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Monday, July 14, 4 p.m.
Regular board meeting
Stone Soup
In person

Thursday, July 17
5:30 p.m.
Member Meeting
Stone Soup
Michael Lukens
In person

Monday, August 11, 4 p.m.
Regular Board Meeting
Stone Soup
In person

Thursday, August 21
WOMEN'S EQUALITY
DAY 5:30 PM.

Stone Soup

In person

Reservations Required
See Page 3



THE

FRESNO VOTER

Our 86th Year



Demystifying the Brown Act

***Please join us as
Michael Lukens ex-
plains what, where,
how and why the
Brown Act is essential
to your right to attend
and participate in
meetings of local legislative bodies.***



***Lukens is the executive director of Government Rela-
tions for Fresno State and has worked as the press
secretary for the City of Fresno. He also produces a
daily newspaper for the Maddy Institute.***

Thursday, July 17, 5:30 p.m. Stone Soup
Members and guests are welcome
Light refreshments, no charge

Co-President's Message

by Kay Bertken



It feels more important than ever to be more than consumers of the news, as absorbing and time-consuming as that alone is.

The National League has recognized the threats that are facing our democracy. It has issued statements declaring a constitutional crisis and is advocating increased activism under its *Unite and Rise 8.5* banner. The 8.5 refers to the effort to mobilize 8.5 million people, the 3.5% of our population that has historically been successful at achieving change (Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights).

It has issued a national alert encouraging letter writing and calls to senators to vote against the SAVE Act (it has already passed the House), a bill that would impose documentary proof of citizenship upon registration while severely restricting allowable documents.



President Trump attempted to bypass Congress and mandate that proof with an expansive executive order. Some parts of his order have been paused in the courts; others are still in litigation, including a provision to deny states funding if they count mail-in ballots after election day.

LWVUS has also encouraged us to send letters and posts to news outlets and media as well as to join protests and other mobilization efforts around immigration and due process violations. Many of your fellow Fresno League members showed up at the large No Kings rallies here in June. There will likely be more opportunities for building community by joining with other groups that share our concerns. Central Indivisible and 51-50 have been organizing many of the local events and are sources for event schedules.

You will find more information on the National League website lwv.org/uniteandrise. An extensive toolkit that includes letter templates, talking points, and protest safety advice are at lwv.org/league-management/advocacy-litigation/unite-and-rise-85-toolkit.

Kay

The Voter is a monthly publication of the LWV Fresno

Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 66 No. 7 Editor: Francine M. Farber



June 2025

Treasurer/Membership: Members are struggling with renewing with the new system. Board members are calling them to explain the new process and to support renewals.

Women's Equality Day: Police Chief Mindy Casto will be honored and BooBoo Bean Bakery will cater. Tom Bohigian has been selected as the honoree to receive the Lipton Award.

Climate: Donna McBrien attends meetings of the Air Pollution Control District, while Terri Figgs is the League's representative to COG.

Measure C: Transportation for All and the FCTA are trying to join forces to endorse a unified Measure C on the next ballot.

Mural: We need to pursue an extension of the Arts Council grant due to difficulty finding an appropriate wall.

State Convention: There will be three delegates: Kay, Robin and Marianne; and three observers: Faye, Maureen and Sue.

Spreadsheet: Robin has developed a spreadsheet for Board members to list time and information to keep track for annual reporting.

Manual: Board members received binders containing information about their general and specific responsibilities.

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.

WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY

Police Chief Mindy Casto has made history in Fresno by being named the first female police chief after almost 30 years in the department.

While there are almost 4,000 chiefs of police in the U.S., only about 300 are women. Chief Casto was chosen to be our Women's Equality Day honoree because she definitely has broken the glass ceiling.



Please come to meet her and our other honorees:

Tom Bohigian, who was selected for the Lipton Award because of his dedication to service and advocacy; and Edna Villicana



Madrigal for the Ruth Bader Ginsburg scholarship at the San Joaquin College of Law.



