

Phone: 559-226—VOTE

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Monday, February 21
Regular Board Meeting
4 p.m. ZOOM

Thursday, February 24
Program Planning
Speaker Paul Nerland
5:30 p.m. ZOOM

March 1-30
100 Notable Women
Exhibit
Fresno County Library
See page 8

Tuesday March 8
100 Notable Women Program
Betty Rodriguez Library
5-6 p.m. See page 8

**Members and guests welcome
at all meetings and events**

Happy Valentine's Day



The

FRESNO

VOTER

Our 80th Year!

This year is kinda different . . .

and so is Program Planning

WHAT IS PROGRAM PLANNING?

“Program” consists of the body of issues we choose for study, education and action at local, state and national levels. Program can include both education and advocacy.

Traditionally we focus on local issues, together with an alternate year emphasis on state or national issues, this year being a national year leading up to the LWVUS convention in June, 2022. It is part of what makes the League a grassroots organization; each

League member has the opportunity to influence the selection of issues on which to focus. This year because of constraints on in-person communication your Board is recommending we study and advocate for city and county priorities. To this end we are inviting leaders of governmental agencies, most of whom were newly elected or appointed in 2020, to speak to us about their concerns and goals for this year. Our first meeting in what we foresee as a year-long cycle is listed below. We will also discuss and vote on national priorities. *

PROGRAM PLANNING IS YOUR VOICE!

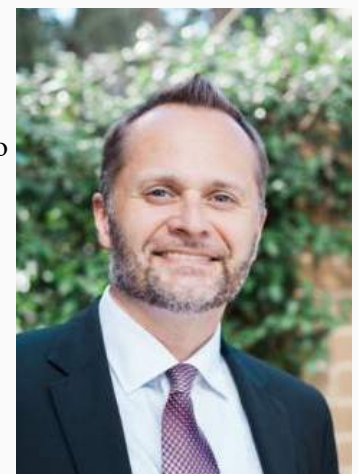
Think about questions you would like our county Chief Administrative Officer to answer and be prepared to ask them orally or through the chat box on Zoom. We will also present and discuss national issues selected by LWVUS.

It takes the enthusiasm and interest of our members to keep our program vital. Please join us virtually and think about issues and questions you would like our guest to discuss.

**Paul Nerland : Fresno County CAO
February 24 on ZOOM—5:30 p.m.**

**Members and guests are encouraged to attend
A link will be sent to you**

* If you have other ideas for priorities for local Program Planning please contact Sandy Williams, swilliams256@sbcglobal.net or Marianne Kast fourkasts@gmail.com.



Paul Nerland

Fresno County CAO

President's Message



A new feature highlighting monthly Board activities

January 2022

We're definitely not "back to normal," but I hope you feel, as I do, that in terms of Covid, we are modifying our definition of "normal" and moving toward active participation in the parts of life we've missed for nearly two years. In League life, February brings Program Planning. We'll conduct this year's Program Planning session online (see page 1), but I'm confident we're close to seeing each other in person.

This year we plan to learn about the priorities of our new and new-ish local leaders. As you hear from these leaders, starting with Fresno County CAO Paul Nerland this month, resolve to be active in the League's work. You can simply observe meetings of local government, or follow the work of a County committee or department, much of which is now possible to do from home. Reach out to us, and we'll figure out a way for you to be part of our work.

This month also, we'll be meeting with local legislators (state assembly members and senators), assessing their priorities for the new legislative session. Statewide redistricting has changed our representation significantly, and daily we're hearing about retirements and potential candidates in our new districts. It will take a few years to see if the newly drawn districts affect the long-ignored issues of the Central Valley. But for those of us who love elections, there will be several this year with plenty League work coming up, from talking about ballot measures and registering young people to unfolding vote-by-mail ballots.

Local redistricting was largely disappointing, and we expect there will be challenges to many of the maps adopted in Valley counties. The California Fair Maps Act provided a good start for fair local redistricting, but until independent redistricting is mandated at the local levels, elected officials will choose the maps that got them elected rather than those that strengthen communities.

And water—the continuing drought, over allocation of surface water, and overdrafting of groundwater basins will continue to change the landscape and economic future of our County. Will all Fresno County residents ever have clean, safe drinking water?

