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Monday, February 9

Regular Board Meeting

4 p.m., Stone Soup

Saturday, February 28

Program Planning

10 a.m., Stone Soup

Monday, March 9

Regular Board Meeting

4 p.m. Stone Soup

THE

FRESNO VOTER

Our 86th Year



**It's Valentine month so why
not Speed Dating for ideas?**

Join us for conversation, both serious and fun, as we select priorities at our Annual Program Planning-meeting using an interactive format.

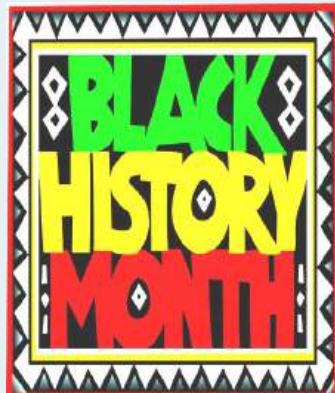
What should our local priorities be for the coming year ?

Do we have the people power or other resources to engage? Are you willing to help? Refer to our handbook and/or website for local positions and links to state and national positions.

Your input is very important, and we look forward to your ideas and questions about the issues we should prioritize this year.

Saturday, February 28, 10—12, Stone Soup

Light Refreshments



Co-President's Message

by Kay Bertken



This is the last edition of our Voter brought to you by our long-time editor Francine Farber. She is handing off the reins this month to Mike Presto after 22 years at the helm of this newsletter. She has managed this job with the talents and energy of an entire newspaper staff: managing deadlines, editing our articles for clarity, formatting text to fit layouts, and getting the finished product out and delivered on time, every time.

You can anticipate changes in the next Voters as Francine leaves the role while continuing to serve on our board. We are so grateful for her friendship and service, past and present. Thank you, Francine, from the LWVF Board.

There has been much that is positive to report about 2025, locally and for our League. First, we have managed to weather the transition to a whole new membership system managed by the National League. The system had a rocky handoff, but our board managed and adjusted. Second, our membership has grown significantly. We added 22 new members plus 8 new students to our Fresno State group just this last year.

It has been encouraging to know that the SEDA proposal for the massive expansion of residential development in southeast Fresno has gone back to staff for reworking and will not likely come back to the City Council in the same form. We were proud members of a broad community effort that resulted in massive turnout at Planning Commission and City Council meetings to pause this misguided effort and that continues to advance a more thoughtful approach to land use.

Over the last years, the League has partnered with still other community groups to extend the county transportation tax Measure C, one that reflects real community input and a serious plan for Fresno's transportation future. In that effort, our coalition worked to stop the 2022 renewal ballot measure then held big community meetings around the county to gather public input for a new proposal for 2026.

(continued on page 4)

The Voter is a monthly publication of the LWV Fresno
Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710
Volume 67 No. 2 Editor: Francine M. Farber



January 2026

LWVUS: The national convention will be held in Columbus, Ohio from June 25—28. We will be able to send 4 delegates. Registration cost will be \$575 per delegate plus airfare and hotel. Zoom attendance will be available.

Program Planning: Our meeting will take place on February 28. The discussion will use a speed dating format for greater interaction and will center around national and local priorities. Two ideas for concurrence from other leagues will also be discussed.

Earth Day: The Board approved a donation of \$250.

Donations: There have been generous donations recently. It was suggested that they be held in a President's Fund for future projects.

Annual Meeting: Our Annual Meeting will be held on April 25. Ideas for a speaker are solicited.

Mural: At long last we have a commitment for space for our mural. It will be on a wall at 1345 M Street, a Fresno Unified building. It is scheduled to be completed by May to coincide with a celebration of the 250th anniversary of the U.S.

Measure C: A new measure has been developed which will require 30,000 signatures to be placed on the June ballot.

DONATIONS

Generous donations have been received this month from:
Kay Bertken, Cathy Caples
Francine Farber, Marianne Kast



LWVF IS A 501 C3 non-profit organization and all donations, including dues, are tax deductible. Please make out checks to LWVF and send to Treasurer, LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno 93710.

Climate Action

by Andrea Farber De Zubiria



In early January Congress released a package of spending bills that rejected the Trump recommended deep cuts to agencies that are responsible for critical scientific research.

For example, The New York Times reported that Trump proposed that the National Science Foundation budget (which sponsors much of the nation's basic research) be cut 56 percent. Fortunately, Congress stood up to this terrible idea and countered with a package that reduced funding by less than one percent.



The Senate package included \$24.4 billion for NASA (a 1.6 percent cut), \$8.8 billion for the Environmental Protection Agency (a 4 percent cut), \$8.4 billion for the Department of Energy Office of Science (a 1.9 percent increase), \$6.2 billion for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (minimal change from the previous budget), \$1.4 billion for the U.S. Geological Survey (a 2 percent cut) and \$1.2 billion for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (a 2.3 percent increase).

