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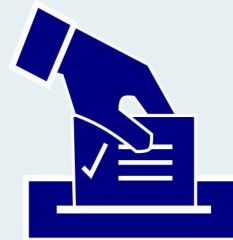
Monday, July 10
Regular Board Meeting
4 p.m. in person
Stone Soup

Thursday, July 27
Member meeting
Georgianne White
5:30 P.M. Stone Soup

Sunday, August 27
Women's Equality Day
Unitarian Church
5:30 p.m.
RBG Scholarship Winner
Lipton Award
WED Award

July is
National
Minority
Mental Health
Awareness
Month

*
**THE FRESNO
VOTER**



Our League's 82nd Year!



Meet
Georgianne White
Fresno City Manager

Thursday, July 27

5:30 p.m. Stone Soup

As City Manager, Georgianne oversees the City's day-to-day operations and is responsible for implementing Mayor Dyer's One Fresno vision and enacting the public policy priorities adopted by the Mayor and City Council. A City Hall veteran with experience in both the mayoral and council arms of government, Georgianne has a deep understanding of what it takes to work with staff and community members to ensure City government works for the people. This includes improving customer service, program and service quality, and the efficiency and effectiveness of program and service delivery.

She will be happy to answer your questions.

Members and guests welcome at no charge.

Light refreshments will be served.

Co-president's message



Quoting Dr. Seuss: *How did it get so late so soon?* Recognizing that it is now 20 years since we moved to Fresno from Connecticut, I am reflecting on how much our League has affected my life.

When moving here to be closer to our daughter and her family we took a leap of faith for our retirement years. I was worried that as a workaholic I wouldn't find enough to keep me gainfully occupied. What an unnecessary thought! Through a chain of circumstances, I was recruited to be the Education chair of the League, and even worked at it remotely in pre-pandemic mode before we fully committed to Fresno.

Through that position our committee began a multi-year campaign to increase access to quality preschool for four-year-olds in Fresno. That effort put me in touch with leadership figures in business, government, civic and other non-governmental organizations. These contacts have remained effective in everything else I have endeavored to accomplish here. And best of all, the Fresno County Office of Education embraced our preschool cause and began a seven-year effort to educate parents and the general public about the effectiveness of preschool. FCOE also set standards to recruit and educate higher quality teachers and aides, as well as standards for rating center-based facilities.

Within two years of my joining the League, one president departed and another died. I took over from 2007 to 2013 in the longest solo term in LWVF history. I confess that although I had many years of professional administrative experience, I was not well-versed in League's sometimes idiosyncratic procedures and vocabulary and had a lot to learn from fellow board members. Just prior to my presidency I had begun as the Voter editor and wanted to continue with that because of my love for writing and editing. I have remained on the Board since 2005 while continuing to serve as Voter editor.

It has been a great experience and without it I would not have met the wonderful people with whom I have made gratifying personal contact both within and outside of LWVF. My co-presidency with Kay Bertken continues to be a highlight.

Francine

**The Voter is a monthly publication of
the League of Women Voters of Fresno
Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710
Volume 82 No. 6 Editor: Francine M. Farber**

June 2023

Program Planning: Georgeanne White, Fresno City Manager, has confirmed for July member meeting. Plans for a meeting about transportation are still in progress. See page 1.

Air Quality: The Board reviewed Nancy Richardson's letter to county officials regarding the effects of planned construction on air quality at the Juvenile Justice campus.

Membership: It was voted that spouses or partners of Life members shall pay second person dues of \$30 annually beginning in April, 2024. This is because we have to pay \$30 in per member payments to state and national leagues for those members.

Women's Equality Day: Nominees for WED and the Lipton Award were discussed. The Board unanimously voted to honor Dr. Michele Copher, first woman superintendent of FCOE, and Dr. Marc Lasher, a physician who has staffed a clean needle distribution and medical clinic on Saturdays for years. The RBG scholarship winner will also be honored.

Transportation: Kay and Francine will attend the ribbon cutting of the Biola EV facility through which Biola residents can get low-cost and efficient electric vehicle rides to Fresno. We are subsidizing the rides so instead of \$10 residents will pay \$5 per ride.

Other information: Kay emphasized the many resources available on state and national League web sites.

- ♦ Finding a site for the mural is continuing to prove problematic for a number of reasons.
- ♦ Information on the possibility of sponsoring an immigrant family has not been forthcoming. We will continue to seek 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. Your estate planning is encouraged to consider LWVF. Please make out checks to LWVF and send to Treasurer, LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno 93710.