Join us in the newly remodeled Community Room at Stone Soup on August 21 at 5:30 p.m. for delicious hors d'ouvres and beverages.

Please send in your check by August 15 or phone an RSVP to Marianne at 270-7937 by August 15 in order to pay at the door. Of course include other guests if you wish.

\$25 per person



Regenerative agriculture uses farming methods that focus on restoring and enhancing soil health, biodiversity, and ecosystem resilience. It emphasizes practices such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, composting, and rotational grazing to improve soil fertility, capture carbon, and increase long-term farm sustainability. It is a key component for solving the global climate crisis by creating an enormous repository of carbon in the soil.

This practice is gaining traction in the United States. As of now, approximately **100 million acres** of farmland in America are using regenerative practices. This represents just over 10% of the 900 million acres of range and farmland in the U.S.

There is no federally regulated definition of the word “regenerative” the way there is with “organic.” So how can you know if what you are buying is actually helping the planet?

To ensure that your purchases are helping the planet, you can follow these guidelines:

Look for Certifications: Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) is the strictest of all the labels. Certifications such as USDA Organic, Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, and others indicate that the product meets certain environmental and social standards.

Check the Labels: Look for labels that mention sustainable practices, such as “regenerative agriculture,” “carbon-neutral,” “biodegradable,” or “recyclable.”

Research the Brand: Investigate the company's sustainability practices. Many brands have dedicated sections on their websites detailing their environmental efforts.

Support Local and Seasonal Products: Buying local and seasonal products reduces the carbon footprint associated with transportation and storage.

(continued on page 7)

A Member Speaks:

Concern re Valley Air Quality

by Alex Sherriffs, M.D.

As a board member of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, I am aware of two very large threats to continued progress with valley air quality.

California's progress with more healthful air quality has depended on the “Waiver” system in the Clean Air Act which offers a mechanism for California to negotiate vehicle emission standards more stringent than federal regulations. This had led to decades of progress, adopted by many other states, saving tens of thousands of lives throughout the U.S., with the auto industry continuing to be profitable.

The Trump administration has made it clear it would not allow its EPA to grant further waivers, and as a result California withdrew new applications- years in development- earlier this year. This will stall needed progress, or worse, erode gains. The Trump administration is again attempting to rescind previously approved waivers, waivers essential to continue to clean our polluted air. Since 2020, most of the air pollution which gives the valley five of the ten worst polluted cities in the US comes from mobile sources under federal, not state or local authority. By 2030 Federally regulated sources will be double the contribution of state and locally regulated sources.

And of course accelerating climate change is already eroding our health. Wildfire intensity and frequency is being driven by climate change. 25% of the health gains from improvements in particle pollution since 2016 have been lost to the damage from wildfire smoke exposure. Four challenging, difficult, expensive, innovative steps forward. One step back.

More heat from climate change means more ozone(smog) and more secondary particles forming in the chemical beaker that is our air basin. More pollution to clean up. All bad for asthma, heart attacks, dementia risk. Especially bad for children, pregnant women, folks with heart or lung disease, for elders.

We have the tools to clean the air, address climate change, and build our economy. It won't happen without pushing.

Stay involved!

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Education

by Kay Bertken



Fresno Unified board meetings have focused on the year's budget. The Governor's May revision of his January state budget incorporated billions in cuts related to California's revenue shortfall. Cuts that will affect FUSD revenue include a cost-of-living adjustment that will be lower than anticipated, a lower state contribution to the transitional kindergarten expansion and a likely delay of cash payments (currently anticipated to be a single month). These declines in revenue are expected to continue for the next few years.

Coupled with the district's declining enrollment and the current contract with the FTA that includes salary increases and smaller class sizes, the district will be drawing down its reserves next year and for subsequent years. Reserve levels are anticipated to drop from 7.645% in 2024-25 to 3.05% in 2027-28 even with anticipated expenditure cuts. Next year's cuts will include staff layoffs, primarily among central office staff and teachers on special assignment. The board adopted its budget at its June meeting.

