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Regular Board Meeting
Monday, February 5
4 p.m.
Stone Soup in person

Program Planning
Saturday
February 24
9:30 a.m.
Stone Soup
Breakfast provided



The **Fresno Voter**



Our League's 82nd Year!



We need your input to validate our priorities for the coming year. Board members have recommended these local issues:

Climate Change: *leader Nancy Richardson*

Housing: *leader Marianne Kast*

Transportation: *leader Kay Bertken*

Voter Education/Engagement: *leaders Sue Goldman/Robin Chiero*

Join us on February 24 at a Continental Breakfast at Stone Soup at 9:30 a.m. where we will present information and welcome discussion on these topics. If you have other ideas, please be prepared to tell us about them. Of course, whatever issues we select we need you to be part of educating ourselves and others and advocating for change. You will be asked to sign up for a committee of your choice. If we don't get volunteers we won't be able to follow that issue.

There is no charge but please call in a reservation by February 16 so we can have an ample breakfast. 226-8683; leave a clear message. Thank you.



Co-president's Message
by Kay Bertken

December 2023

Twenty-twenty four is here. Happy and healthy New Year to us all as we prepare ourselves for the work associated with three elections.

The Presidential Primary will be here in March, with its accompanying Congressional primaries; and this year, the primary election will elect someone to fill a full term of Diane Feinstein's long-held seat. Local races of all sorts will also be on that ballot as well as three county measures.

Measure E will be coming back: a sales tax to support programs and facilities at Fresno State that failed last time around. There are also two charter amendments placed on the ballot by the County Board of Supervisors. Your League has signed on to the arguments against these last two measures as incompatible with our positions on good government. It is our belief that both represent efforts to circumvent state law.

AB 759 was signed by Governor Newsome in 2022. It mandated the election of County District Attorneys and Sheriffs during the Presidential election cycle. Given the power wielded by these officers, it was thought important to maximize voter participation in their selection. Measure A would insert in our charter that the election of these offices remain as off-year elections, minimizing the larger vote possibilities.

Measure B would amend the charter to give the Board of Supervisors power over place names. There is nothing on the surface of that proposal that seems problematic, and there is nothing in state law that would take away that discretion-- except when it comes to using a word that has been designated a slur and removed from place names by state law (AB 2022) and federal regulation. It is significant that this proposed measure follows a concerted effort by some Supervisors to maintain the name of Sq... Valley.

Our Voter Services board members, Sue Goldman and Robin Chiero, will likely be calling on you soon to sign up for the important work ahead. Given the frequent efforts to limit voter access and contest the validity of election processes that we have seen across the country, working on free and fair elections and assisting in the education of voters has never felt more important.

Kay

January meeting: Marianne and Kay will cover transportation issues, especially Measure C. We want to see whether an early brown-bag session will bring out more members and guests.

February meeting: Program Planning will take place on Feb 24. at 9:30 a.m. at Stone Soup. The four areas to cover will be Transportation(Kay), Voter Education (Sue and Robin), Climate Change (Nancy) and Housing (Marianne). See page 1

Nominating Committee: Marie Slater, Andrea De Zubiria, Diane Merrill and Janice Maroot will survey the current board and see what our needs are for next year.

Green Energy: Keith Bergthold made a short presentation on Green Energy needs.

Voter 411: We will purchase book-marks and signs for members to buy from the national organization The site 411 is up and running on the national website.

Requests: We will continue to consider whether we want to donate to the Maddy Institute to support its lecture series. The board voted to be a partner with the Farber Campus whose alternative school programs will stress civic education and service learning, perhaps leading to internships and/or mentorships. There is no charge

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. Send to Treasurer, LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane,

Thank you!

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Volume 83 No. 2 Editor: Francine M. Farber

Climate Change

by Nancy Richardson



Do you remember when agricultural open burning was considered unavoidable? According to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, over 1 million tons of material were open-burned annually in the past.

In 2021 changes were made to ensure that smaller agricultural operations receive increased and equitable access to incentive funding. Also, off-site beneficial re-use incentives, such as mulch, composting, and land application near roadways for dust suppression were approved.