I've highlighted just a portion of our continuing League work. Keep up with what we're doing in each monthly Voter newsletter and our weekly emails.

Happy 2022.

Marianne

Program Planning: A series of talks is planned with the many new top administrators in city and county agencies. The first one is likely to be the recently appointed CAO of Fresno County, Paul Nerland.

Transportation: Francine Farber and Kay Bertken are following up on the possible funding of a pilot rural transportation program to bring dedicated service to underserved or unserved unincorporated communities. Mary Savala and Bill Jordan are seeking a third person to join them on planning for Measure C renewal projects.

Voter Services: There will be three elections this year that the League has been asked to help with. The first is in April to fill Devin Nunes' congressional seat, then the primary in June, and the election in November.

Membership: Dues receipts are in good shape and another new member is in the offing.

Nominations: The committee is calling each current board member to verify her willingness to continue to serve the rest of her term or a new two-year term. Any LWVF member interested in becoming a board member should call Francine at 559-226-5455.

Kudos: Former Arts Editor and Bee columnist Donald Munro wrote his blog about our choral premiere "A Thousand Tries" and agreed with everyone else that it was beautiful and moving. You can still find it

LWVF IS A 501 C3 non-profit organization and all donations, including dues, are tax deductible. Donations are always accepted for the RBG Scholarship Fund at San Joaquin College of Law, the League's general fund, and any other purpose. Donations for RBG should note RBG in the memo line. Your estate planning is encouraged to consider LWVF. Please make out checks to LWVF and send to Treasurer, LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno 93710.

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

Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 81 No. 12 Editor: Francine M. Farber



Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



Water News

by Diane Merrill



The January meeting of the Behavioral Health Board meeting focused on Children's Services.

Two Wellness Centers open

Department of Behavioral Health Interim Director Susan Holt reported that two of four Wellness Centers are up and running at Fresno Pacific University and at Tarpey Elementary School in Clovis. Wellness Centers are funded through the Mental Health Student Services Act, and through partnership with the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools and the Department of Behavioral Health. The Wellness Centers are staffed with Family Partners, open to walk-ins, and hold numerous events,



including parent and youth activities,

and support and linkage services for families.

Sites in Riverdale and Fowler

are scheduled to open in February.

Board members are concerned about behavioral health services for children in the child welfare system. The Department has a Child Welfare Mental Health Team that accepts referrals from Department of Social Services for court ordered mental health assessments and care coordination for children under the court's jurisdiction. The goal of DBH is to meet the mental health needs of youth and family members through its contracted providers, from whom clients receive outpatient specialty mental health services.

Public comment solicited

The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Annual Update for 2021-2022 was posted in January to the Department's MHSA website at fresnomhsa.com for a 30-day public comment period. The public comment period will close on February 16, when the Behavioral Health Board will hold a Public Hearing on the Update. Comments on the document are welcome at mhsa@fresnocountyca.gov.

evansalca@comcast.net

In many groundwater-dependent areas of California including the San Joaquin Valley, local groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) are required to bring over-drafted groundwater basins into sustainable condition within 20 years, between 2040 and 2042.

Groundwater trading structure

The California Water Commission recently released a white paper on groundwater trading after holding workshops in July 2021 to gather input from water experts, organizations, and the public about how groundwater trading might be structured in a way that protects the interests of vulnerable groundwater users. Several LWVC Water Committee members, including LWVF members Diane Merrill and Mary Perich, attended these workshops

Local GSA's, including two in Tulare and Madera counties, are beginning to experiment and establish pilot programs to give groundwater pumpers allocations to pump up to a specified amount from the groundwater basin, and allowing them to use the allocation themselves or trade allocations between specified parties.



Ideally, groundwater trading could ease the economic disruption of having to substantially reduce the amount of groundwater pumping, but there are concerns about how groundwater trading would impact vulnerable groundwater users, including disadvantaged rural communities, small and medium size farms, and groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Central Valley well represented

The Commission established a Groundwater Trading Stakeholder Advisory Group and many of the members are from the Central San Joaquin Valley. Representing disadvantaged rural communities. Dr. Ruth Dahlquist Willard, Small Farms and Specialty Crops Advisor with the University of California Cooperative Extension in Parlier, has done extensive work with southeast Asian and other small farmers in our area. Representatives from Madera County, the Mid-Kaweah Subbasin in Tulare County, The Nature Conservancy, and the Environmental Fund are also represented on the Advisory Group.