The district also held its hearing and adopted its Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), a document oriented around community identified resource needs. The district anticipates total revenue of just short of 1.5 billion dollars in 2025-26. Most of that money, more than one billion dollars, is state Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) funds.

LCFF funds are comprised of base grants that go to all districts based on their enrollments; supplemental grants that target the unduplicated count of high need students—foster youth, English learners, and students from low-income families; and concentration grants based on a district's high percentage (greater than 55%) of students being among the high need categories. FUSD qualifies for approximately \$177 million based on those high-need categories

New to LCFF funding last year was the "Equity multiplier." These additional funds go to specific schools identified as having high turnover student populations and a high percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students. Fourteen of FUSD schools qualify for these funds next year (four new schools were identified that replaced four that qualified last year.)

(continued on page 7)

Behavioral Health

by Sherri Gibson



The Fresno County Grand Jury recently reviewed the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health and issued a report.

Among the findings was that because funding is sensitive the department should create a written contingency plan to define cuts in services should there be a cut in funding. The Jury also recommended that a vertical communication system be established to enable field level staff to communicate concerns and suggestions to management.

The transition to electronic health record has created many issues. Some field clinicians felt that they lacked sufficient training to enhance their safety and effectiveness. It was recommended that the department develop a formal training program for all new hires as well as an annual refresher training depending on their professional category.

Some clinicians stated that they have no current information regarding known violent tendencies or criminal history of their patient prior to meeting them. Recommendation was made to create a flag in the health record which identifies known violent tendencies and criminal history of clients. Implementing this recommendation is fraught with clinical implications.

The Grand Jury found there were insufficient or outdated supplies provided to clinicians outside of the office including complete first aid kits and Narcan. It was also noted the department's website was outdated and in need of annual update.

The department leadership team will respond to the Grand Jury Report findings and delineate how the recommendations will be implemented.

Department of behavioral Health board members recently visited the clinic in Firebaugh. This clinic sees approximately 70 self referred patients a month. Because it is difficult to recruit staff to this rural location, they must rely on telehealth. They provide mental health screenings and referrals to Department of Behavioral Health when appropriate but many of these referrals are not followed through because of transportation problems. They have noted a recent increase in anxiety, much related to current immigration issues.

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Lawsuit against County reaches fourth postponement

by Radley Reep



Over a 14-month period, the Case Management Conference for the League's lawsuit challenging the County's 2024 revision of the General Plan has been postponed four times.

On March 21, 2024, the League, Sierra Club and Central Valley Partnership (**Petitioners**) jointly filed a lawsuit in Superior Court, claiming that the environmental analysis prepared by the County (**Respondents**) was fatally flawed. Petitioners asked the Court to direct the County to set aside the revised Plan and EIR.

Petitioners elected to prepare the administrative record (**AR**) for the case. The AR is the collection of documents and testimony that the Board of Supervisors considered when it made its decision to revise the Plan. But Respondents opted instead to prepare the AR itself.

An AR must be compiled, indexed and certified within 60 days of the filing of a lawsuit. But there are exceptions to the rule, and Respondents asked the Court for a two-month extension to July 19 due to the voluminous nature of the AR.

The **CMC** was scheduled for that very same day. A CMC is not a hearing on the merits of a case. It is a one-time meeting of the litigants to address any procedural issues in dispute, to set a timeline for filing briefs and to schedule a trial date. But the County did not certify the AR by the July 19 deadline, instead filing it on September 23. Consequently the CMC was postponed to October 25, 2024, the first postponement.

The County's certified AR weighed in at 33,045 pages. Although lengthy, the AR was recognized as incomplete. The Petitioners sent Respondents a list of some of the omissions. As a result, Respondents agreed to prepare and certify a supplemental administrative record (**Supp AR**).

The day before the scheduled October 25 CMC, Petitioners filed with the Court an objection to the County's certification of an incomplete AR, and the CMC was postponed a second time to February 21, 2025. On February 10 Respondents provided Petitioners with an index to a Supp AR and requested that Petitioners provide copies of some documents that Respondents could not locate.

