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Monday, July 8  
Board Meeting  
Stone Soup  
4 p.m.

Thursday, July 25  
Member Meeting  
Water Seminar




Monday,  
August 26  
Women's Equality  
Day  
Details to Follow  
Unitarian Church



THE

FRESNO

VOTER



Our 84th Year

"If there is magic on the planet, it is contained in water"

Loren Eisley, American Anthropologist



**Dr. Thomas Holyoke**

JOIN US  
FOR A STIMULATING  
DISCUSSION

THURSDAY, JULY 25  
STONE SOUP  
5:30 P.M.

MEMBERS AND GUESTS  
WELCOME, NO CHARGE  
LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

"We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one"

Jacques Yves Cousteau

Thomas Holyoke, Ph.D. is a professor of political science at Fresno State. His most recent book is "Water Politics: The Fragmentation of Western Water Policy".

His research focuses on American interest groups and lobbying, the development of western water policy, and charter schools and education policy.

Please join us at a board meeting and find out more about what the League does and how you can help.

## Co-President's Message

by Kay Bertken



June 2024 Board Minutes

**I**t is a belt tightening season for California and Fresno.

One-time COVID relief funds have largely been allocated, and revenues are down. In what is called the May Revise, Governor Newsom proposed a budget that would be 7% lower than the 2023-2024 budget with a deficit of \$45 billion. The city of Fresno is projecting a deficit of \$47 million. Including lower average daily attendance ( a product of lower enrollment and a decline in the rate of student attendance), Fresno Unified is planning for a revenue loss of roughly \$38 million.

By the time you read this Voter, local budgets will have been finalized while the state legislature argues over California's. It will be worth watching what and where cuts are made that impact League priorities. Further transitional kindergarten and preK implementation funding will likely be delayed at the state level. \$200 million of the anticipated \$250 million of state funding to our downtown infrastructure could also be postponed. Staffing in the city and school district will be reduced, primarily through attrition.

The proposed city budget narrative includes an optimistic statement that it will rely on federal and state funding to continue to support the homelessness/housing results that Fresno has achieved. As reported in FresnoLand, there is currently a dispute over the Mayor's plan to spend some Measure P parks money to clean up freeway embankments while simultaneously asserting a lack of money to fund a city commitment to plant 1,000 trees a year. A recent study of the urban canopy in Fresno, commissioned by the City Council, has suggested the need for 4,600 trees per year for 40 years to achieve an equitable and reasonable coverage of the city. We may not get 1,000.

New sources of targeted revenue may be on the horizon. Prior to the announcement of the results of a community mailing and a determination by the City Council, Mayor Dyer's budget has already assumed the approval of a rate increase for trash pickups to accommodate the mandate for kitchen waste recycling.

The November ballot is likely to contain big bond measures in addition to propositions that could change vote level requirements for passing new revenue measures. The State is contemplating a school

*(continued on page 4)*

**LWVUS Convention:** Attending in person in Washington D.C. June 27-30 will be Marianne Kast and Jackie Canfield. Attending remotely will be Kay Bertken and Robin Chiero.

**Women's Equality Day:** The site is still under discussion due to the increased price of previously used spaces. The fallback is the community room at Stone Soup. Catering is still under discussion as well, since the owner of Food for Thought has retired. Nominations were discussed and finalized. Retired Judge Jane Cardoza will be contacted by Cathy to see if she is available and willing for the WED award, and Marianne will contact community activist Gloria Hernandez in connection with the Lipton Award.

**Letters:** Letters in support of grant applications by the Fresno County Rural Transportation Authority and the Central Valley Partnership have been sent.

**Mural Project:** Several new wall sites are being investigated with regard to ownership and availability.

**Logistics:** LWV Riverside shared its new local position on transportation, distribution and logistics. These are areas that may be of equal interest to our League.

### DONATIONS

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

**Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710**

**Volume 65 No. 7 Editor: Francine M. Farber**

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## Education

by Kay Bertken



In the final meetings of the school year, the Fresno Unified trustees concluded their work by appointing new school principals, approving the 2024-25 budget and LCAP, and voting to proceed with a facilities bond measure proposal.

The board unanimously passed a budget that reduced expenditures by \$24.4 million and patched its expected shortfall with money from its reserves. This year's budget accommodated recent contract agreements with the Fresno Teachers' Association to reduce class sizes and bring many of the teachers on special assignment as coaches or those in semi-administrative positions back into the classroom.

The LCAP, the Local Control Accountability Plan, is required by the State to justify expenditures targeted to at-risk students. The document is a result of numerous community meetings and surveys and includes the entire budget as it aligns with community priorities and district goals. It includes evaluations of previous actions, lists each of the individual school sites and subpopulations at those sites that got the lowest performance rating on any of the state metrics, and targets some of the lowest performing schools with additional resources. The many-page document is available on the district website.