Transportation

by Mary Savala and Bill Jordan

A three-billion-dollar payout over 20 years through a Measure C local sales tax will result from a plan being developed in Fresno that will be ready for review this spring.

The two-committee group that is designing the renewal expenditure plan will provide a draft for the Fresno County Transportation Authority (FCTA) and the Fresno Council of Governments (FCOG). The Technical Working Group for Measure C has approved general outline programs and subprograms for the expenditure plan. The serious work of recommending specific projects and programs and the allocation for specific expenditures will be condensed into the months of February and March.

The FCTA and COG boards will review the recommendations and draft a plan in April. The draft plan will go out to the public in May. FCTA and COG will develop the final plan in June/July. After submission to the Board of Supervisors for approval, the proposed language will be sent to the Election Commission in late summer or early fall preliminary to placing the proposal on the November general election ballot.

That schedule might leave you breathless, but public members of the working group looking forward to the real nitty gritty of hashing out what specific programs and policies will be funded and their allocations are warning that the most important part of developing the expenditure plan is being railroaded through a bad public process. Public outreach and the public survey is ongoing through April, making little sense as the working group will not have the results of the public outreach efforts and survey until after FCTA and COG deliberate on the specifics of an expenditure plan.



Community groups such as Building Health Communities and Leadership Counsel sent another letter to the chairs

and co-chairs of the Executive Committee and the Technical Working Group last month again citing the concerns about the timeline and the process. The groups asked that goals of the plan explicitly seek to address and prioritize environmental, racial, economic, and climate justice.



Recommendations for potential funding programs include:

- ◆ climate resiliency programs
- ◆ projects that prioritize resources for disadvantaged municipal neighborhoods and disadvantaged unincorporated communities
- ◆ public mobility program with a focus on electrifying all public transit fleets and making transit affordable, frequent and reliable
 - ◆ programs for workforce development
 - ◆ comprehensive accessibility program through the county that addresses ADA standards
 - ◆ active transportation programs for bike paths, pedestrian safety, and trails
 - ◆ new program designed to address the deleterious impact that highway construction has had on neighborhoods and has contributed to pollution in overburdened areas.

The letter goes on to recommend elimination of programs that would perpetuate or exacerbate inequality and health disparities, including programs that support highway expansions, highway interchange expansions or road expansions that facilitate increased truck traffic and pollution in already burdened communities. League signed its name to the letter.

It's to be expected that there will be heated debate over specific projects and programs. The Technical Working Group is only producing recommendations, and there is every chance that the Executive Committee, the FCTA and FCOG Boards could make changes in the plan before presenting the ballot language to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. We will keep League members informed.

Voter Services

by Sue Goldman



The redistricting process has been completed for state level positions as final maps were submitted to the Secretary of State on December 27. The city and county of Fresno have also completed their redistricting process. Fresno Unified completed process on January 12. The district chose a community-submitted map over ones presented by the consulting company.

The city of Clovis and Clovis Unified elect their council/board members at large. Some Clovis residents plan to file suit to force the city to elect council members by district. The California League of Women Voters is interested at legal solutions to mandate local entities utilize independent commissions for future redistricting.

There will be multiple elections during 2022. The first will be April 5 to replace Devin Nunes' congressional seat. If no one receives more than 50% of the vote, the run-off will be held with the June primary. This person will only be in office until January, 2023. This may be confusing for vot-



ers as those in the current 22nd Congressional District will be voting for the person to fill the remainder of that term as well as voting for a new representative in the newly drawn districts.

Fresno Unified will hold an election on April 12 to fill the vacancy on the Board left by the death of Carol Mills. The primary to fill congressional seats, assembly seats and state senate seats will be held on June 7. The top two vote getters for each position will have their run-off election on November 8.

The elections office is again asking the League to provide volunteers for the phone bank and ballot opening for all elections with the exception of the Fresno Unified election. Be on the lookout for requests for volunteers to fill these interesting and fun positions.

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Climate Change

by Andrea Farber De Zubiria



True or False?

In Fresno, if you put containers in the blue recycle bin with food in them, it will taint your entire bin and it will all wind up in the landfill.

