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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



Regular Board Meeting
Monday, January 22
5 p.m.—League Office
Note change of date

Program Planning Meeting
Saturday, February 24
4 p.m.—Stone Soup

Regular Board Meeting
Monday, February 26
5 p.m.—League Office
Note change of date

Members and guests are always
invited to all League meetings
and events



Happy New Year 2018



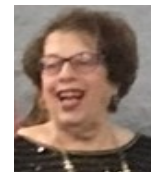
Kay



Lisa



Patty



Francine



Jerri



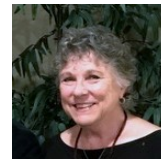
Sue



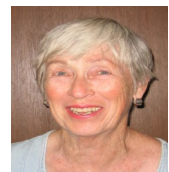
Marianne



Diane



Dolores



Mary



Jane



Nyla



President's Message



Since last spring, the LWVF Housing Committee has been asking numerous experts in the housing industry the same question: What are you doing to encourage affordable housing? From developers to non-profit CEOs, everyone agrees that lack of money at the state and local levels is the number one reason for Fresno's affordable housing shortage of 40,000 units. But next to lack of money, local experts say, is our lack of will to deal with this problem.

Here's how it is supposed to work: Each community's general plan includes a housing element which outlines its existing and projected housing needs. A state-wide regional needs allocation process determines every community's fair share of housing to be built, and cities and counties are responsible for incorporating their share into their housing element.

The allocation process is complex, but what happens when cities or counties don't meet the needs allocated to them? Basically, not much. Non-compliant communities become ineligible for certain housing related state-grant funds. These funds have always been a very small part of local government resources, and now represent even less as Governor Brown has steadfastly refused to add much in the way of housing funds to recent state budgets.

Here's the reality in the City of Fresno: For the years 2008-2013, Fresno constructed 14% of the Very Low Income (<50% of median income), 25% of the Low Income (<60% median income) units, and just 2% of the Moderate Income units it was responsible for in the statewide allocation process. I can only think of a few affordable housing developments that have opened in recent years so I'm pretty sure those grim statistics have become dire needs in 2017.

Several statewide housing bills were approved by the state legislature and signed into law by Governor Brown. Most of the money raised by SB 2, the \$75 real estate transaction fee, and SB 3, the \$4 billion housing bond, will help to pay for development of housing for Low Income Californians. Other bills signed are supposed to make it easier for developers to get housing projects approved, and those projects must reserve a percentage of homes for Low Income residents.

But statewide legislation will never be enough. First, the cities in the Valley will have to compete with the population-heavy areas of the state for those funds. Next, the cost of construction in this area is not significantly less than that in the rest of California, but the rent potential is much lower, making it nearly impossible for developments to pencil out without substantial public subsidies. And finally, local elected officials are barely talking about affordable housing needs here.

We cannot begin to deal with the disparities in opportunity and success for Fresno's citizens if we cannot provide good quality, affordable housing for all. In 2018, let us demand action to create the housing that so many of us need.

- Marianne

The VOTER is a monthly publication of the League of Women Voters of Fresno
Mailing Address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno CA 93710
Volume 77, No 1 Editor: Francine Farber

Member News

Please edit your roster



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The League is a 501 © (3) non-profit organization so your dues payments and donations are tax deductible and gratefully accepted.

Join a Priority Committee!

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



As we continue to discuss the possibility of co-sponsoring a series of public engagement meetings around Fresno, including downtown, we are also hoping to secure a grant to finance speakers, site rental, publicity and printing, and refreshments.

Next meeting: To be announced

Chair: Marianne Kast: fourkasts@gmail.com



EDUCATION

The committee is continuing to work on its report on charter schools in Fresno. It is anticipated that it will eventually be available not only to League members but to interest groups and perhaps even the general public. Some members are continuing to research the complex area of finance.

See additional Education article page 7

Next meeting: To be announced

Chair: Kay Bertken: kayb@csufresno.edu

HOUSING

The committee continues to hear from local housing experts. Most recently Preston Prince, Dir of the Fresno Housing Authority, discussed the dearth of affordable housing in Fresno, citing a number of reasons including the high cost of developing it due to massive regulations.

