

Phone: 559-226—VOTE

Info.lwvfresno@gmail.com

Web site:

www.lwvfresno.org



Monday, Jan. 12

Regular Board
Meeting

4 p.m.

In Person, Stone
Soup

Thursday, Jan. 29

Member Meeting

5:30 p.m.

In Person, Stone
Soup

Brenda Solorzano

January 19

THE

FRESNO VOTER

Our 86th Year



Please join us on Thursday, January 29

5:30 p.m. * Stone Soup

Meet BRENDA SOLORZANO, CEO of the California Endowment

Brenda Solórzano is known as a leader focused on continual learning while making time to play and enjoy life. Solórzano is the President and CEO of The California Endowment. She was appointed to the position in 2024. This is a return for Brenda, after working at the Endowment early in her philanthropic career.



Brenda began her career in advocacy circles and has continued to ensure community voice remains at the center of her philanthropic work. She is a nationally recognized leader in trust-based philanthropy, a values-driven approach that advances equity, shifts power, and builds mutually accountable relationships between funders and nonprofits.

After immigrating to the United States from Guatemala as a baby, Brenda was raised in San Francisco. She is married to Randall Caudle, an immigration attorney, and has two college-aged children.

**MEMBERS AND GUESTS WELCOME
NO CHARGE—REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED**



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Co-President's Message

by Kay Bertken



I hope all of you had a restful and happy holiday season because we will be starting this year with a long to-do list and would love to have your help.

Beginning this month we will be scheduling meetings with Fresno County's state legislators. and letting them know our interests. The State League asks that we do these interviews each year to find out what each of them is prioritizing and for us to send them this information so that they can better focus their lobbying efforts.

In February we will be hosting our yearly program planning meeting, at which we will determine the local issues for focus in 2026. We will also develop recommendations to send to the LWVUS for its work. Attend and help us make those decisions. This will be a great opportunity for our many new members and some of us oldsters, who may know less than we thought, to learn about League positions and processes.

During these early months we will be recruiting those of you who might join us in implementing an expanded voter outreach effort before these oh-so-important primary elections in June.

Our monthly member meetings will continue to introduce people and programs of importance to our local advocacy efforts. Join us at these informative events. See page 1 for our January meeting information. If you have suggestions for people or topics you would like us to schedule for one of our later member meetings, we would like to hear your ideas.

Once again, we will ask your help in answering phones and unfolding ballots for the Elections Office in June and November. But that work is not our only need. If you are motivated to "do something" like so many of us are



December 2025

No Board meeting was held during December 2025

THANKS TO OUR REGULAR MEMBERS WHO WERE COLUMN WRITERS THIS PAST YEAR

Dr. Richard Bertken

Andrea Farber De Zubiria

Carolyn Evans

Sherri Gibson



right now, we have possibilities beyond what I have already mentioned -- help with our website, attend community meetings, or contact local candidates to submit their candidate statements to our Vote 411 project. These are only examples. Contact a board member to talk about what you might have time to do.

Many wishes to us all for a happy, healthy, and productive New

Year.

Kay

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Climate Action

by Andrea Farber De Zubiria



Given the increasing energy demands in the U.S., it is critical to speed up the permitting of clean energy infrastructure projects. This is necessary to reduce the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change and air pollution. It is also needed to make the energy required by American households and businesses more affordable.

Currently it can take many years to get approval for projects that increase access to solar or wind energy or update the grid to transmit energy. Lack of staffing, variation in procedures between states and localities, duplication of requirements, and the six years allowed for environmental reviews and lawsuits to block projects are some contributing factors.

This is true for all types of energy projects, but there are more clean energy projects awaiting approval than fossil fuel based projects. The good news is that there is interest in streamlining the permitting reform process on both sides of the aisle in Congress.

Unfortunately, much of the proposed legislation is not comprehensive enough to address the gamut of issues that slow permitting. And the December 2025 passage of The SPEED Act (Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development Act) in the House is very problematic.

The SPEED Act only streamlines the environmental review process, not any of the other issues causing delays. While people on both sides of the aisle see room to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, Republican lawmakers amended the bill with wording that would allow the Trump administration to exclude any projects he dislikes (such as off shore wind). This would give a dangerous advantage to fossil fuel projects. The American Clean Power Association, which represents the renewable energy industry, dropped its support for the bill after the changes were made favoring oil and gas projects.

Republican members of Congress from the Valley, Vince Fong, Tom McClintock and David Valadao, voted to pass the SPEED Act with these damaging amendments, as did Democrat Adam Gray. Jim Costa-D voted against. It is hoped by those who are concerned about air quality and climate chaos that the pro-fossil fuel amendments will be removed when this comes before the Senate. *Afarberdezub@gmail.com*

Housing

by Marianne Kast



Last month the Fresno City Council sent the Southeast Development Area (SEDA) specific plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Report back to the City Planning and Development Department for revision. This plan would have opened 9,000 acres of (mostly) farmland to 43,000 residential units and some accompanying commercial development.

300-plus people opposed SEDA at the December 18 City Council meeting for a variety of reasons. From air quality and water supply concerns to incomplete infrastructure within existing city limits and a potential \$3 billion funding shortfall, about 50 opponents addressed the Council.