False-Rinse out containers so there is minimal food left behind, though it does not need to be perfect. Take off the lids and place in the recycle bin too. Don't worry about labels.

In Fresno, you can recycle all plastic bags.

False-plastic bags should be saved up and brought to big box stores that recycle them into more bags.

In Fresno, you can toss your shredded paper in the recycling or put it in a plastic bag.

False-Loose shredded paper may fly around and make a mess when your bin gets picked up. If you use a plastic bag, the whole thing will wind up in landfill. Put shredded paper in a paper bag and roll the top down tightly or close with tape or staples (a cardboard box full of paper, placed in the blue bin is also okay)

These are some of the finer points of local recycling that our committee learned when we recently met with Alicia Real, Recycling Coordinator for the City of Fresno. Creating new plastics generally uses more fossil fuels than recycling them. We also wanted to discuss the city's plans to implement part of the Short Lived Climate Pollutants Reduction Act (SB 1383) which calls for cities to compost organic waste, including fruits and vegetables, from households. These kinds of materials produce much more methane when they wind up rotting in a landfill than when they are turned into useful compost. Methane contributes to global warming and climate change.



The city will start a public education campaign about this program by summer. It will not involve an extra bin at the curb; recyclers' machinery will be able to chop up plant-based food waste together with yard waste.

Call the City of Fresno Recycle Hotline if you are unsure how to dispose of any item. 559 621-1111.

afarberdezub@gmail.com 5

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



Before lighting up or dropping an edible THC product, you must be careful to note whether you are in Colorado (no problem) or Wyoming (at risk of criminal prosecution).

In previous articles, I highlighted the thorny problems arising from the patchy national progress toward legalization of marijuana. Tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, is the chief psychoactive chemical in marijuana. Nationwide, 18 states have now fully legalized recreational use of THC. An additional 13 have authorized medical use only. Eleven states still criminalize the production, sale, and use of THC. Transporting THC across state lines is problematic.

Uniform code needed

As permissive THC laws, protocols, and enforcement gain acceptance, most states will likely adopt legalization. There are good reasons why they should. Legalization done right should reduce demands on law enforcement, legal and court costs, unnecessary and prejudicial incarceration, weaponized and damaging cultivation, violent trafficking, and border controls. A uniform marijuana code across the US through adoption of essentially identical policies by the states would be a welcome simplification of national THC rules.

From the medical point of view, standardization of dosing and preparation of THC products *should* result in fewer intoxications and durable

The evolution of very high-potency THC has increased the risk of confounding the normal functions of our brain's "endocannabinoid" system. This thermostat-like system is built into our brains to modify many facets of neural interaction, most notably mood, arousal, and pain perception. High levels of THC found in modern products turn off the system, ultimately causing increased pain and anxiety in the absence of repeated intake of THC. This can foster physiologic dependency.

Safer dosing possible

Moving THC purchases from the street to licensed dispensaries should result in safer dosing of cleaner, better characterized products. States that have legalized THC have necessarily regulated labelling, modes of administration, and dosages. It is not clear yet that these progressively standardized regulations have achieved the goal of optimum safety of legal THC products. Modifications to the codes should become an ongoing process based on data gathered from dealers and public health services.

Moving THC sales from the street to licensed dispensaries also requires competitive prices and convenient access. California undermined its legal marijuana market by allowing

psychic adverse effects, including dependency.

every county and every city to decide whether to sponsor marijuana cultivation and sales. THC dispensaries are available in only 174 of California's 482 cities. Additionally, the impenetrable thicket of THC regulations forces the industry to absorb major structural and administrative costs. Examples of legal marijuana



business overhead: greenhouses with barred windows and continuous video monitoring, teams of lawyers and accountants to deal with highly taxed and cash-only business, and expensive THC-specific software. The result is that legal THC re-

mains expensive and inconveniently located. It is not shocking that legal marijuana sales are only 20-30% of total sales in California.

Production and legal sales of THC in California are out of balance. The market may move to a better equilibrium in time, but dispensaries likely will be going out of business in the meantime.

Standardized restrictions needed

There are two government actions that would help. First, amend California's Medical and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act to standardize *statewide* restrictions on the numbers and locations of dispensaries. Second, finally pass (after numerous attempts) in Congress an amendment to the Controlled Substances Act removing marijuana from its current Scheduled I (illegal) status. Dispensaries could use banks and researchers could access marijuana for vital research on its use as an accepted social intoxicant.