A Fresno Unified bond measure for \$500 million will be placed on the November ballot to continue to address the billions of dollars of demands on its aging facilities. The board will discuss the specific projects to be pursued by this bond in its fall meetings. A proportion of the funds raised by the measure will necessarily go to class-size reduction as agreed in the FTA contract that ended the threatened strike this year. Early discussions suggest that some other projects will likely include those that were left over from the previous bond list such as: deferred maintenance; turf, tracks, lights, and stands for schools without stadiums; and the new aviation facility.

The regular school year has ended, but summer academies (summer school) are in session and summer camps will begin soon. The district has agreements with the city to open its pools for summer lessons and recreational swimming, and lunches are available to all children aged 1 to 18 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at all school sites this summer. The services provided by the schools don't stop in June.

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## Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



A public hearing on an addition to the Mental Health Services Act 2024 Annual Update was held recently by the Behavioral Health Board. The addition was related to the Psychiatric Advance Directive (PAD). *(Advance directives are legal documents that provide instructions for medical care and only go into effect if you cannot communicate your own wishes.)*

### Information for first responders

This portion of the plan is to connect with hospitals and first responders, so that they may identify individuals with a PAD, and act accordingly. This may be the most important part of the project, so that emergency personnel can follow through with the plan even if the individual is not able to provide information. The Board supported the addition to the MHSA plan; it will now go to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors and then to the state.



Though the Board did not meet in June due to the Juneteenth holiday, its subcommittees did meet as scheduled, and the Board completed its site visit for the month.

### HALO team assists with aftercare

The Adult Services Committee heard from the Hospital Access Linkage Outreach (HALO) Team. The focus is on Fresno County residents being discharged after an involuntary hold from acute psychiatric inpatient hospitals. The Team provides aftercare appointments to evaluate and determine the right level of care. If not already linked to behavioral health services, individuals are connected to service providers by HALO. If individuals already are linked, HALO collaborates with treatment teams to ensure follow-up after discharge. Ideally, the Team is notified by hospitals at time of intake, so that discharge planning can begin immediately. Unfortunately, often hospitals do not notify until time of discharge, if at all. Patients slip through the cracks when there is a lack of timely collaboration between hospitals and outpatient services.

The Board made another visit to the WestCare Substance Use Disorders site. The most exciting news is that WestCare now has a license for a higher level of care that will include individuals with Serious Mental Illnesses. The new program has its own curriculum with extra support for

*(continued on page 6)*

## Housing

by Marianne Kast



One of the housing programs preserved in the City of Fresno's 2025 budget is \$1.5M for the Eviction Protection Program. This program defends tenants in the City from illegal eviction regardless of income level. Each case is reviewed by the City Attorney's office and if eligible, referred to an attorney at no cost, or to mediation between tenant and landlord.

While the program was originally created to respond to pandemic-era housing issues, there are still people being evicted for unlawful reasons that have nothing to do with non-payment of rent. Hundreds of calls have been received from tenants in every City Council district, with the highest volume of cases in Districts 3 (Arias), 4 (Maxwell), and 7 (Esparza). The most common reason landlords illegally attempt to evict tenants is retaliation for reporting code issues to code enforcement.

Since 2021, the Eviction Protection Program has helped over 1,400 tenant cases ranging from guidance during the eviction process to legal representation from outside law firms contracted with the City for tenants in court. In the past three years, the Program has led to the dismissal of 186 eviction cases, and the prevention of the filing of 367 cases in court. Another 580 eviction cases have been prevented from appearing on tenants' records through negotiated settlements.

Another important housing program that is not likely to survive after this year is the Voucher Incentive Program. Originally funded with federal American Rescue Plan money, this program provided cash incentives to local landlords to accept Housing Authority voucher holders as tenants.

Families who are lucky enough to receive Housing Authority vouchers, where their rent is based on their income and the government pays the balance of the rent due, have a limited amount of time to secure housing. Although California law prevents discrimination against prospective tenants based on their use of government housing assistance, in 2022 just one third of local voucher recipients found housing before their vouchers expired.

The Voucher Incentive Program increased the redemption rate of vouchers to 57% in the City of Fresno and 64% in the County. Funding for this program was not included in the City budget; County funding is unlikely as well, so this valuable program will end this year.

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## Senior Activity Center shares news, design



**Architect's rendering of new Senior Activity Center**

The City of Fresno's Senior Activity Center has issued a report on the building's progress.

Demolition of the Vons Building on Blackstone is complete with a proposed budget of more than 25 million dollars. The bulk of the funding, \$20 million, is proposed to come from a Section 108 loan which was to have been approved at the June meeting. Section 108 allows states and local governments to use their Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) annual grant allocation to access low-cost, long-term financing for economic development, housing, public facilities, and infrastructure.

A number of businesses currently located in the strip mall have to be relocated. A consultant is working with each tenant with the goal of completing the relocations by the end of September. The developer is currently drafting final construction documents which are due in August, with the construction contract to be awarded by the end of October.

*(information contributed by Carmen Navarro)*

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### *Co-President's Message* (continued from page 2)

facilities bond as is Fresno Unified. Various environmental groups are lobbying the State to pursue a climate bond to protect air quality, strengthen climate resilience, mitigate wildfires, provide recreational access, and protect natural resources.