By 2023 the amount was down to approximately 122,000 tons. Through a phase-out strategy coupled with development of alternatives, a near-complete phase-out of agricultural burning is slated for January 1, 2025.

The Ag Burn Alternatives Grant Program provides financial incentives to chip agricultural material and then use it in or on soil. To date, the District has allocated over \$131 million to support alternatives to open ag burning projects on over 196,000 acres in the Valley. The vast reduction in ag open burning is but one of many examples of the Air Board working with residents of the seven counties and part of an eighth county, with the California Air Resources Board, and the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Other successful incentive programs include residential wood smoke reduction, increased funding for electric heat pumps, incentives to switch to electric lawn equipment, and upgrading agricultural equipment to clean technology. Perhaps you have seen League member Connie Young in a television spot extolling the conversion to a heat pump in her home.

Note that continual artful pairing of mandates with financial incentives avoids pitched battles regarding changes from “the way we’ve always done things.” The 2022-2023 District budget allocates nearly 90% for voluntary grants and incentives. Clean air grants funding in the budget totals over \$560,000,000. District operations are budgeted at nearly \$71 million.

(continued on page 6)

Water News

by Diane Merrill



Climate change is impacting California’s climate and hydrology, and tree ring studies indicate that historic droughts may have extended for 20 years or longer.

To help California prepare for the possibility of long periods of drought, the California Water Commission recently released a draft report on “Potential Strategies for Protecting Communities and Fish and Wildlife in the Event of Drought.” Strategies include better positioning communities to prepare for and respond to drought emergencies, and scaling up groundwater recharge.



The Kings River water service area in Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties was highlighted in the report for

its long history, dating back to the 1920s, of managing surface water and groundwater together to prepare for drought. This involved constructing ponds and groundwater recharge basins to increase groundwater recharge during wet years, as well as the construction of dams

This effort intensified after the passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in 2014 when local water agencies in the area constructed additional recharge basins to improve groundwater levels. These efforts left the area in a good position to take advantage of last winter’s record-breaking storms. It is estimated that 500,000 acre feet of surface water were intentionally recharged in the Kings River area. An acre foot of water provides a one year supply of water for an average household.

Accurate forecasts of when and how much water was going to run off the landscape into reservoirs allowed water managers to better manage reservoir operations in the winter of 2023 and to maximize groundwater recharge. Local, state, and federal agencies collaborated in this process. Kings River water agencies provided a detailed knowledge of the Kings River watershed, while state and federal agencies were involved in the contracting, administration and analysis of the Aerial Snow Observatory data.

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



Care Court, the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment Act, authorizes the creation of a civil court to connect severely impaired individuals who have untreated schizophrenia spectrum disorders to County behavioral health services. The process was explained recently by Susan Holt, Director of the Department of Behavioral Health.

When a petition is filed with the Court, County behavioral health investigates to determine if the individual meets CARE criteria; if so, the Court sets an appearance date and appoints legal counsel. If the individual voluntarily engages in services within 30 days, the CARE process ends. If there is no agreed upon CARE plan, the County is ordered to perform a clinical evaluation and develop a plan. If the Court approves, the year-long CARE process begins. The individual attends status review hearings every 60 days for 11 months; at that time it is determined if the person graduates from CARE or should remain in CARE, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

According to State implementation deadlines, Fresno County must have Care Court up and running by December 1, 2024. In the meantime, individuals may be referred to the Assisted Outpatient Program (Laura's Law) that provides many of the same services.



The Behavioral Health Board Forensics Committee learned about "Clean Slate," a program of the Fresno County Public Defender's Office that assists individuals in reducing or dismissing charges from old criminal cases, and in sealing and/or clearing their criminal records. Individuals may request that the Public Defender's Office file Petitions to Dismiss or Petitions to Seal. Most are old cases or cases in which the crimes have been reduced by state law, such as some drug laws that have been reduced from felonies to misdemeanors. Judges like to see efforts at rehabilitation and clean records since the original offenses. Clearing their criminal records allows individuals more opportunities for employment and housing. "Clean Slate" has a 92% success rate.

(Continued on page 8)

Housing

by Marianne Kast



Is housing on the ballot? Governor Newsom claims Proposition 1 on the March ballot is Californians' chance to do something about the unhoused who are on the streets of California.

