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The *Fresno*

VOTER



Sunday, December 8
LWVF Holiday Party
Watkins Home, 2 pm

Monday, December 9
Board Meeting
Stone Soup, 5 pm

January 2-31
First Ladies Portrait Exhibit
Fresno City Hall

Thursday, January 9
First Ladies reception, 5 pm
See page 4

Monday, February 10
African American Women
in the Suffrage Movement
Details to Follow

Members and guests
always welcome
to all meetings and events

***THIS HOLIDAY ISSUE
ELECTRONIC ONLY.
PRINT EDITION WILL
RESUME IN JANUARY.***



LWV Fresno

Annual Holiday Get-together

Food, beverages, film, and friends!

View "100 Years of Suffrage," the League's winning entry in The Big Tell 2019 and other short videos highlighting our work in Fresno.

Gifts will be collected for Stone Soup's preschool program.
See page 4 for their wish list.

at the home of

Christine and Howard Watkins

1785 W. Dovewood Ave., Fresno

(north on West Ave., right on Browning Ave.,
right on Channing Ave., right on Dovewood
Ave.)



President's Message



In California's rental housing world, everyone is talking about AB 1482, the Tenant Protection Act of 2019. This bill, signed into law in October, caps annual rent increases to 5% + CPI, and prohibits landlords from evicting tenants without just cause. Heralded by Gov. Newsom as an important step toward preventing homelessness, the bill was not opposed by California's housing developers.

Last month, the Gazarian Center for Real Estate at CSUF presented a panel discussion to brief local realtors and developers on AB 1482 and to allay their fears that it might discourage further investment in rental housing. This legislation is seen as not as severe or supply-constraining as other proposed forms of rent control, such as Proposition 10, the 2018 ballot initiative that developers spent \$70M to defeat.

The most important effect of this bill is eliminating no-cause evictions. Without this protection, tenants could be evicted for no reason as long as adequate notice was given. Now, evictions must be for cause, such as non-payment of rent, breaking the lease terms, etc. If landlords wish to remove tenants in order to substantially raise rent, move in distant relatives, or take rentals off the market, they are required to waive rent or give tenants a relocation allowance.

Also last month, Matthew Desmond, Princeton sociologist and author of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in American Cities* spoke in Fresno. Desmond praised AB 1452 as moving in the direction of tenant protection, and recounted the devastating downward spiral that the eviction process has on families and communities. Desmond advocates for the expansion of Section 8 housing vouchers, perhaps at the expense of the mortgage interest deduction which has become mostly a benefit for the wealthy in the US.

Locally, Fresno State sociologists Janine Nkosi and Amber Crowell joined with Central California Legal Services and Faith in the Valley to produce, "Evicted in Fresno: Facts for Housing Advocates." They suggest creating a fully funded emergency rent and relocation program as a partnership between government, landlords, and tenants which would allow tenants to move in an orderly way and landlords to be paid the money they're owed. More importantly, they advocate for providing legal representation for tenants in the eviction process. Research shows that two-thirds of tenants with representation are able to settle eviction cases, avoiding the damage an eviction has on a tenant's future, as well as getting landlords paid more quickly.

Eviction reform is one aspect of reducing homelessness. But giving over half of Fresno's families who are renters residential stability has an even broader community benefit..

Marianne

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.12 Editor: Francine M. Farber

MEMBER NEWS

Are you receiving our weekly email news blast?

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If you know of meetings or events League members should attend, email them to us at

fourkasts@gmail.com

so they can be included in the weekly blast.



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Climate Change

by Andrea Farber De Zubiria



In October, the LWVF submitted comments on the 750+ page North Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency's draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan required by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act . Our league was one of 20 individuals and organizations that submitted written comments and may have been the only all-volunteer organization offering comments. A hearty thanks to the League members who helped with this process.

Most of the 190 pages of comments were from environmental organizations and organizations that work with disadvantaged rural communities that lack safe and affordable drinking water. The Tulare League also commented on two groundwater sustainability plans in their area.

Encompassing the cities of Fresno, Clovis, and Kernman, the North Kings is the largest and most populous of seven groundwater agencies in the Kings Groundwater Subbasin. These seven agencies plan to adopt their individual plans no later than mid-December for submission to the State as a coordinated plan in January 2020.

In recognition that developing and implementing the groundwater sustainability plan is a complex, evolving, and ongoing process the agency posted this notice on its website. "The agency received comments on its draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan. All comments are provided here on our website to provide transparency to any interested person or organization about the plan and comments offered by stakeholders. The agency gives due consideration to all comments and will continue to consider comments as we implement the plan. The agency understands that new or different data will develop, and new or different comments might arise. Accordingly, the agency recognizes that modifications to its plan implementation policies or efforts might be appropriate in the future. The agency looks forward to working with stakeholders to implement the Sustainability Groundwater Management Act."