Education

by Kay Bertken



Next Board Meetings
Wednesday, August 9
Wednesday, August 23

Another school year is over. Summer academies and free student breakfast and lunch programs began at all elementary and middle schools on June 12. High school credit recovery programs also begin on that date. The district will hold summer day camp programs for thousands of students in July. Meals will be available at all summer school sites for children under 18.

District revenue to fall

While the school year is over, the Board of Trustees met for the last time to pass its budget for 2023-24 and its Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) that ties funding to needs identified in numerous public meetings and surveys. According to the Governor's May revision of the State budget, District revenues will fall next year compared to last year by \$57 million-- partly because of declining enrollments, but mostly because of a decline in the post-pandemic Learning Recovery Block Grant funds.

Nevertheless, budget expands

In spite of that State news, the District is planning a budget that exceeds last year's as it spends down the last of previously distributed one-time allocations. Unknowns include the State Legislature's negotiations over the Governor's proposals and the ongoing contract negotiations with the Fresno Teachers' Association.

State testing data for Fresno Unified shows a trajectory that has been true

nationwide—a return to 2015-2016 levels after years of improvements, then a decline following the pandemic years. Preliminary data from this last spring shows a 2%- 3% gain in English Language Arts (ELA), but the district scores are still below the percentage of students who “have met or exceeded standard” for the other large urban districts in California and the State as a whole

The multi-department staff of the



District Campaign for Literacy has adopted the ambitious goal of reading by the first grade for Fresno students. Regional plans will be developed in August around district generated parameters for pre- kindergarten through first grade. A principal institute in August and meetings with the Superintendent in September will initiate a year of comprehensive planning and monitoring before full implementation. A preliminary budget of \$100 million over five years has been proposed.

Another huge district project is the development of an aviation program at Chandler Airport. The program and new buildings planned for the site will offer pilot training and certification in mechanical/technical trades to high school students in a half day program that will offer dual

enrollment with Reedley College. Introduction to aviation careers will be offered to elementary through high school students through field trips and summer camp exposure.



New FUSD initiatives include the offer of free FAX bus passes to middle school students. This year they were available to high school students. Next year they will be available to middle school students if the parents opt to participate. In partnership with Fresno State, the Bulldog Bound program has offered conditional admission acceptance to all FUSD 9th graders, assuming their completion of all course requirements. The positive message of the promised pathway to college is likely to inspire students to envision their own college trajectory.

The Board held a workshop to consider a facilities bond for the 2024 ballot. A survey of facility needs documented about \$2.5 billion in needed facility repairs and upgrades. A local survey showed passage-rate support for a \$500 million bond. Respondents prioritized safe drinking water and other health and safety repairs plus STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education and preparation for 21st century jobs. kayberten752@gmail.com

Health Care

by Richard Bertken MD



AI is coming to medical care. In fact, it is already here in the form of exceptionally accurate reading of biopsy slides and x-rays. It is playing an important role in drug and vaccine development. And it promises revolutionary advancements in clinical care.

Over the last few years I have accumulated several personal healthcare apps. These “patient portals,” intended to facilitate communications with one’s physicians, are a rapidly growing component of icons on our phones and laptops. The pandemic surely added impetus to the drive for secure on-line health information exchange. But soon via patient portals, health data can be reported via home monitors or structured, periodic patient reports on key outcome measures.

Doctors can view this data and respond as needed. But given the limitations and expense of repeated physician review, an AI computer could perform the analysis with greater specificity and even flag meaningful trends.

AI will also improve disease management by developing individualized treatment plans. This requires comprehensive electronic databases for every patient. All that data you record on paper would be encoded into digital fields. This resource would fuel AI tailoring of your treatments to your specific attributes: exact classification of disease process; previous drug effects, good and adverse; relevant lab results and trends; genetic factors, both

family history and genetic testing; social factors, personal and even spousal and family preferences. This would qualify as precision medicine in action.

Applying the power of AI to individual care is critically dependent on the quality and quantity of relevant population data supplied to it. The best possible source for this data would be an international health record of 8 billion people. The World Health Organization has done us all a favor in recognizing health data as a vital strategic asset. But it is not chartered or funded to track billions of individual health outcomes.

