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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



January 2-31
First Ladies Exhibit
Fresno City Hall
Reception January 9
5 p.m.

Monday, January 13
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m. Stone Soup

Thursday, February 6
Congressional
Candidates Forum
Fresno State, 5-8 pm.
Peters Auditorium

Monday, February 10
Centennial Event
Black Women and
Suffrage
Details will follow

**MEMBERS AND
GUESTS WELCOME**
To ALL
LEAGUE MEETINGS
AND EVENTS

Don't
Miss the
Opening
Event
in the
League's
Centennial
Celebration
Year.

Featuring
our own
Dr. Diane
Blair, an
expert on
the
First
Ladies
*Free and
open to the
public*

The First Ladies
An exhibit of historic portraits from Martha to Melania
Honoring the United States Centennial Anniversary of Women's Suffrage
January 2020 • Fresno City Hall

Opening Reception
Thursday, January 9, 2020
5:00 - 8:00 p.m.



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OF FRESNO

In collaboration with
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President's Message



This month we kick off a year of celebrating in honor of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. There are many events planned; be sure you're receiving our weekly e-newsletter and the monthly *Voter*. You won't want to miss a thing!

How has the vote of women changed the direction of our country? Historians generally credit the passage of Prohibition, the most consequential legislation following the 19th amendment, as the first example of the power of women voting. That is probably a distinction we'd rather downplay, but women have made their mark on legislation in many ways since then.

I believe that our societal safety nets like Social Security, SNAP, TANF, and Medi-Cal, are the result of women voting. While women may not have written the legislation, the power of their vote advanced the legislation. Today's most talked-about issues—reproductive rights, immigration, access to healthcare—are those with greater effect on women and families. And since 1964, when the number of women who vote eclipsed the number of men, “women's issues” are now absolutely mainstream.

The election of women to public office, a natural result of women's right to vote, transformed expectations for women. The recognition that women, too, could reason, exercise judgement, demonstrate social responsibility and effect action was revolutionary. At this point, it's quite embarrassing that the US ranks 75th for female representation in government (Mexico is #1!)

Worldwide, a majority of countries have passed laws to address underrepresentation. In the US action groups (Emily's List, NWPC, Ignite, Women's Campaign Fund, RepresentWomen, etc.) have proliferated to advance parity, but at a slower pace than legislation would accomplish the same job. If you attended the forum, “Why Don't Women Run,” you heard other reasons that women continue to be missing from elected office.

How would our nation look with more than half women legislators? I have to believe that there would be greater collaboration, more clearly defined national direction, improved lives for all children, and legislation striking down racial, economic, and gender bias wherever it inhibits opportunity for all.

We won't achieve parity in 2020, but my wish for the new year is that we take some big steps in that direction.

Marianne

MEMBER NEWS

Please edit your roster



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Fresno, CA 93710



The League is gathering signatures statewide to qualify this initiative for the November 2020 ballot. This measure will generate \$12 billion annually for schools and local governments by reassessing commercial real estate on an annual basis rather than only when sold. Residential properties are excluded as are businesses owning property worth less than \$3 million. We have petitions available if you have time to work on this. Read more at: schoolsandcommunitiesfirst.org.

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

Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 79, No.1 Editor: Francine M. Farber

Climate Change



by Andrea Farber De Zubiria

One of the goals of the Climate Action Committee is to gather information about local, state and federal initiatives to address climate change. Our committee met with Ann Kloose, the Sustainability Manager for The City of Fresno Department of Public Works and her assistant, Sarah Wood. Ms. Kloose is currently focusing on various methods of improving energy efficiency and saving money for the city.



For example, when she was hired a few months ago, she noticed that there are over one thousand different

energy accounts within the local government;. She has saved the city quite a bit of money through rate adjustments with PG&E. By converting streetlights to LEDs, power usage decreased by 9.9 million kWh hours per year--a savings of \$1.6 million per year. Other facilities like the city parking garages, Fresno Yosemite International Airport, and the Selland Arena were also given upgrades and lighting changes, with a total annual savings of \$4.7 million.