Agencies trying to address the climate change crisis and our air pollution problem have much in common. To better understand what state and local groups are working on, our committee met with the CEO of the Central Valley Asthma Collaborative this past month. We were provided with an excellent overview of the ins and outs of air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and the various agencies, policies and initiatives that are meant to monitor and regulate them. We discussed California's Cap and Trade policy, which allows corporations and governments to buy and sell "carbon credits" with a "cap" on how much carbon can be emitted overall.

Fresno will be the recipient of the largest of three Transformative Climate Community grants from these funds--\$70 million. This grant from the Strategic Growth Council gives low income communities



funds to develop programs that meet area goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality. But according to the non profit online news agency ProPublica, even though California's Cap and Trade program helped the state meet some initial, easily attained benchmarks, carbon emissions from California's oil and gas industry have actually risen since cap and trade began due to various concessions. "Putting a price on carbon" is supported by the California League of Women Voters, but our current method of doing so in California does not appear to be vigorous enough to meet the state goal of 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.

There are other market-based policies that may be more effective. More than 3,500 economists, including more than two dozen Nobel laureates, have signed a statement calling for a "robust and gradually rising carbon tax" combined with equal, lump-sum rebates of the revenue to every individual. This form of pricing is known as "carbon fee and dividend".

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



The November Behavioral Health Board meeting was devoted to learning about Children's Services provided by the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health.

The Youth Wellness Center is the "front door" to Children's Mental Health services. Clients may be seen on a walk-in basis. Services include assessments, treatment plans, case management, therapy, and psychiatric services.

Pathways to Well-being (formerly known as Katie A.) includes the Child Welfare Mental Health Team that provides specialty mental health services to children in the child welfare system of care; these services include assessments, individual/family/group therapy, crisis intervention, case management, rehabilitation, plan development, medication support, intensive care coordination, intensive home-based services, and psychological evaluations.

The Continuum of Care Reform was enacted to aid in the reduction of congregate care placement setting and to increase the use of intensive, home-based care for children in foster care. As an alternative to Group Homes, Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs are required to provide specialty mental health services in a more home-like environment. Therapeutic Foster Care is required for children with a high level of need; services are provided by resource parents with the support of licensed clinicians.

All 4 Youth is a partnership program between the Department and Fresno County Superintendent of Schools to provide specialty mental health services to children and youth (0-22 years of age.) Services include case management, care coordination, rehabilitation, individuals and group therapy, medication support, and crisis services. The program reduces barriers to accessing specialty mental health services and increases timeliness of services. Currently there are mental health clinicians in 101 schools in Fresno County.

The Department is planning for the 2020-2023 MHSA Three Year Plan by collecting community and stakeholder input. League members are invited to attend one or more of the many community forums to suggest behavioral health services needed in our community. The schedule may be found on the web site, along with surveys for written comments, at

www.fresnoMHSA.com

Stone Soup Preschool Holiday Wish List

**construction paper/ glue/ glue sticks/ crayons
markers/ Legos/ glitter/ scissors/ balls/ felt
dress-up clothes/ pom-poms/ sequins/ yarn paper
plates/ hot glue gun (small)/
Lincoln logs/ bristle blocks/ Mr. Potato Head/
diversity books— race and culture, disabilities
math books— counting, measuring, numbers
pumps (for water play)/rakes/water wheels/
turkey baster/props for dramatic play/
Tinker toys/ gears/ wooden lacing cards/
construction tools (hammer, saw, screw driver)
large backing tape/scotch tape /staples/
colored pencils/kids kitchen table/
borders for bulletin boards/ black markers
Pens/ white-out/**

Voter Services

by Liz Shields



Fresno County Clerk's Office is gearing up to implement the election changes due to the adoption of the Voter Choice Act procedures. Currently it is hiring people to staff the 53 Vote Centers across Fresno County. Ten of these will be open for eight hours each day from February 11th and from 7 am to 8 pm on Election Day (March 3rd). An additional 43 will be open for 4 days from February 29th. Applicants should be computer literate and be fluent in at least one second language. This is a short term assignment. Applicants can find more information on the Fresno County Clerk's web site at www.vote.fresnocounty.com

A Toolkit will be available shortly on the web site to assist individuals and groups who want to publicize the new procedures. Anyone may download this toolkit which will contain the following information: flyers and posters for distribution, samples of social media that may be posted on web sites and other media sources, FAQs about the Voter Choice Act, Talking Points and a PowerPoint presentation with scripted notes for use in group presentations, a short video highlighting the main points of the new procedures, and a glossary of terms.

Currently we are receiving requests to speak to groups about the Voter Choice Act in January. Early in January I will be scheduling a training session for League members who wish to speak to these groups.

Education

by Kay Bertken



The Board has met three times in November: twice in regular session and once in a special workshop. Most of those meetings have been concerned with bond measure discussions. Two different public opinion surveys were conducted testing responses to several different bond amounts and potential tax levy implications. Under the provisions for the sort of bond anticipated, 55% of voter approval would be necessary. All of the amounts tested from \$160 million to \$500 million garnered more than 55% favorable responses.