The day before the scheduled February 21 CMC, the Court postponed the CMC a third time to May 30. Then on May 28, at the request of the County, the CMC was postponed for the fourth time to September 19, 2025.

This is probably the last postponement. On May 29 Respondents certified a Supp AR, increasing the size of the AR by 10,209 pages, bringing the total page count to 40,254. Petitioners will spend the next few months reviewing those 10,209 pages to see if the AR is finally complete.

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Water News

by Diane Merrill



As required by California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) in overdrafted groundwater basins must bring local groundwater levels to a sustainable condition no later than 2040.

If local agencies are not making adequate progress in managing local groundwater levels, then the State Water Resources Control Board can take over control of local groundwater management. A major goal of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies is meeting State requirements in order to maintain local control over groundwater management.

The North Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency (NKGSA) is responsible for groundwater management in the cities of Fresno, Clovis, Kerman and the surrounding areas. An important component of groundwater management planning required by California's SGMA is having an understanding of the groundwater levels in all public and private wells. Registering wells with the local GSA is an important part of understanding what is happening with groundwater levels.



After a year of encouraging well owners to voluntarily register their wells, the NKGSA is now requiring all public and private well owners to register their wells by November 30, 2025, or be subject to a \$100 late registration fee per well. This includes agricultural, industrial, household wells, school district and public water system wells.

Housing

by Marianne Kast



What is a Pro-Housing city, and why did Fresno lose its designation?

In the 2019-2020 California State Budget Act a group of support, incentive, and accountability measures were included to increase the availability of housing statewide. The Prohousing Designation program was created to *acknowledge* jurisdictions that go-above-and-beyond state housing law to help accelerate housing production. The value of the Prohousing Designation is that these jurisdictions receive priority processing and additional points when competing for state housing related grants.

The City of Fresno received its Prohousing Designation in April, 2023, about one year after it applied to the state. The designation application requires the enactment of policies that encourage favorable land use and zoning, that accelerate housing production, that reduce construction and development costs, and that provide financial subsidies for housing. Additional requirements include having a certified Housing Element, engaging public participation, complying with state streamlining requirements, CEQA, and more. Two years after Fresno's application was submitted, seven items remained incomplete, so the City's designation was revoked.

Hoping to reinstate its Prohousing Designation, the City Council recently enacted policies reducing the minimum density of mobile home parks from 12 homes per acre to 8, eliminating parking requirements for accessory dwelling units, and allowing tiny homes on wheels to be considered primary residences. Further, a policy to streamline the development of housing in office buildings near transit has led to fierce debate, with the council backing off from allowing "ministerial approval" (approval without public input when the standards of development are met) for these projects.

A final vote on this policy will come up in the future. The City's loss of its Prohousing Designation means it cannot apply for millions of state housing dollars. This comes at a time when federal housing dollars are even less certain.

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HELP WANTED!!!

We are looking for members who might want to take a more active role in the League by serving on our Board. It is a great opportunity to be a part of all the work of our League, but also to specialize in an area of particular interest. We are especially interested in new board members who might want to help us by

- ♦ Acting as a liaison with our Fresno State student unit
- ♦ Coordinating a focus on water issues
- ♦ Working on communications and our website.

If you have particular skills and interests that you might like to pursue under the League umbrella, let us know about those---please. We would also love to have you serve outside the board on one of our committees. To volunteer or for more information contact Kay at

559-824-1185 or kaybertken752@gmail.com

CLIMATE *(continued from page 4)*

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Opt for products with minimal packaging, and consider how you can reuse or recycle the product and its packaging.

Consider the Product's Lifecycle: Think about the entire lifecycle of the product, from production to disposal. Products designed to last longer or be easily recycled are generally better for the environment.