According to a brochure produced by their department, the 28 million annual kWh hours saved are equivalent to taking 4,272 cars off the road or saving 2 million gallons of gas. Future projects for a number of city departments such as the Police, Fire and Parks departments, include reducing fluorescent lighting and replacing it with LEDs, installing individually controlled thermostats, replacing obsolete solar panels, fixing deteriorating roofs, replacing HVAC units past useful life, and catching up with deferred maintenance. While the cost of continued upgrades would be \$5.5 million, the estimated savings would be \$10.5 million.

The city is also planning to convert to all electric vehicles. There is state funding for the electric vehicle transition. The Council of Governments is planning to add more charging stations to decrease so-called "range anxiety." It is reassuring that there is a division of city government tasked with increasing energy efficiency; hopefully these positive changes will be an example for other businesses and agencies.

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Water News

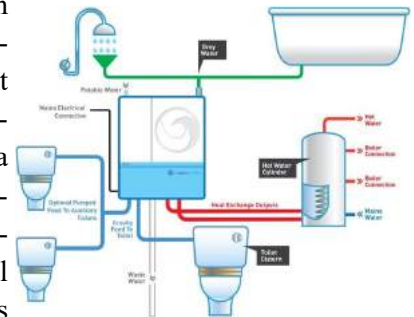


by Diane Merrill

In October we submitted comments on our local North Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency's Draft Groundwater Sustainability Plan required by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Our comment on water conservation was recommended for inclusion in the finalized plan which will be submitted to the State in January.

The Executive Summary of this nearly 800-page plan is the most likely section to be read by the general public. There was no mention of water conservation in the Summary, even though water conservation will require the involvement and buy-in by the general public. The following paragraph was buried in another section of the plan, and we recommended that it be added to the Executive Summary.

"Water conservation has been and will continue to be an important tool in local water management, as well as a key strategy in achieving sustainable groundwater management. All of the member agencies



engage in some form of water conservation including water use restrictions, water metering, education, tiered rates, etc. These water conservation programs were tested during the 2014-2015 drought, which included State-mandated urban water restrictions for the first time. Details of water conservation programs can be found in various documents, including Urban Water Management Plans and USBR (United States Bureau of Reclamation) Water Management Plans. Many agencies also have multi-stage water shortage contingency plans to help conserve water in droughts. Efficient water management practices will include maximizing the beneficial uses of water along with recycled water use as it can replace potable water use in some instances. Future efforts will include an increased focus on elevating awareness on groundwater overdraft and land subsidence and explaining the requirements of SGMA. Some or all of these conservation efforts will be necessary to achieve groundwater sustainability."

Affordable Housing

by Nyla Zender



Last month Fresno City Council discussed a resolution recommended by three Council members to establish a General Plan review committee.

Some Council members maintained that the current plan was failing in its commitment to infill and growth area development. They suggested that the city's sphere of influence (SOI) has restricted developers' ability to provide a product the public wants.



They recommend enlarging the SOI especially on the southern boundary of Fresno. If the resolution to set up a GP Review Committee passed, the 17 members would study the issues raised and recommend whether or not to go forward with a new GP update.

The League opposed the resolution and any need for an update. The current General Plan is excellent. It includes a lot of public input, focuses on infill that includes developing and upgrading downtown, transit corridors and other neighborhoods around the city. It maintains the city's SOI that does provide areas for growth and development. According to the city planning staff there is land available to build 289,159 housing units. Developers prefer building on large areas of vacant land, but this would lead to sprawl and the need for costly new infrastructure as well as the movement of people from older areas of the city to new areas. The current plan recommends growing up, not out.

Our current plan is well designed and incorporates long-term vision. We need to give it time. If we have not seen the number of housing starts as projected, it is not the fault of the plan. The Council needs to put more focus and energy on implementing the current plan but unfortunately the resolution passed 6 to 1.

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Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



Last month members of the Fresno County Behavioral Health Board visited the Juvenile Justice Campus to see the facility, learn about its services for adolescents who are incarcerated and, specifically, to hear about care provided for youth with behavioral health disorders.