Proposition 1 would authorize the issuance of bonds to raise approximately \$6.4 billion: \$4.4 billion to build facilities for treatment of people who have mental illness or substance use disorder, and \$2 billion to build or renovate housing for people experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness or who have mental illness or substance use disorders. It would also shift \$140 million of the Mental Health Service Act (MHSA) monies currently available for counties to state mental health services. And, it would divert about one third of the MHSA funding that counties receive to provide the full range of services to housing and personalized support services like employment assistance and education.

It is estimated that 172,000 people in California are unhoused, with 75,000 of those needing mental health or addiction treatment services. According to the Legislative Analyst's office, this ballot measure could fund 6,800 beds in treatment facilities and create 4,350 new homes for people who need mental health or addiction services, with 2,350 reserved for veterans. So this measure, while helpful, still leaves about 90% of California's neediest people relegated to temporary shelters.

Supporters believe that targeting the most visible and hardest to help of the unhoused community will address the public perception that all homeless people are mentally ill. It is clear that California needs much more housing, but the unhoused mentally ill often dominate the conversation.

Mental health officials in several counties have expressed concerns about Proposition 1. If they are required to move money from programs like homelessness prevention, early mental health intervention and other outpatient services, and divert it to housing, they may actually cause more people to fall into homelessness. But proponents of the measure see it as reprioritizing the expenditures of the MHSA.

(continued on page 8)



In post-Roe America, state legislators and courts now have the responsibility for defining and enforcing rules about abortions in their states.

For legislatures intent on restricting abortion, monitoring adherence to the new codes and adjudicating penalties for violations is a daunting and expensive task. These legislators also risk societal censure for causing severe mismanagement of miscarriages (10% of all pregnancies), for which abortion is often the optimal treatment.

Also a troubling issue for the 16 states with total bans on abortion is the emergence of abortion strategies that skirt the usual healthcare encounters. Data relevant to abortions from healthcare facilities will grow less informative to state monitoring as abortion moves to the internet, especially in states where it is criminalized.

Over two decades ago, the FDA approved a drug combination of mifepristone and misoprostol (for brevity here, “M+M”) for inducing abortions within 10 weeks of pregnancy. Later the FDA increased the timing to 90 days. The paired drugs (taken 24 to 48 hours apart) result in a very safe abortion at home. This has been proven by data from the FDA’s ongoing registry of authorized prescriptions. Abortion by pill is safe, but in most cases painful and disturbing and almost never undertaken without sober consideration.

Currently, more than 90% of recorded

U.S. abortions occur within 90 days of pregnancy, 54% done with the M+M combination, commonly known as “medical abortion.” In the UK, 97% of elective abortions have been medical abortions.

Traditionally medical abortions in the U.S. were prescribed and overseen by community physicians and women’s health clinics. But three developments are changing the face of medical abortions: growing confidence in the safety and effectiveness of self-managed medical abortions; increasing use of telemedicine, hastened by the pandemic, for initiating treatment; and increasing worldwide demand for, and production of M+M, resulting in growing numbers of foreign on-line providers.

Several websites help women seeking medical abortions in states where it is now illegal. They list and describe online ordering of abortion tablets from a variety of providers. A few of these providers are physician-led clinics that perform the same telemedicine services and mailing of tablets that they do routinely in their own legal-abortion states or countries.

Those in the U.S. have been enabled by “shield laws” passed by their state legislatures that prevent prosecution of the physicians for violations of anti-abortion laws in other states. These sites provide continuing professional support and are more expensive than the e-commerce sites that simply mail M+M. As shield laws increase in number and uniformity, patients in abortion-forbidden states will gain access to

full telemedical abortion treatment, though at a higher price than e-commerce pill providers.

Let’s look at Texas, a no-abortion state, through the eyes of the abortion advisor website *Plan C*: In-person clinics are banned. On-line clinics are banned, but four are available (shielded or international). Alternative (e-commerce) suppliers number 46. Travel to another state cannot be banned but is expensive. Prices for M+M range from \$0 from a Mexican community network to an average of about \$50 for the e-commerce mailers. Telehealth medical clinics in the U.S. and abroad are about \$100 more because of their supervision.