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Education

by Kay Bertken



The new semester began with board officer and trustee boundary changes. Trustee Jonasson-Rosas is the new board president and Veva Islas the new clerk. The board approved a new map outlining trustee areas that accommodate the population changes revealed by the 2020 census. The map was submitted by a citizen's group rather than one of the three proposed by the district's consultants.

Some redistricting changes

The new map creates three Hispanic majority districts, keeps the current trustees residing in their current districts, uses major streets/highways as boundaries, and balances population. It also keeps one of the comprehensive high schools within each of the districts. The major changes in the map occur within the southern trustee areas 1, 2, and 3 --the areas associated with Edison, Roosevelt and Sunnyside. While trustee areas have traditionally been identified by the comprehensive high school located within their boundaries, the trustee boundaries are not attendance boundaries.

In April there will be a special election to fill the remaining two years of the Fresno High seat, vacant since Carol Mills' death. The current trustee map will be used to define the relevant population for that election. The new map will not be used until the November regular term elections.

Covid preparations

The district provided thousands of COVID test kits at various school sites prior to the start of school on January 11 but could not meet all the demand. There are also vaccinations being provided at

school events, a fact complained about by some public speakers at the board meetings. The superintendent has expressed his commitment to keeping schools open for in-person learning as long as staff is available and the health department allows it.



Community meetings are being held around the district to gather input around priority spending next year (LCAP meetings) and Governor Newsom's preliminary announcement of allocations to education has triggered general budget talks. The governor's proposals, which will be amended in a May revision, contain billions in new expenditures for general and special education, for the next phase of Transitional Kindergarten expansion, and other expanded learning opportunities.

ADA has fallen

While the allocations are generous, FUSD is facing some revenue challenges. Average daily attendance (ADA), the basis for per pupil funding, has declined in FUSD from about 67,000 in 2019-2020 to 60,000 projected for this year. The governor has proposed using an ADA average to fund districts, but that would still yield a decline of 2,000 ADA for Fresno Unified. In addition, the governor has suggested no relief for the continued escalation in district contribution and declining state contribution to state retirement plans.

There has been no state testing since 2018-2019, which complicates evaluation of student achievement and the effect of the pandemic. Internal testing has shown declines in literacy and math relative to pre-pandemic levels but with some improvements since students came back to in-person learning this fall. Trustee discussion centered on the need for baseline measures to track district progress. Trustees were especially concerned that FUSD's high graduation rates be tied to competency data.

Early learning expands

Early learning expansion is proceeding with the implementation of universal Transitional Kindergarten. That expansion will eventually accommodate all four-year-olds, leaving preschool space for more three-year-olds. Research suggests two years of pre-K experience has the greatest impact on student success. In addition to expanding TK and pre-K opportunities, the district is seeking to expand the availability of its child-



care centers. The first new one will be located on the Farber campus in southeast Fresno.

The district has received a Wallace Foundation grant (one of 8 awarded) to develop a school principal pipeline since principals are recognized to have a major impact on student learning and staff morale.

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Did you miss it?



If you didn't see our exhibit of 100 Notable Women at the Fresno Art Museum, you will be able to have another opportunity at the Fresno County Central Library during March.

All posters will be on exhibit all month.

Photos by Howard K. Watkins

VISITORS MUST WEAR MASKS

Fresno County Central Library

2420 Mariposa Street

Hours: Monday thru Thursday 9 a.m.—6 p.m.

Friday—Saturday 9 a.m.—5 p.m.

Join us for a special event

The 100 Notable Women Project

Who are the women?

How were the women selected?

See their photos and bios on screen

Guest speakers: Some of the Notable Women will tell their stories

Bonus: Receive your free copy of the fascinating booklet containing all 100 biographies

Tuesday, March 8, 5—6 p.m.

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MISSION: The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of interested individuals and influences public policy through voter education and advocacy on issues. The League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

DIVERSITY POLICY: There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the LWVF on the basis of race, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socio-economic level.

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.

Yearly Dues Individual - \$70 ~ Family - \$100 (2 members, same address) ~ Student - Subsidized

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 to: LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710.**

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