The Juvenile Justice Campus includes Juvenile Court, offices for its staff and space for probation staff; a section of the campus is for the detention of youth awaiting trial and adjudication; and a third section houses and cares for those who have been committed to serve time for their offenses.

The Campus was built to house 400 young people; on the day we visited, the population was approximately 170 adolescents. Board members were surprised, and pleased, to learn that the number of youth who are incarcerated is relatively small. Staff indicated that changes in laws, especially those related to drug possession, and diversion programs are allowing youth to remain in the community rather than being incarcerated for their offenses.

Our group visited one of the housing pods in the detention section. Each pod provides private rooms (cells), including a bed, desk, chair, toilet, and sink, for each youth; showers are in a common area. There is a central room for meals and activities, with attached outdoor space. A school classroom also is included in each pod.

All youth, who are willing, meet with clinicians to determine their mental health needs. Suicide ideation is a frequent concern, so those youth who may be at risk are placed on "watch" to assure their safety. There are no isolation cells at the Campus but safety cells are available for youth who may be a danger to themselves; they may be held for up to 72 hours before being returned to housing units or sent to a psychiatric facility. This year there have been only two suicide attempts, and no completed suicides at the Campus.

All in all, Board members were impressed with the cleanliness and functionality of the facility and with the commitment of the staff to the adolescents in their care. There is still time to get in your ideas for the 2020-2023 MHSA 3-Year Plan at mhsa@fresnocountyca.gov

Education

by Kay Bertken



The Fresno Unified Trustees met only once since before Thanksgiving and will only meet once more before the winter holiday vacation.

Role of law enforcement

At its early December meeting there was a lengthy discussion of probation and police personnel on campuses prompted by new contracts for service. The role of the officers was critically discussed, with Trustee Veva Islas particularly concerned about their coordination with district policies and intervention personnel. She was concerned about the police interventions leading to the juvenile justice system rather than the district behavioral programs provided by school psychologists, counselors, restorative justice personnel and others. A discussion of the role of the parole officers lead to a commitment by the District Department of Prevention and Intervention to meet and coordinate with the officers.

Arts programs reviewed

At that meeting there was also a review of the District's visual and performing arts program. The programs have seen some significant expansion. There are now 54 full time elementary music teachers. It was not so many years ago that all elementary music was cut due to severe budget constraints.

The Real Art Collaborative, patterned after the program at McLane, has expanded to other high schools. Students in that program focus their projects around socially relevant topics and hold exhibitions at the downtown M Street Gallery. Last year the topic was

human trafficking; this year it is in recognition of contributions in celebration of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage.

Currently all FUSD third grade students visit the Fresno Arts Center; the fourth graders learn to play the recorder and the fifth graders attend a live theater performance. The district has also won a grant to increase arts for the special needs students of the district to add to the United Sound program that pairs special needs students with an abled student who acts as a music partner and mentor.

Dashboard results posted

The California Department of Education has posted its 2019 data dashboard, scoring districts and individual schools on the basis of chronic absences, suspensions, graduation rates, college and career preparation, as well as English language arts and math achievement.

The dashboard displays its assessments from very low to very high as colors, red for the lowest, orange, yellow(average), green and blue(the highest). Overall FUSD has had modest changes over the three years of assessments with considerable variation among the individual schools. Overall there has been a decline from yellow to orange for increased chronic absences, a consistent orange for suspensions, a decline from green to yellow graduation rates and green to orange in college and career readiness, up to yellow from orange in ELA and stable yellow in math.

The dashboard provides the analysis by school indicating which schools fall in each color relative to their previous ratings.

At its last meeting scheduled before the holiday break, the trustees will go through the dashboard findings.

Charter applications to be voted

They will also vote on the application for a new high school campus of the Aspen charter schools that currently operate K-8 charters in the district. They will also receive an application for a new independent study charter. The district is soliciting the opinions of the community for its next round of Local Control funding and budgeting. The questionnaire can be found on the district website.