Aid Access was founded in 2018 by the Dutch physician Rebecca Gomperts to provide on-line abortion pills and counseling. This is possible because the U.S. cannot police international mail. Aid Access has increased its deliveries from the Netherlands since the Dobbs decision to meet the needs of pregnant women in no-abortion states. Aid Access has been receiving 4,000 requests a day since Roe v. Wade was overturned, up from 600 to 700 a day previously. Orders from Texas tripled in the weeks following Texas’ ban despite the \$150 fee.

Like many physicians interested in public health, I would like to see on-line abortion services elicit and provide more information and follow-up. These services would increase cost (\$150 vs \$50, a significant difference for many women). For the time being, we must tolerate an uncomfortable compromise.

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Education

by Kay Bertken



Fresno Unified is back in session after the winter break, and the Board of Trustees has met to conduct various contract approvals and briefly discuss its upcoming bond issue.

While things are relatively quiet on the local front, the same cannot be said for schools across the country.



The assertion of parental rights has gained traction in many states. Florida has certainly been in the news regarding limitations on curricula, coursework inclusions, and books deemed inappropriate. Our own county has initiated review of children's books in county libraries by a select parent task force. Beyond libraries and particular curricula, however, other issues have been less well publicized.

My daughter works for a school district in Montana. Under the guise of

parental rights, the state legislature there has recently passed a law asserting that no government entity, including schools, *"may interfere with the fundamental right of parents to direct the upbringing, education, health care and mental health of their child."*

While this law seems uncontroversial on the surface, from the perspective of a school district, it does remarkable things.

In this Montana district and across the country, childhood mental health concerns are well documented. Suicide attempts among students are a major concern. Recent efforts to screen students for signs of problems have been important for offering and directing services.

Consent required

Those screenings must now require parental consent, likely leaving many of the most vulnerable students unscreened or without counseling services that might be required without the delay of obtaining parental con-

Next Board Meetings

Wednesday, Feb. 7, 21

Wednesday, Feb 28/Workshop

sent. It is hard to imagine schools working under such restrictions in handling the challenges of student behavior on their campuses or not responding to the obvious needs of children they see every day. A particular incident of a child in my daughter's district whose parent protested a mental health screening given to his son's classroom is a terrible illustration of the problem. This man's son subsequently died by suicide. Sometimes parents are the last to know.

The forces that responded so negatively to Hilary Clinton's book "It Takes a Village" so many years ago are now directing policy in some places in this country and denying a public interest in the wellbeing of children. While schools, like parents, don't always do the right thing, surely our public interest should not be dismissed under the banner of "parental rights."

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Climate Change *(continued from page 3)*

Despite the challenges of our "bathtub" topography, our air quality is vastly improving as measured against federal health-based air quality targets. To learn more, it is worthwhile to read the 2024 Legislative Platform adopted January 18 by the Governing Board. It is a model of clarity on the complexity of continuing to address air quality. The majority of members of the Governing Board are elected officials from the Valley counties. The Legislative Platform can be accessed on the Valleyair.org website, Governing Board, Agenda for January 18, Item 9. nmrichardson@comcast.net

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Voter Services

by Sue Goldman



The League is excited to be partnering with FresnoLand and KVPR to host several candidate forums. The first will be February 6 and will include back-to-back forums for the Board of Supervisors District 2 and the Fresno City Council District 6 candidates. That will take place starting at 6 p.m. for the first and 7:30 p.m. for the second to be held at the Hyatt Place, El Capitan Room, at 7333 N. Fresno St.



The next one will be on February 12 for the Board of Supervisors District 3 candidates, also starting at 6 p.m. That one will take place at the Dodson Theater in downtown Fresno in the former Bitwise building at 700 Van Ness Ave. Please help us have a large turnout by contacting friends and colleagues from other organizations and inviting them to these events.

California has transitioned to utilizing the national League's **Vote411** platform that will list candidate information as a resource for voters. The League is currently requesting candidates to submit their information to this platform.

There are fewer propositions on the March primary ballot than in past years. At the local level there are three county-wide propositions, a city of Orange Tax measure for police and fire departments, and a Fowler School District Bond Measure. The two county propositions that the Board of Supervisors put on the ballot are explained in the Co-President's message on page 2. The third county-wide proposition is Measure E, explained below. In addition, there is one state-wide proposition regarding mental health, also explained below.