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The National Council on Atmospheric Research (NCAR), based in Boulder, Colorado was the subject of tense negotiations. The White House has threatened to "break up" this agency due to "climate alarmism". NCAR is important for wildfire behavior analysis, flood forecasting, aviation safety and emergency preparedness.

While the effort to include direct funding for NCAR in the appropriations bills failed, NCAR does get a lot of its funding from the National Science Foundation which retained most of its budget. While Congress expressed its intent for NCAR to be funded, it is still possible that the National Science Foundation will withhold funding this agency. If so, hopefully there will be opportunity for Americans to speak up and contact their members of Congress to urge them to protect this world renowned research center.

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Voter Services

by Sue Goldman



With the primary election coming up in June, we want to provide members with as much information as possible. In this article there will be two lists: deadlines indicated by the elections office and specific local elections that will be on the ballot.

The deadlines are listed below.

Candidate filing deadline: February 9 – March 6. If no candidate has filed, the deadline is extended from March 7 – 11

County Voter Information Guides: mailed April 23 – May 12

Military and Overseas Vote-by Mail ballots distributed: April 3 – April 18

Mail-in ballots sent: May 4 – May 26

Early Voting: starts May 4

Close of Registration for this election: May 18

Conditional Voter Registration period: May 19 – June 2

Eleven-day Vote Centers open: May 23

All Vote Centers open: May 30

Election Day: June 2

Last day to receive vote-by-mail ballots posted on election day: June 9

The following local elections will be held:

County Superintendent of Schools: Michelle Cantwell-Copher is the incumbent; John Henry Alvarado and Eimear O'Brien will be contesting

County Supervisor District 1: Brian Pacheco is the incumbent but intends to run for the Assembly

County Supervisor District 4: Buddy Mendes is the incumbent but will be retiring

Assessor/Recorder: Paul Dictos Incumbent

Auditor and Controller: Oscar Garcia Incumbent

County Clerk: James Kus Incumbent

Fresno City Council District 1: Annalisa Perea is the incumbent but plans to run for the Assembly.

Fresno City Council District 3: Miguel Arias, the incumbent is termed out.

Fresno City Council District 4: Brandon Vang is the incumbent.

Fresno City Council District 7: Nelson Esparza, the incumbent, is termed out.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

(Continued from page 2)

This last year we joined the Council of Governments (COG) established steering committee that developed an allocation measure reflecting what we heard from community. It was approved by a large majority of COG mayors but has been prevented from advancing as a government-sponsored measure by the County Board of Supervisors' opposition. Now the coalition is committed to collecting signatures to put it on the ballot as a newly-named (the new letter will be assigned) citizen-led ballot initiative extending the old Measure C. We are excited about the challenge.

The opportunity to extend the League's reach by partnering with other organizations has been a major benefit of our work on these issues. It will certainly prove beneficial to our other concerns to have such an expanded network of relationships with like-minded organizations.

Kay

Behavioral Health

by Sherri Gibson



Funding for mental health services provided by Fresno County is very precarious. This year's Governor's budget proposal changes mobile crisis services from a mandated benefit to an optional benefit.

Counties would be responsible for non-federal share of costs. This will shift tens of millions per year in costs from the state to counties to maintain this benefit. Mobile crisis was implemented as a statewide mandated benefit with enhanced state funding and is a key part of the state's behavioral health continuum. Overall analysis is still underway.

On January 14 it was announced that the federal government had cut over two billion in mental health and addiction grants. By the end of the day it was announced that the federal government had reversed its position on the two billion in cuts. Given the current climate there is always concern about federal dollars.

The Fresno Madera Continuum of Care conducted its annual Point-in- Time count of homeless families and individuals January 27 and 28. This year's effort for Fresno County was led by the Office of Housing and Homelessness.



Thanks to Fresno Unified, our long-awaited mural will appear by the end of May at 1350 M Street. The artist is well-known muralist Will Portis. He has created hundreds of works of art, both commercially and as a private fine artist. The mural is funded through donations to our League solicited for the 100th anniversary of U.S. suffrage in 2020.

Health Care

by Richard Bertken M.D.



Last August the Fresno County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to unhouse the San Joaquin Valley Free Medical Clinic and Needle Exchange Program but just two years earlier the board had voted 3-2 to *house* the program in the offices of the Fresno County Department of Public Health.

One of 522 such programs known as Syringe Service Programs (SSP) in 43 states, our Clinic is still alive in its mobile unit near Roeding Park. However, its ejection from a key downtown, brick and mortar location was a major body blow to its staff and clientele. In addition, our local SSP has lost its immediate access to a portfolio of social services at the Public Health building.