But one of the best arguments against SEDA comes from the City's own Housing Element. According to that December, 2024 document, "Fresno has many vacant residential development opportunities along with underutilized non-vacant sites with redevelopment potential with



sufficient capacity to meet and exceed the identified housing need (about 37,000 units) through 2031."

Additionally, the Housing Element notes, "There are several hundred acres of agricultural land, mostly on the periphery of the city limits, that have been annexed into the city and zoned for residential development. Some already have approved subdivision maps and are planned for development in the short term."

If 85% of the units projected for the SEDA plan can be accommodated in the city's current boundaries, the argument for extending the city limits by 9,000 acres seems ludicrous.

Voter Services

by Sue Goldman



While California, Texas and Indiana have all made long news cycles in regards to redistricting middecade, significant mid-decade redistricting activity is currently underway in other states, primarily driven by new laws and ongoing litigation ahead of the 2026 elections. This activity is highly contentious and involves both voluntary redraws by state legislatures and court-ordered changes.

As of December 2025, six states have successfully enacted and implemented new congressional maps outside of the standard post-census cycle:

California, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Utah. Several other states are currently involved in the redistricting process through legislative efforts or legal battles: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana: have congressional or state legislative maps that are subject to change due to ongoing litigation, primarily over claims of racial

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Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



Public comment for the past two months has been focused on conservatorship, both treatment and placement. Noted this month by a provider of emergency care, today individuals considered for involuntary care and conservatorship have a greater need for treatment than providers have seen in the past. Perhaps evaluation of mental stability should be more stringent prior to release from hospitals and/or from conservatorship.

Another form of conservatorship unfamiliar to many is a Murphy Conservatorship. This is a court-ordered conservatorship for individuals facing serious felony charges who are gravely disabled due to a mental disorder and thus incompetent to stand trial, even after three years. Its purpose is to protect the public from dangerous individuals and provide necessary care for individuals, who are moved from the criminal justice system to mental health treatment

This month the Substance Use Disorders (SUD) Committee learned about the changes made to the laws governing involuntary psychiatric holds throughout California. Criteria for "gravely disabled" now means any of the following: *A condition in which a person, as a result of a mental health disorder, a severe substance use disorder, or a co-occurring mental health disorder and a severe substance use disorder, is unable to provide for their basic personal needs for food, clothing, shelter, personal safety, or necessary medical care.* An individual meeting the criteria may be placed on a 5150 involuntary psychiatric hold by a designated professional.

While these changes must be implemented in January 2026, the state does not have facilities approved and designated that can admit individuals with severe substance use disorders for intensive treatment. Counties are waiting for direction and approval from the State Department of Health Care Services to expand the ability of other types of facilities, such as Mental Health Rehabilitation Centers and Psychiatric Health Facilities to serve individuals with severe Substance Use Disorders.

The Adult Services Committee heard from the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) Older Adult Team. This team serves individuals 60 and older with moderate to severe mental health disorders. Currently there are approximately 155 persons, ages 60-81, assigned to the treatment team. About 85% have co-occurring SUD diagnoses, and 30% are unhoused. Services include individual and group therapy, psychosocial rehabilitation, linkage to community services, case management, and care coordination evansalca@comcast.net



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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Health Care

by Richard Bertken M.D.



The One Big Beautiful Bill Act along with Trump's Department of Health poked holes in women's healthcare in three ways.

First is a general reduction in funding and access to *all* Medicaid services, including reproductive care. Second is the denial of payment for *all* Medicaid services from healthcare providers that provide abortion services. Third is reduced and more selective support for the venerable women's healthcare program known as Title X (Ten), a major funder of contraceptive care

About 950 centers across the U.S. specifically provide reproductive healthcare, including birth control methods and abortions or abortion referrals. Planned Parenthood operates or coordinates the activities of over 600 of these facilities, many of which provide medical and, less frequently, surgical abortions.

The implementation of the OBBBA regulations will require complex assessment of the degree of connectedness of abortion activities to non-abortion healthcare services. Abortion programs have traditionally kept a low profile, and most have extensive and much-needed non-abortion female health services that are essential in their community.

Such entities may dodge the designation as "prohibited entities" (banned from receiving any Medicaid payments). Current projections have the law decommissioning somewhere

between a quarter and two-thirds of abortion-providing clinics. The loss of income from Medicaid will be an existential threat to these clinics. Likely-to-be targeted clinics are filing lawsuits, doing corporate restructuring, closing, or dramatically reducing services, seeking private funding, and turning to their state partners (where possible) in Medicaid care.

It would be wonderful to live in a world where abortion was dramatically reduced. Currently, 40% of pregnancies in the U.S. are accidental. Around the developed world, the unintended pregnancy rate is not much better. The best long-term solution to the problem of abortion remains the apparently thorny problem of preventing unintended pregnancies.

Making contraceptives accessible and affordable throughout reproductive years is fundamental. All oral contraceptives and other FDA-approved contraceptive methods are legal but not necessarily accessible. Just getting and maintaining a prescription may present insurmountable problems for the rural and poor.