Eight countries operate national electronic health records (NEHRs), demonstrating their utility by showing better health outcomes than economically equivalent nations. Germany (AI For Health), France (Health Data Hub), and Australia (Digital Health Cooperative Research Centre) are moving forward with government-funded organizations to bring AI to fruition using their NEHRs.

Our country has just finished a struggle with government spending. Our healthcare budget tops any other developed country by double, with mediocre outcomes. But unaccountably it was not a target of either spending cuts or modification in the debt limit negotiations. It is twelfth on the list of concerns of voters in the 2024 presidential election.

However, large businesses are growing restless with ever-increasing healthcare costs, projected to grow faster than inflation. They are seeking new contracts and lobbying Congress. In spite of inaction during the debt limit negotiations several business analysts are pre-

dicting bipartisan congressional action to cut federal healthcare costs, possibly before the next election.

Certainly the poor performance and high price of our current system should be addressed, but reducing beneficiaries would be tragic. What we need is a heavy dose of *kaizen*, a Japanese-derived meme for customer orientation and efficiency.

Charting a path to AI-assisted healthcare based on large patient registries and international data would vastly improve the productivity of our current healthcare workforce. It would also likely improve our health outcomes at lower cost. Making it happen would require federal spending and patience. It would take several years, perhaps even a decade, to see the striking return on investment. But patients would notice improvement in their healthcare much sooner. rbertken@comcast.net

Behavioral Health

(continued from page 5)

After 20 years the Legislature is proposing modernization and reform of the Mental Health Services Act. SB 326 would expand services to include SUD treatment, in addition to care for the most seriously mentally ill, to provide more resources for housing and workforce, and to increase accountability for outcomes. AB 531 rebrands the Act as “Behavioral Health Services Act”, and places on the March 2024 ballot a \$4.68 billion general obligation bond to build 10,000 new clinic beds and homes for behavioral health treatment so that individuals have a place to stay while stabilizing and healing. Behavioral Health Departments throughout the state are anxious, but excited about possible changes in the services that they might be able to provide to clients.

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Housing

by Marianne Kast



When gubernatorial candidate Gavin Newsom ran for office in 2017, he vowed that under his leadership, California would build 3.5 million new homes by 2025. This was a calculation driven by the idea that if enough homes could be built, California's housing prices would retreat to levels equal to nationwide housing costs instead of remaining at nearly triple that amount. Newsom has walked back that "aspirational" estimate many times since his election and re-election, and in 2022, he set 2.5 million homes by 2030 as his housing target.

Since 2017, California has enacted over 100 new laws designed to increase housing production. There have been increases to housing starts in some municipalities and stakeholders are generally optimistic that changes to zoning and permitting processes could lead to increased home-building in the future as the laws are enacted. So far, California is only producing one-third of the housing units it needs to meet Newsome's goal.

One chunk of the progress can be attributed to laws which made it easier and less expensive to build accessory dwelling units. Between 2016 and 2021, 21,000 of those units were built in California. They currently represent about 20% of all building permits issued, though they remain more popular in areas of the state where lot sizes are larger.

Legislation that streamlined the approval process for affordable housing units has led to about 12,000 finished units of housing with another 5,000 in process. This law allows qualifying projects with certain minimum affordable housing guarantees to move more quickly through the local government review process and restricts the ability of local governments to reject the proposals. The projects are generally infill development in areas that have not met their share of regional housing needs.

It is probably too early to proclaim the dozens of other housing laws as failed legislation, but Californians are frustrated over persistent homelessness, high rents, and perpetual "no vacancy" signs. It has taken decades of underbuilding to get where we are now; we certainly cannot think that the problem will be solved quickly.

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Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



At its June meeting the Behavioral Health Board focused on services for Substance Use Disorders (SUD). The Department of Behavioral Health administers SUD services for Fresno County's Medi-Cal population. Individuals may request services by walking into the Urgent Care Wellness Center (4441 E. Kings Canyon Road), the Youth Wellness Center (2719 N. Air Fresno Drive,) or any contracted services program. By phone call the 24/7 Access Line at 1-800-654-3937. Individuals are screened to determine appropriate levels of care for their specific needs. Most programs are operated by contracted providers.