Referrals for medical treatment

Like all such SSP's, our Clinic provides services for people with opioid addiction beyond providing sterile syringes and disposal of used ones. For example, many provide rapid testing strips for fentanyl and various drug adulterants so that street drugs can be vetted by their users for safety. Many other services are important for the individuals and the public, but perhaps the most central is referral for the medical treatment of addiction.

People with opioid dependence may commit to a long-term program of treatment with drugs that replace addicting opioids, with the hope of long term cure. No one is forced into

treatment programs. However, current data show a trend to increasing use and effectiveness of medical treatment, and it is clear that syringe service alone is reducing the harms—hepatitis, AIDS, and hospitalizations for injuries and infections.

SSP's don't enable use

The social and economic benefits of syringe services are proven. Regrettably, this objective proof must tangle with the "commonsense" notion that providing the administration mode of addictive drugs will enable their use. This is another instance in our social and political climate of "science versus your gut feeling."

Proving scientifically that syringe programs do not increase drug use is impossible. But they do cut opioid-related deaths, emergency calls, and transmission of chronic viral infections. They do improve engagement with health and social services, decrease public drug use and its trash, and reduce the high violent crime rates in locales where they operate. Is that not enough?

Funded by lawsuits

In the U.S. syringe services are supported by a huge opioid remediation fund derived from numerous law

suits against pharmaceutical firms and pharmacies that fueled the initial opioid epidemic of the first two decades of this century. The funds will be paid out over the next two decades, with California receiving four billion dollars.

Our own SSP is currently largely supported by this money, so its services are a gift to our county. While only one Board member is known to have visited our local SSP, all of the Board members could have watched its volunteer staff and its clientele in the process of saving the county 1.2 million dollars annually for collateral damage to our hospitals and emergency and police services.

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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Education

by Kay Bertken



Fresno Unified first board meeting after the long holiday break was occupied with board required attention to a naming determination for the baseball facility at Edison and a hearing for the renewal of the School of Unlimited Learning's (SOUL) charter.

The Edison High School baseball diamond has been named for Dr. James Aldredge who passed away this last year after a life of service to Fresno and being drafted into pro baseball while still at Edison. The trustees voted unanimously to honor Aldredge, who was Fresno's first Black city manager and, after retirement, taught at Fresno State in the Department of Social Work Education.

Charter school up for renewal

SOUL is a charter school affiliated with Fresno's Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC). The school was the district's first authorized charter school in 1998 and has operated at the old downtown site of Temple Beth Israel ever since. The school provides alternative programs and wrap-around services for about 200 students who have not found success in regular schools. It serves three times the number of foster and homeless students as the state average, and many of its students have been expelled from regular schools.

The hearing for its charter renewal is the first public step in its renewal process. It provided the board with the opportunity to hear testimony from the school about its program and achievements on various alternative metrics allowed by the state for alternative schools like SOUL. The board will hear more and vote on the renewal at its February 25th meeting.

Federal funding in question

In the meantime, across the country states and districts are dealing with a dizzying array of federal funding cancellations, court suits challenging some of those cancellations, injunctions and restorations, and uncertainty. The White House continues to try to shut down the Department of Education and go after various programs affecting

children, especially children of poverty. It has recently initiated a freeze of poverty-focused childcare funding in five states, including California. The freeze is ostensibly about a desire to combat fraud, an effort that is focused particularly on Minnesota. Attorney Generals, including our own A.G. Bonta, are suing over that freeze.

Interestingly, given the renewal of our EOC's SOUL school, another program in the White House budget cross-hairs is the Community Services Block Grants, the modern incarnation of part of Lyndon Johnson's 1964 War on Poverty that established our EOC and other locally based community service organizations throughout the country. The EOC supports job training and employment services, energy, food, and health supports as well as education programs like SOUL and Head Start.

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After 22 years on the Board as Voter editor with eight of them while serving as president or co-president of our League, I've decided to pass it on. Mike Presto has stepped up and will be the new editor.

I want to thank all of you for being loyal readers and especially the people who have written so many interesting articles to keep our members up to date on all that we do. In addition to these contributors, my devoted husband and proof reader Murray and dear friends Jane Worsley, now deceased, and Patty Campbell spent many hours preparing the Voter for mailing and then taking the long drive down to the Bulk Mail site of the Post Office and climbing up the grungy stairs to get the job done. Thanks to Marie Slater as well.

Please keep reading and writing.

Francine

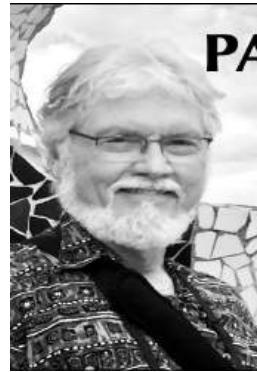


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