After long discussions and consideration of implications to the district's bond rating and the potential of higher debt service plus the tax rate implications, the board determined that \$500 million was not feasible. They did vote to place a \$325 million dollar bond on the ballot. That bond would immediately add \$25 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation per year to the district's current rate of \$180 per year. Over the life of the bond, it would replace other bonds and contribute more of that tax levy.

Beyond the vote on the bond amount that will be part of a bond measure appearing on the March ballot, the trustees spent a good deal of time discussing their priorities for spending the bond money. The working project list includes new early learning classrooms, library and cafeteria construction and reconstructions, special education improvements, plus remodeling and new construction to relocate alternative education programs and to the

old juvenile hall site recently acquired by the district. In addition to other projects, the bond would add substantial funds to the deferred maintenance budget of the district.

The trustees ultimately decided to approve the priority project list as provided by staff with the proviso that it remain flexible and amenable to review and alteration as new needs or opportunities arise. The Board will review the priority list on a quarterly basis as the facilities staff reports on progress.

In addition to the bond issues, the Board heard a review of its special education services. In 2018 The Council of Great City Schools did an evaluation of the district's special education program and found a number of areas in need of attention and repair. In addition, it has been common over the last year to hear members of the public and special education staff voice complaints about the program and its leadership. More of those complaints were voiced at the November 20 meeting.

While the department has added to staffing, especially to its physical therapy staff and speech and language pathologists (the focus of many concerns about unmet needs) and to the number of classroom aides, there are still areas of perceived need. One complaint has been the lack of support for new special education teachers and the difficulties they are having adapting to their new jobs. There have also been reports of burnout among aides and the need to improve their working conditions. Unresponsive special education leadership has been a routine complaint.



SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL



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In collaboration with **FRESNO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**
Dr. A. Prine, Superintendent

Health Care

By Richard Bertken, M.D.



While a polarized Congress seems totally diverted by either attacking or defending the President, is any substantive legislation being advanced? Not so much. In 2019 the House passed bills on climate change, equal access to the Internet, campaign finance and voting rights reform, and other key Democratic issues. None was considered by the Senate. The Senate was quiet by contrast. But there is at least one possible example of bipartisan interest: cutting the cost of prescription medicines. Even the Senate is engaged, with the approval of the President. Mr. Trump has long expressed an interest in getting a better bargain for drugs from the pharmaceutical industry. Alex Azar, Mr. Trump's Secretary of Health and Human Services, recently announced a plan for a Safe Importation Action Plan that would allow importation of prescription drugs from Canada and possibly other nations. Where that would not work, drug prices in the U.S. might be indexed to prices abroad.

Limits to Medicare Part D

Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Ron Wyden (D-Or) collaborated on the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act that passed the Senate Finance Committee by a 19-9 vote last July. The core of the bill limits out-of-pocket costs for medications under Medicare D. It limits increases in drug costs to the rate of inflation. It requires drug companies to document the pricing of their products and to reveal their discount packages to pharmacy benefit managers. Unlike other proposals, it does not set up competitive bargaining for prices or a special agency to administrate drug costs. Even so, the prevalent canon in the Senate holds that this bill is anti-free market. The only chance for passage lies in wholesale deference to the President



and to public opinion, where the Republicans need a win going into 2020.

The CREATES Act that has been kicking around both chambers for several years was passed this year in the House but appears to be on the back burner in the Senate. This bill requires the drug industry to cooperate with generic firms in providing samples needed for FDA evaluation of safety and efficacy of generic products. It also outlaws payments—bribes—to potential generic competitors to delay marketing cheaper products. This bill establishes sensible, ethical corporate behavior in the interest of the public while incidentally saving half a billion dollars yearly.

Should CMS bargain for better pricing?

Nancy Pelosi and her associates in the House are marking up a bill based on two decades of effort to empower the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to bargain with pharmaceutical firms. An effective version of this government-private relationship already exists in the VA Health System. The VA also has a formulary—a limited list of medications that meets the needs of its six million patients. Federal policy prohibits the CMS from excluding any FDA-approved medication from its list of available drugs. This weakens the CMS bargaining position and directly increases costs attributable to the size of its drug list.

Congress considers new agency

The recently released Booker-Sanders-Harris Senate bill would establish a Bureau of Prescription Drug Affordability empowered to establish drug prices based on analyses of research and production costs, unique value, and existing prices around the world. This new agency has precedents in other advanced democracies, but none of those countries produces the magnitude of government-funded and corporate-funded medical research seen in the U.S. Apportioning these research costs to prices will be difficult and contentious. Government-sponsored basic research underlies a large portion of pharmaceutical achievements, and there is an emerging consensus that it migrates to successful products without enough compensation to government. Assessing unique value of a product is likewise a challenging but ultimately essential task.

There is currently no free market for prescription medications to be damaged by any of these proposals. From producer to pharmacy benefit manager to supplier to pharmacy to physician to the patient consumer, every step is convoluted and opaque.

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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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