See additional Housing article page 6 and President's Message, page 2

Next meeting: to be announced

**Co-Chairs: Marianne Kast:
fourkasts@gmail.com**

**Nyla Zender:
nylajz@comcast.net**



RUTH HEISE REYNOLDS

We regret to announce the passing of Ruth Heise Reynolds, age 90, on December 6. Ruth was a League member since 2011 and the partner of John Donaldson. She was a retired educator. Ruth and John traveled frequently to the East Coast to her home and family in Connecticut.

Ask a friend to join LWVF



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Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



Is our pharmaceutical industry, commonly known as “Pharma,” guilty of anti-competitive marketing? My grand-dog, Brucie, has a strong case for the prosecution. A feisty, athletic West Highland white terrier, she (with the gender-bending name) has canine atopic dermatitis—allergic itching. She no longer scratches herself into reddened and denuded skin because of regular injections of a complex biopharmaceutical made by the veterinary drug giant, Zoetis, an offspring of Pfizer.

This drug is just like agents I occasionally prescribe to control rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. Brucie’s treatment costs about \$30 a month. If my patients went to Walmart to purchase similar agents, the cost would be between \$3800 and \$5000 per month. The actual purchasers of these drugs are pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs—Express Scripts, OptumRx, CVS are the biggest), negotiating prices and filling prescriptions on behalf of health insurers. PBMs negotiate just a 15% discount off retail prices on branded biopharmaceuticals.

The 100-fold difference between human and dog pricing is partially explained by the byzantine pathway that drugs follow to get into the hands of their human clients. For dogs, it is a simple matter. Their owners are responsible for buying products to treat allergic itching, for example, based on price and performance in a competitive and transparent market. Pharma, dealing with humans, faces much higher costs for research and development, as well as a much greater threat of legal actions from patients and their industry competitors. Marketing to physicians and directly to the public adds about 20% to the cost of their products. **But these overheads do not explain why humans pay 100 times as much for the allergy therapy.**

When these drugs first emerged as major advances in the treatment of diseases 20 years ago, their high price—then averaging \$800 per month—was attributed to manufacturing costs. By all expert accounts, these costs have plummeted while the prices have increased five-fold. If these products did not have competition for therapeutic value, their high prices might be understandable. But in my field, at least, there is healthy competition.

So why are the prices so high? The charitable interpretation is pharmaceutical industry is socking away money to fund R&D to cure cancer, allergies, and autoimmune illness. That is what they claim. But data from their own industry

shows that investments in R&D from 2007 to 2017 have not kept pace with the drug prices, while marketing costs have soared.

Getting better prices for drugs starts with the purchasing agents, the PBMs, the most important of which could be the federal government. The Medicare Modernization Act of 2003—creating Medicare D—rejected the idea of a national PBM and instead adopted a pharmaceutical industry-written bill which generated numerous PBMs for Medicare recipients, none having substantial bargaining power. In addition, the PBMs have evolved a self-serving ethic, accepting contracts from producers or wholesalers for bundled sets of products and accepting rebates (aka kickbacks) that disguise their actual, lower payouts. **Health insurance plans, because they accept risk for drug costs, have lately been dumping and/or suing their PBM contractors over these deceptive practices that cut into their profits.**

Medicare and Medicaid set drug prices based on the negotiations of these corporate PBMs. They are rife with conflicts of interest, but our state and federal governments spend about 200 billion dollars yearly on drugs for Medicare and Medicaid based on secret negotiations that are divorced from the public interest. This floor on the costs of drugs prevents health care systems like Kaiser Permanente from conducting free-market negotiations with drug sellers. If the sellers gave Kaiser better prices, all other systems, including government programs, would find out and demand to “piggyback.” “There is no free market for prescription drugs in the US,” says Kaiser CEO Bernard Tyson.