During budget and election season, "follow the money" is good advice, even when corruption is not the main issue.

*Kay*



**T**he connection between laboratory discoveries and new disease treatments traditionally dawdled along as an incremental process. However, a class of messaging hormones known as brain neurosteroids emerged in a firestorm of scientific articles starting in 2017.

The existence of brain neurosteroids and a role they might play in mood goes back 20 years. But the concept of a key role in important mental conditions exploded in 2017 with the discovery of an abrupt drop—to near-zero!—in women diagnosed with postpartum depression (PPD). This gave credence to the theory that brain neurosteroids were important in sustaining a normal mood state, especially amidst the normal emotional storms of pregnancy.

PPD by definition causes severe mental distress in afflicted new mothers, usually in the three months after delivery but sometimes later and rarely prior to delivery. Some victims of PPD may not bond with their child and provide breast feeding. The distress often spreads to the patient's entire family and friendship circle.

### Clinical trials highly successful

Researchers proposed a large set of clinical trials of synthetic neurosteroid replacement in PPD. These were conducted starting in 2017, revealing that short bursts of replacement neurosteroid could miraculously suppress the symptoms of PPD permanently.

In 2019 the FDA approved a one-week continuous IV infusion of synthesized brain neurosteroids to compensate for their disappearance in PPD. Four years later a tablet was approved—Zurzuvaе, branded by Biogen. As a convenient 14-day tablet regimen it replaced the infusion. After short courses of treatment, patients in the clinical studies improved quickly and durably.

### 15% experience post partum depression

PPD of varying severity now occurs in 15% of pregnancies. Because routine anti-depressant treatments are less effective for PPD than for spontaneous depressive disorders, the only proven alternative would be neurosteroid supplementation.

I requested interviews with OB-GYN staff at a local hospital to assess their protocols for using the 14-day tablet treatment. A protocol using a standard questionnaire—a postnatal depression scale—would be necessary to diagnose and follow patient response to treatment.

I felt dumb-founded by the six responses piling up on my



original email thread. None were aware of protocols for using the new drugs. Only one, at an academic center, had any experience using the new drug—once—and she reported an arduous pathway through pre-approval, funding, and delivery. The one simplifying factor was that refills were not required.

### Enthusiasm but no marketing

One prominent feature of the respondents' messages was enthusiasm over the prospect of ready access to neurosteroid replacement therapy. This in turn shaped a ghostly mystery: why was Biogen, the marketer of Zurzuvaе, the only neurosteroid available, holding off on the usual biopharma marketing blitz? Biogen inexplicably did not launch print or TV ads and hired no salesforce.

In spite of this absence of marketing effort, Biogen reported modest but increasing sales of Zurzuvaе this spring. This remains a mystery that vigorous internet searches have not solved. [rbertken@comcast.net](mailto:rbertken@comcast.net)

## Climate Action

by Sandy Aune



There are numerous technologies being developed around the world to reduce the carbon dioxide (CO2) that is now in the air. Entrepreneurs, scientists, governments and private citizens are creating these technologies.

While many of these innovative technologies are small, they are being designed for scalability. The scalability feature is key to removing enough carbon to deter the worst effects of climate change in the short term. Of course, the best way to reduce CO2 in the atmosphere is to stop putting it there in the first place.



One of these innovative technologies is Direct Air Capture (DAC). This technology removes CO2 from ambient air. There are various DAC processes being developed by national and international companies. In Iceland, Climeworks, a Swiss company, has just completed its largest DAC facility, which it claims is

capable of removing tens of thousands of pounds of carbon yearly.

Closer to home in Tracy, Heirloom Technologies is operating the first commercial DAC facility in the United States. The purpose of the facility is to remove carbon from the air permanently by using a process that super heats limestone with energy from renewable energy. Once captured, the CO2 is injected into cement where it remains permanently and is being used in construction projects in the Bay Area. The Tracy facility removed 1,000 tons of CO2 in 2023.

According to a recent LA Times article, the U.S. Department of Energy awarded \$50 million dollars to Heirloom and its partners to develop a million-ton DAC facility in Louisiana. The Biden administration also announced last year that it would make a 1.2-billion-dollar investment into DAC technologies.

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## Voter Services

by Sue Goldman



The Voter Services Committee has been meeting bi-monthly. We are continuing to update our PowerPoint that previously has been used for high school voter registration.

We are broadening the focus to include not only voter registration, but also voter engagement, nuts and bolts of voting, ballot security, and how to identify dis- and mis-information. Our target audience will not only be high school students, but also college students and community groups.

We are researching community organizations and libraries that are in areas of low voter turn out. We hope to



partner with those community organizations and libraries in those areas to

make presentations and encourage registration and voting.

We will of course be developing a PowerPoint presentation on the propositions. Currently four have qualified for the ballot with the possibility of 13 being included.

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## Behavioral Health (continued from page 3)

clients who need this level of care.

You are invited to attend the Board's regularly scheduled meeting on July 17 at 3:30 pm at the Health and Wellness Center, 1925 E. Dakota.

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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.

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