majority of the trustees seemed to be in favor of spending funds on second gyms at the high schools without those facilities—Fresno High, McLane, Edison and Roosevelt. Many of the trustees also spoke in favor of continued expenditures for air conditioning cafeterias and gyms for the schools not yet equipped. Less often, but significantly supported ,were issues of safety—lighting, fencing, and single points of campus entry; career tech buildings at some of the high schools; and special education facility improvements.

A project generating ambiguous support was for the major expense (estimated at \$44 million) of the new Herrera Elementary School in southeast Fresno.

(continued on page 6)

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



Recently I assumed rheumatologic care responsibility for a woman in her mid-twenties with a very serious autoimmune illness. In addition to many painful and inflamed joints, the condition was causing scarring in the lungs, threatening in the long term to inflict respiratory failure. She felt miserable from pain and fatigue, having lost her prior specialty care and her medications because of her MediCal status.

The one bright spot in this scenario is that her prior care included Rituxan, a periodically infused biologic agent with the striking ability to selectively kill the immune cells responsible for producing autoantibodies (as well as normal antibodies, an unwanted but manageable adverse effect). She experienced dramatic improvement from the Rituxan infusions and clearly was ready for the next infusion.

Her MediCal managed care plan, via its pharmacy benefit management (PBM) function, refused to authorize my order for a set of Rituxan infusions. Each set of two infusions costs about \$18,000, 2.7 times the international average. Also, the condition for which I ordered this infusion is not one for which the FDA has specifically authorized Rituxan. This was an *off-label* use. Rituxan is approved only for treating non-Hodgkin lymphoma (it kills the lym-

phoma cells), but in the US it is the second largest selling biologic agent because of its use in rheumatoid arthritis and related autoimmune illness. I filed a detailed rebuttal to the denial, in process.

This system of ordering expensive and/or off-label medications—“pre-



authorization”—has required physicians to develop one more time-consuming skill or to add another employee, the expert pre-authorization prescription nurse

In the two decades since pre-authorization (and periodic re-pre-authorization) emerged, I have accumulated 116 files on my thumb drive addressing the rationale for my requests for pre-authorization for about two dozen agents used for about two dozen diagnostic codes under several different circumstances.

There are limits to the rigor with which PBM’s can fight off paying for expensive agents. The most rational of these limits is the recognition that the requested agent provides *unique value* in preventing greater health costs to the health plan. Usually this is the prevention of hospitalization (a real possibility in the case of my patient). Another limit is the widespread acceptance of and advocacy for medicines by professional organizations and by disease-specific

charities. This is especially true for drugs that have been FDA-approved for the disease in question.

This is the doctors’ and patients’ aggrieved view from the bottom of the expensive drug supply chain. Meanwhile, in pursuit of lower cost drugs, Congress has recently been interrogating pharmaceutical CEO’s, who respond with finger pointing at PBM’s, class action litigation, high R&D costs, and foreign governments’ monopolistic lowball drug pricing (forcing Americans to pay more). Each of these contributes to high drug prices,

along with PhARMA’s high profits and large budgets for lobbying and advertising. Two fertile ideas amidst the clamor of the Congressional hearings are value pricing of drugs (not just in the short-term interest of the health plans but in the long-term interest of society) and comprehensive regulation of PBM’s to insure fair dealing. There could be bipartisan and PhARMA support for these ideas that would move us forward.

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EDUCATION *(Continued from page 5)*

Building that school would require the relocation of the Phoenix Academy, an independently identified need and expense. Some trustees were hesitant about the cost of that combined project although plans for it had previously garnered Board approval based on anticipated growth and current overcrowding in the neighborhood schools surrounding the site.

Kayb@csufresno.edu

BOARD MEETINGS

MAY 1, 15, 29

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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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