Brucie has the poop on Pharma

Giving our government the power to evaluate the relative value of drugs and conduct auctions for their purchase is the ultimate third rail for Pharma, which spends \$240 million annually for lobbying—more than any other business. Remarkably, President Trump has repeatedly advocated government action to lower prescription prices. His instinct to get a better deal turns out to be a vital first step in moving incrementally to universal health care—and to a system where humans are treated as well as dogs.

Dr Bertken can be reached at drbertken@comcast.net

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans
Chair, Behavioral Health Board



Next BHB Board Meeting * January 17

2:30 p.m. * 1925 East Dakota * Fresno

At its December meeting the Behavioral Health Board received a report on housing from Department of Behavioral Health Director Dawan Utecht. The Department has formed a Housing Taskforce to work on improving housing for its clients at all levels of care.

Since Fresno County has no Emergency Housing Shelter, the Department is piloting different options to serve clients who either are chronically homeless or temporarily homeless while awaiting appropriate placement. It has set up a hotel/motel voucher program to house clients who have been approved for housing that is not yet ready for occupancy. A new housing option dubbed "The Lodge" is being developed for clients while they are becoming "housing-ready."

Transitional housing actions include educating and supporting Board and Care operators, so that they might provide higher-level care for clients who need that type of housing and support in an unlocked setting. Likewise, the Department is meeting with Room and Board operators to encourage, educate, and support them so that they might provide appropriate congregate living homes for clients who are able to live independently but with some structure and support. To address the community's concern about the poor quality

of many Room and Board homes the Department is contracting with Independent Living Association to encourage operators to join the Association at no cost; then the Association will work with R&B operators to improve their homes, so that they may be included on a list of high quality homes to which the Department and its contractors will refer clients.

Of course, the highest priority and most difficult to provide is Permanent Supportive Housing. A Master Leasing program has begun to provide permanent housing for clients who are able to live without on-site support. The Department has toured various sites, met with developers, and contracted with Corporation for Supportive Housing to evaluate and review the quality of current permanent, supportive housing that is available in Fresno County. The next step will be to contract with consultants to create development plans, secure properties and funding, oversee construction, provide property management, and provide supportive services.

The Board also voted to follow up on its letters to the City Council concerning alcohol licensing and to the Opioid Coalition regarding the Lock It Up Project. *Ad Hoc* committees will be formed to work on these projects.

The BHB ended the year with the election of new officers and a celebration of the work done during 2017.

Editor's Note: Carolyn was elected Chair of the Behavioral Health Board for 2018.

Student Unit

by Lisa Bryant

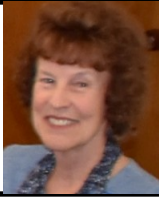


The Student Unit will be meeting in late January to discuss topics for a public education forum. The officers are reviewing what will be on the ballot in 2018 and are leaning toward a public forum on statewide universal

healthcare. Also discussed was the possibility of printing "I Voted" stickers with a bulldog print as the "O" to hand out during the upcoming ASI/Student Union election if in-person voting is allowed.

The Student Unit will be tabling and doing voter registration in early March, mid-April and mid-May to get students registered in time for the California primary elections this year.





Housing Authority director speaks to LWVF committee

by Nyla Zender

In a meeting with Preston Prince, Fresno Housing Authority Director, housing committee members learned that 40% of Fresno County residents live in poverty. The life expectancy of residents of West Fresno is lower than in other parts of the county

He proposed some solutions to the separation of areas of poverty from more affluent areas. One suggestion was building affordable housing around Clovis schools. An Urban Institute Study of those living in school areas compared to areas of poverty showed that affordable housing in school areas benefitted many aspects of families



Preston Prince

lives. He noted that then Mayor Ashley Swearingen fought for state funding to build affordable housing north of Herndon.

The Housing Authority is seeking state funds to build a mixed-use development, including affordable housing units, along the Bus Rapid Transit route on Blackstone Avenue.

A major problem is the high cost of building affordable housing due to the accompanying regulations. He suggested possible tax credit programs to help builders obtain mortgages. Los Angeles gives “soft” dollars as incentives and payback is based on cash flow.