Prior to the Board meeting, its SUD Committee heard a presentation on Medication Assisted Treatment provided by MedMark and Bay Area Addiction Research and Treatment (BAART.). Both programs treat individuals with opioid addictions. After a complete assessment people are treated with methadone or buprenorphine. Clients must see case managers, and counseling services are required. Clients come to one of the treatment centers daily to receive their medication. After several months, responsible clients are given medication for a week to take home. The programs have a high success rate in reducing opioid use. BAART also provides treatment to inmates in the Fresno County jail. For inmates already enrolled in a program, services continue. Other inmates may be referred by Wellpath, the health care provider in the jail. BAART's nurse administers the medications daily in the jail.

This month the Adult Committee learned about the Master Leasing program for clients of the Department. RH Community Builders develops scattered sites and manages the 68 furnished apartments for the Master Leasing Program; it also handles maintenance and upkeep of the properties. The Department's Housing Access and Resources Team provides support for clients who rent the properties. Master Leasing is a temporary program for those with a plan for seeking permanent housing. Clients are referred by their case managers. Residents pay 30% of their income and are expected to keep the apartments in good condition. There are no on-site support services, but weekly meetings with case managers are encouraged. Most residents stay for a year before finding permanent housing.

(continued on page 4)

Climate Change

by Andrea Farber De Zubiria

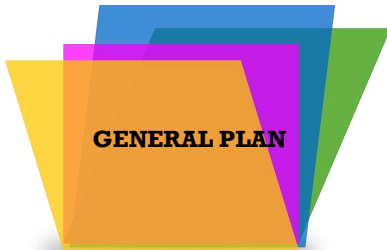


* Water News

by Diane Merrill



Members of our committee have been wading through the complex waters of Fresno County's General Plan revision and its lack of a Climate Action Plan. In response to the County's call for community input by June 27, our committee members produced a letter to the Board of Supervisors on behalf of our



League. The letter calls on the supervisors to add a climate plan at this time, rather than waiting for sources of funding or lawsuits. This letter was edited, approved and signed by the League co-presidents.

Every city, town, and county in California must have a General Plan, which is the local government's long-term framework or "constitution" for future growth and development. The General Plan represents the community's aspiration for its future and intentions for community development.

Local governments of California are now required, in accordance with Senate Bill 379, *Land Use: General Plan: Safety Element* (2015) to include a climate change vulnerability assessment, measures to address these vulnerabilities, and a comprehensive hazard mitigation and emergency response strategy.

Climate Action Plans are customized roadmaps for making informed decisions and understanding where and how to achieve the largest and most cost-effective emissions reductions that are in alignment with other local or regional goals.

You can read the full letter at the LWVF website. Some of our committee members attended community workshops about the General Plan. We are considering other responses such as an op ed and a follow up letter requesting that the county declare a state of climate emergency.

It is well documented that our region is burdened by the hazards of poor air quality, rising temperatures and threats from weather whiplash (fluctuating between drought and excessive precipitation). A plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our County is critical to our health and to our economy.

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I have close friends who have a small farm south of Fresno. Over many years, in wet, average, and dry times, I have walked with my friends and their dogs along the dirt roads that run along the irrigation canals near their farm. Over the years, many of the vineyards along our walking routes are being removed and converted to almonds, olives, pomegranates, or other less thirsty, or more profitable crops.




Along with the change in crops, many of these farmers have replaced flood irrigation systems with drip irrigation systems that utilize pumped groundwater to provide efficient watering of the root zone of their plants. In the process, some farmers have abandoned their connection to the flood irrigation systems developed by the local irrigation district. The flood irrigation system is not always available, especially during dry years, but when it is available, it is a major contributor to groundwater recharge.

Here's what the Fresno Irrigation District (FID) and the North Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency recommend to their growers to conserve water during dry years and recharge groundwater during normal and wet years.

- ◆ Use flood irrigation in wet years instead of drip.
- ◆ When FID has excess water available, take delivery and use it for on-farm recharge or storage in a local, private pond.
- ◆ Contact FID to explore options for using drip or micro irrigation systems directly off an FID canal.
- ◆ The North Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency promotes keeping irrigation methods flexible when installing a drip/micro system.
- ◆ Funding assistance may be available through State and Federal grants and existing programs.

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**Women's Equality Day
Recognition Event**
Sunday, August 27
Unitarian Church



5:30 p.m. *Generous*
\$25 per person *hors d'oeuvres*

League of Women Voters Fresno, Inc.

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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

**Please send your check payable to the League of Women Voters, Fresno, with registration form (below),
 to: LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710.**

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