Measure E – CA State University Transactions and Use Tax

This is a different version of a ballot measure that was defeated in the last election. It would add ¼ cent tax for 25 years to support the following at Fresno State: expand access in nursing, agriculture, criminology, science, engineering, and other fields; repair and upgrade campus

MEET THE CANDIDATES

facilities; provide safe drinking water; make the campus more accessible for people with disabilities, and provide scholarships for local students and veterans. It would require a seven member citizen's oversight committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors, California State Chancellor's Office, CSUF Office of the University President. This measure requires a majority vote.

Mental Health:

Proposition 1 authorizes \$6.38 billion to build mental health treatment facilities for those with mental health and substance abuse challenges and provides housing for the homeless. This was originally two measures, now combined into one. It would rename the Mental Health Services Act to the Behavioral Health Services Act. Thirty percent of the funding would be allocated to housing intervention programs. The revenue stream continues to be a 1% tax on incomes above \$1 million. Income from this tax would allow the state to issue \$6.38 billion in bonds. Governor Newsom's Ballot Measure Committee is sponsoring the measure. Those opposed to the measure argue that it would divert funds from treatment programs to government sponsored housing projects.

The Voter Services committee will continue to be busy this year with the primary and general elections. We appreciate the people who have volunteered for the phone bank and the ballot opening. However, we still have time slots to fill so please consider volunteering if you haven't already. suewldtr1951@gmail.com

Candidate forums

February 6: 6 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

February 12: 6 p.m.

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Kay and Richard Bertken

Francine and Murray Farber

Marianne Kast

Jane Worsley

Anonymous

Transportation4All workshop yields problems, perhaps solutions

by Francine Farber

Transportation problems and wishful solutions were brainstormed at a Transportation4All workshop last month led by Marianne Kast and Kay Bertken and attended by attentive and enthusiastic League members and guests.

Member Keisha Thomas explained EV Ridesharing, a program for electric vehicle (EV) ride sharing of bikes, cars and eventually vans that is centered around mobility hubs at Fresno public housing locations. Drivers needing a car, for example, pay a one-time \$20 initial fee, complete personal and payment information forms, and then are able to use a car for an hour or a day at a time, even overnight, throughout the state. When they return the vehicle they just complete payment and re-charge the vehicle at the site. Other rules and regulations apply.



The rest of the program was devoted to an explanation of Measure C and invited participants to brainstorm current local

(County) problems with transportation and possible solutions for these problems which will be passed on to the 10-member group that is working to re-write Measure C for a future election ballot. Among the problems were lack of public information about how to use the transportation system and lack of coordination between Fresno and Clovis transportation systems. The solutions included a media campaign to literally get the public “on board” by making public transportation more friendly, passing out flyers about routes and schedules and explaining health benefits; and getting Fresno City and Fresno County political leaders to work together on solutions for bicycles, cars and pedestrians.



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Behavioral Health

(continued from page 4)

At a recent Board meeting, Department Director Susan Holt provided an overview of the Department’s Substance Use Disorder (SUD) System of Care. Fresno County offers both prevention and treatment services. The 22 programs are operated primarily by contracted providers.

Outpatient and Intensive Outpatient Services are provided in the metropolitan areas. Rural areas are covered through telehealth, though the department seeks opportunities to expand in-person care. Youth services are offered on many school campuses.

Adult Residential and Withdrawal Management are provided in Fresno and out-of-county. Adolescent Residential Services are available only in Los Angeles County. Narcotic Treatment Programs/ Opioid Treatment Programs/ Medication Assisted Treatment programs are in metropolitan Fresno County.

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Housing

(continued from page 4)

The state League opposes Proposition 1, believing that the flaws of the measure outweigh its benefits. The League opposes earmarking funds through ballot initiatives, citing that action as discouraging the development of alternate models of care and preventing the use of funds to address urgent needs that may arise. The League also believes




that this measure was rushed through the legislature, ignoring the arguments raised by health care and civil rights advocates that community-based mental health care is preferable over institutionalization mandated by the initiative.

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