Members of the LWVC Water Committee are working hard to keep abreast of developments with the Proposition 1 Water Storage Investment Program funding approved by voters in 2014. The California Water Commission is tasked with evaluating projects and awarding funding. The process is highly competitive as \$5.8 billion in funding for eleven projects has been requested, while \$2.7 billion is available.

The public benefit ratio (PBR) of each project will be used to rank the projects. The PBR is structured in this way. At least 50 percent of each proposal’s funding must be devoted to ecosystem benefits, while up to 50 percent may be devoted to four other public benefits - water quality improvement, flood control, emergency response, and recreation.

LWVC may choose to comment at times when public comments are accepted. This month the Commission will release initial PBRs. At a three-day meeting March 2018, final PBR’s will be determined. In May 2018 the Commission will announce final project scores, and in June 2018 it will make a determination on ranking and conditional project funding. The public will have the opportunity to comment at the March, May, and June meetings.

There are thousands of pages of documents submitted for the projects. As a grassroots organization made up mostly of volunteers from around the State, the LWVC, and the LWVC Water Committee in particular, must “pick its shots carefully” in order to offer comments that are credible and effective. The March 2018 meeting may be the best opportunity to submit comments.

Two projects, the Temperance Flat Reservoir Project and the Tulare Lake Storage and Floodwater Protection Project, are located in the Central San Joaquin Valley and are of particular interest to members of our league.

More information about the Water Storage program can be found at the California Water Commission website.

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SITE IS
COMING SOON**



<http://my.lwv.org/california/fresno>

Education

by Kay Bertken



Fresno Unified has a new school board president. Without much fuss or discussion, Elizabeth Jonasson Rosas, one of the two newest members on the board, was unanimously elected to the position. Valerie Davis is the new clerk.

These new officers presided over the last Board meeting of the year. That meeting reviewed the District's financial position as revealed in an audited report and heard a positive review of expenditures from the Measure X and Q Bond Oversight Committee.

Although not specifically addressed, the discussion of the District's financial position certainly reflected the District's ongoing bargaining stalemate with the Fresno Teachers Association. That negotiation is currently awaiting a report from the State appointed fact finders that is due around January 18.

High pension obligations

Trustees asked repeatedly about the District's increasing responsibility for

employee pension contributions. Given the unfunded liability of the state pension funds—STRS (the state teacher retirement system)

and PERS (the public employee retirement system) - the State recently demanded increasing contributions from local school districts. FUSD's contributions to each for 2017-2018 will be 14.43% and 15.5% of employee compensation; in 2018-10 it will be 16.82% and 18.1%; in 2019-2020 it will be 18.13% and 20.8%. For the average teacher's salary of \$77,000, the retirement contribution next year is more than \$11,000. Any increases in salaries impacts the total dollar amount of these pension obligations—a fact that was certainly on the minds of the trustees.

Additional insurance costs

In the course of negotiations, FUSD has offered to increase its contribution to teacher's health insurance costs—from paying 80% of premiums to paying 90% and reducing deductibles from \$5,000 for an individual and \$10,000 for a family to \$2,500 and \$5,000. The cost would be \$17,789 per employee. The FTA is asking for a 95% contribution and deductibles of \$1,250 and \$2,500. With additional FTA salary demands—a 10% increase

over three years vs. the District's 3.5% offer, the already projected decline in the District's reserves raised some alarm.

Parents complete courses

On a more upbeat note, Superintendent Nelson reported on the recent ceremony honoring parents completing courses through the district's Parent University, which offers courses in literacy and guidance to further parent engagement with the schools and their children. Nearly 2,800 parents finished at least one course module this last semester; and since Parent University was launched seven years ago, 38,000 families in Fresno Unified have participated in the course offerings.

Girls learn to code

Another growing program is the District's Coder Girls initiative. In 2014 the District launched Coder Girls at Kings Canyon Middle School and Phoenix Secondary School to encourage and prepare female students for possible careers in the tech world. The program has now expanded to include six elementary schools, five middle schools and two high schools.

NEXT FUSD BOARD MEETINGS

January 10 , January 24

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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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