By being mindful of these factors, you can make more informed choices that contribute to a healthier planet.

tfiggs@comcast.net

EDUCATION *(continued from page 5)*

In community meetings over the last year, five general areas of need were identified for the LCAP: academics, safety, engagement/school climate, staff support, and food/nutrition. The extensive LCAP report to the state enumerating those expenditures and plans for evaluating their impact is available on the district website.

At its last meeting of the year the board conducted its own quarterly self-evaluation. The exercise allows the board to grade itself in accomplishing various target activities, including determining goals and establishing systems that allow for achieving those goals.

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Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



In reviewing the biomedical science achievements in one of the most economically and socially important diseases of our times, I was astounded by the breadth of our current understanding of Alzheimer disease and related dementias. Research conducted around the developed world has laid open the details of structural, molecular, and genetic factors that lead to irreversible brain damage.

Laboratory and clinical scientists have closed in on the possibility of early diagnosis and treatment. The media has recently touted new blood testing that might identify or exclude Alzheimer less expensively than current imaging and spinal fluid analysis. Regrettably, we find ourselves at an impasse. These blood tests lose their predictive value in people with minimal or indefinite symptoms, the very population for whom intervention might be most effective.

We are even further away from safe and effective treatments. Intravenous agents that remove the wayward proteins responsible for brain injury, beta amyloid and p-tau, have been approved by the FDA for treating early Alzheimer, but are very modestly effective based on sensitive cognitive testing and brain imaging. On research surveys, they are rated as ineffective by care providers.

By far the leading agent is lecanemab (Lequemb), which charted sales of \$361 million the last year. The annual cost for the drug, monitoring, and administration is about \$75,000 yearly. Medicare shoulders 80% of this expense through its Part B drug program, a burden that is problematic with cuts to Medicare threatened by current legislative efforts. Just today, as I have been writing this, the Alzheimer Europe website reported that the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE), which controls the formulary of Britain's National Health Service, has declined to purchase lecanemab due to its poor cost-to-benefit ratio. The same sensible economy should be embraced by our new Health and Human Services secretary.

Based in our current, advanced understanding of the causes of Alzheimer, it is likely that we are not far from finding effective early diagnosis and treatment. Or would be, if not for the drastic cuts in medical research funding by the Trump administration. Our NIH has been responsible for 80% of *global* public biomedical R&D. The projected cut in NIH funding of 40% will cause a 32% reduction in dollars spent on worldwide governmental medical research. Cash accounting fails to fully quantify the effects of organizational disruption. It will take heroic private and public investment to re-establish a healthy international medical research capability.

My scratchpad math says that long-term care for Alzheimer dementia costs the US about \$100 billion annually. So the struggle for effective treatments could provide an excellent return on investment. The recent plan for reorganization of the NIH has, however, seriously undermined the 35 Alzheimer Disease Research Centers located at universities across the US. Half have effectively been defunded due to canceled grant renewal meetings.

China, on the other hand, has achieved unprecedented understanding of the early course of Alzheimer disease. As an autocratic megastate, it can do human studies not possible in advanced democracies. Starting in 2000, Chinese researchers recruited about a thousand volunteers (?) to undergo spinal taps and brain imaging annually for the next two decades. Completed in 2020, this research project found characteristic spinal fluid changes of Alzheimer disease 18 years before the onset of symptoms and brain imaging changes of the disease. In spite of the obvious ethical problems of this study, the New England Journal of Medicine published this research last year without comment.

The vision of early prevention of Alzheimer by the development of affordable and simple screening tools will probably be achieved within the next decade. Barring a major change in current federal support for medical research, the key discoveries will belong to other nations.



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Webmaster Robin Chiero

Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy

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Men and Women age 16 and above Making Democracy Work

MISSION: The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of interested individuals and influences public policy through voter education and advocacy on issues. The League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

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 - \$75 is the recommended amount. However you can choose an amount, with \$20 being the least you can pay. Renew online at <https://portal.lwv.org/>

Please make your check payable to the US League of Women Voters, Fresno, and send to our local office at LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710. with registration form below

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