To address these issues, a remarkable organization named Upstream USA, funded primarily by large donors, has developed a women's healthcare curriculum that has been incorporated into over 150 community health centers in 20 states over the last decade. Melding reproductive care with primary care is a great idea only if the additional demands on staffing are addressed through easily implanted

algorithms, training and technical assistance, and data management tools. These are the core of Upstream's didactics and tools

A close-to-home example of Upstream in action is its adoption by UCSF-Fresno's Mobile HeAL. This program has brought, among other routine healthcare services, patient-centered contraceptive care to underserved communities in Fresno County since March of 2024.

Upstream is anxious to report major reductions in unintended pregnancies and abortions in the regions where it is fully operational, but cuts to Medicaid and the cost of epidemiologic surveys have put long-term population studies out of reach. Regrettably, the current administration is currently not amenable to scientific studies even if they could make healthcare more efficient.

Voter Services

(continued from page 4)

disrimination under federal or state law.

Florida, Maryland, Virginia have taken official action toward voluntary redistricting. New York has considered new maps in response to actions in other states, though implementation for the 2026 election cycle is uncertain. Indiana has passed redrawn maps, but the proposal was rejected in the State Senate in December 2025. In Wisconsin, pending legal fights exist over both congressional and state legislative lines.

At least 11 states have explicit constitutional or statutory prohibitions against mid-decade redistricting for state legislative, congressional, or both types of districts.

Education

by Kay Bertken



Fresno Unified trustees elected new officers this month, reflecting a new rotation scheme.

Previously the board president and clerk were nominated members and voted on by the board members in a public meeting. That process was subject to disputes or friendships among the trustees. The new system appoints a clerk on the basis of their sequential region number, and the clerk advances to the presidency at the next annual election. Veva Islas, who was the clerk, is the new president; Andy Levine is the new clerk.

Facing declining enrollments, the district is working to manage budget reductions. Enrollment is down 1,100 students this year, and next year it is projected to be down another 1,200. The budget impact is estimated to be \$50 million.

The results from one cost-cutting move, an early retirement offer, yielded 573 takers, an estimated savings of \$13.7 million in the first year. That savings will only accrue if the retir-

ees are not replaced. The average age of those potential retirees is 62.5 years and the average tenure with FUSD is 28 years—a very experienced group.

FUSD is the authorizing agent for 10 charter schools. The trustees will be addressing the petitions for charter renewals and revisions in the new year so heard a report on the process. State controls on the charter school experiment have changed since 2018 when our League studied the charters within Fresno Unified's boundaries.

In 2018 there were 8 schools chartered by Fresno Unified, six more chartered by small districts outside of this district, and three chartered by the Fresno County Office of Education within FUSD boundaries. It is no longer legal for one school district to authorize a charter school in another district.

It was one of the major concerns that our study pointed out when we noted Orange Center and Raisin City, among others, authorizing

large independent-study high schools here in Fresno. The only agencies now authorized to charter a school within a school district boundary are the district itself, the County Office and the State Department of Education.

The academic success of a charter school, one of the criteria for renewing a charter, is now measured on a three-tier scale by the State Department of Education. A High rating is a presumptive renewal for 5,6 or 7 years (5 used to be the maximum); Medium has no default recommendation but may be renewed for 5 years; Low is a presumptive denial but may be renewed for two years if there is an approved improvement plan.

Aspen Ridge is the only one of FUSD authorized schools that is currently in the Low category, but it is not up for renewal until 2027-2028 and has time for improvements.

kaybertken752@gmail.com

Another Postponement:

Lawsuit delayed until March

Once again, the Fresno County Superior Court has postponed the first court hearing concerning the Fresno League's lawsuit against the County of Fresno for the County's February 2024 adoption of a revised General Plan.

The County has sought, and the court has granted, six postponements of the CMC. The latest postponement moves the CMC to March 26, 2026.

Why the extraordinary delay? That's difficult to say, but the postponement may be due, in part, to a similar lawsuit brought by the City of Fresno and to the County's difficulty in preparing a complete administrative record for the case. The two suits have since been consolidated, which means that they will be heard simultaneously by

the same judge. The two most recent postponements are based on statements filed with the court by both the City and the County saying that the two parties are working diligently to settle their case out of court. Until that process runs its course, the League's case is on hold.

Delay may also be the result of the County's seeming inability to put together a complete administrative record (AR), which is the collection of County-prepared documents that attorneys will use to support their legal arguments and the court will use to render a decision. In September 2024, the County filed with the court a 33,045-page AR, but because that record was seriously incomplete, the League filed an objection with the court. As a result, the County added another 7,209 pages to the record. Unfortunately, the AR still appears incomplete, and that deficiency may cause additional delay.

radleyreep@netzero.net

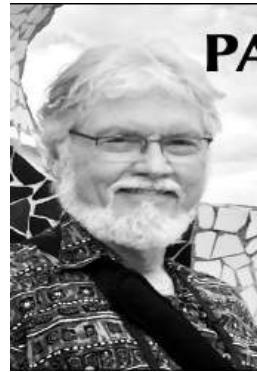


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