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VOTING AND THE CENSUS

The Voter Services Committee is looking at engaging in the following activities in the new year: voter registration at senior living facilities, providing information on the census and providing information on the new voting procedures. All registered voters should have received information from the Fresno County Elections Office regarding the new procedures.

All registered voters will receive a vote by mail ballot. Vote centers will replace polling places and voters may vote at any center in the county. Ten vote centers will open on February 22 and an additional 40+ vote centers will open on February 29.

At the last meeting the U.S. Census Bureau Staff asked for the committee's help in spreading the word about census jobs. The bureau needs 5,000 applicants with a significant need for applicants with language skills. The bureau plans to fill 8,000 positions by the end of the month. Pay in our area is \$18/hour. The representatives also shared recruiting materials.

Sue Goldman

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



As I type this, reliable news sources predict that none of the prescription price control bills discussed in my last column will pass Congress this year or even in 2020. However, there is strong bipartisan, bicameral, and executive support for bills that curb surprise billing. These iniquitous charges arrive after a stay at an in-network hospital during which the patient unknowingly receives services from out-of-network physicians. Those physicians—ER specialists, radiologists, pathologists, surgical subspecialists—then bill the patient often shockingly large sums. Surprise!

Who is your provider?

Logic would demand that in our already crazy quilt health system hospitals would require all their physicians to sign up as providers under all the health plans that the hospital supports. This is currently impossible because of the stunningly complex and varied formulas for how hospital-based physicians are paid. In many communities the health plans are also numerous and complex, forcing physicians to choose just a few to work with, usually determined by fees for the types of services they provide. Many of these physicians work for multiple hospitals, including small-town hospitals that cannot dependably recruit specialists. Because of these factors, no federal or state bills have taken the seemingly simple step to stop surprise billing: mandating that hospitals and their physicians maintain matching portfolios of health plan contracts.

Staffing through private contractors

In fact, hospitals are pleased to obtain staffing for specialty services on a private contractor basis, eliminating the need to provide partial or full salaries and benefits for their entire physician staff. To facilitate such staffing, a hospital staffing industry has emerged comprised of about 40 firms with a combined asset base of about five billion dollars. Private equity funds have played a major role in financing this expansion, recognizing the need to migrate where the money is. These firms have organized a nationwide lobbying campaign against state and federal laws that would curb surprise billing. While hospitals are not being asked to pay for unexpected bills—the losses would

be borne by the physicians and health plans—the American Hospital Association is working along with the private equity interests to sustain its current model for staffing by lobbying to fine-tune inevitable Congressional action—and in the process hold up passage of any bill this year.

California is special. In 2009, the California Supreme Court held that billing disputes over emergency medical care must be resolved by the emergency department physicians and the health plans. The patient could not be billed for these charges. That immediately changed the medical billing landscape, but Californians continued to see surprise billing for non-emergency care until the passage of AB 72 in early 2017. That bill served as the model for the legislation now before Congress. A key provision of this model was that the amount paid to the billing physician by the health plans would be determined by a formula based on an average of prevailing contractual payments. This appears reasonable in context of patients being dunned for unexpected charges, but organized physician and hospital groups predicted catastrophic closures of small hospitals and generalized hospital staffing problems that, now two years since the passage of AB 72, have not occurred.

Legislation to resolve billing disputes

The success of AB 72 has led to AB 1162, now before the California legislature, extending the provisions of AB 72 to *all* third-party payers. The bills in the House and Senate would essentially reduplicate California's measures, applying them to the entire country. Passage this year was imminent as of early December, but intense lobbying by private equity firms appears to have infected House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, who has recently sponsored a competing bill more accommodating to the hospital staffing industry. It substitutes arbitration for out-of-network fees instead of formula-based payments. To outsiders, it seems a trivial difference, but one can only assume that there is a significant cash benefit to the staffing industry from arbitration.

This tortuous pathway to solving an obvious problem with our health system invites questions about the value of our fee-for-service model for universal health care.

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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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