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## The *Fresno* VOTER

### Could a positive transformation be in the offing?

#### A doctor looks at some

#### healthcare trends and shares his



Richard Bertken, MD

**W**ill the experience of lurching and suffering through the worst pandemic since the 1917 influenza bring about positive transformations in our personal lives? Could that transformation fuel a renaissance of the key institutions of our irresolute democracy? History supports this seeming Panglossian view. Examples of cultural makeovers following plagues abound. As a thought experiment, frame the physical and emotional suffering due to Covid-19 as a universal “pre-existing condition.” That might provide the extra energy we need to move on to a universal health care plan. The challenge is channeling that energy into deeply original insights supported by the heavy lifting of research.

In the May 11 *Fresno Bee*, Adam Gray, Assemblyman for District 21 (including Merced, Los Banos, and Modesto) asks Governor Newsome for a “Blue New Deal” to accelerate the training of doctors for the underserved Central San Joaquin Valley. His billion-dollar ask for a traditional brick-and-mortar medical school during a Covid-19 induced crash in state revenues is certainly Panglossian. It lacks the ingenuity to espouse more affordable and more nimble ways to train healthcare personnel and induce them to settle in the Valley. It also ignores what is already happening. Since its founding 45 years ago, UCSF-Fresno has quietly grown to a program graduating 100 fully trained physicians each year, 50% of whom settle in the Central San Joaquin Valley. It has provided thousands of clinical rotations to medical students. It will continue to grow, likely much faster and in new activities. Its output of local physicians is in part due to the most profound determinate of where doctors settle. It is not in proximity to their medical school as Gray claims, but to their post-graduate training program.

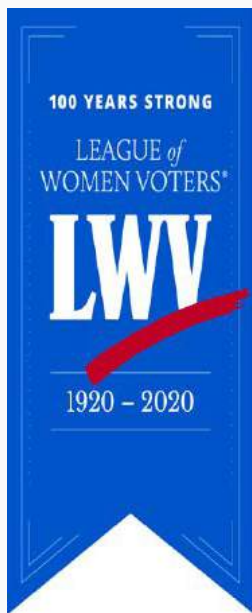
According to Gray, a 2020 Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) report faulted UCSF-Fresno for producing only eight doctors a year. I could not find this statistic in the LAO report I read online. On the contrary, the LAO reports many areas of growth of medical training in Fresno. The state will fund growth in the residency and fellowship programs. UCSF has achieved formal licensing of UCSF-Fresno to provide two years of medical school training, with plans to grow a

*(continued on page 5)*



Monday, June 8  
Board Meeting  
Via **ZOOM**  
Look for on-line  
Invitation

Members and Guests  
invited to all League  
meetings and events



## President's Message



# W

e're two months into what we once referred to as "these crazy times." I think we've moved on from that descriptor to the understanding that much in our lives has permanently changed and will continue to change as long as we live with the threat of Covid-19.

I've grown to enjoy online formats for many meetings that I used to race to in my car, and even some that I never seemed to have time to attend. At this point, I need a scheduling "app" to keep my Zoom meetings from overlapping.

But this move to online formats has laid bare the inconsistent availability of broadband Internet service in our city, our county, across our state, and nationally, too. Internet providers have generally been able to provide service, at their discretion, wherever it has been profitable for them. Since Internet service has significant cost for each user, the providers build out their service in areas where patrons are most able to pay and users are most densely gathered together. That leaves communities like West Fresno, much of rural Fresno County, foothill areas, and many other parts of our community with unreliable or no service.

This lack of Internet service means some employees cannot work from home, some students can't participate in online school, and some households cannot benefit from online services like banking, medical care, and shopping. The cost of Internet service can also be prohibitive, though providers have created low-cost access for qualified residents in areas where there is existing infrastructure. Additionally, school districts have distributed WiFi "hot spots" and Internet- equipped school buses to connect students to school, but these solutions are limited in strength and hours of operation.

In the wake of Covid-19, utility providers (for water, electricity, gas, phone) have been mandated to suspend shut-offs for non-payment. No such order exists for Internet service, despite the necessity of that service now and as our lives move forward.

It is well past the time to ensure that every business and household in California has broadband Internet service. We leave big swaths of our community behind when we ignore the need for this basic utility.

*Marianne*

## MEMBER NEWS

*Please edit your roster*



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## Voter Services

by Liz Shields



To dispel doubts about voters' attitudes towards vote-by-mail ballots, Fresno County Elections Department posted a Statement of Vote for each precinct in the county. It shows that 42.25% of all registered voters in Fresno County voted, and of those ballots almost 87% were returned by mail or drop box, while 13% voted at a polling place.

Fresno County is ahead of the game again. Governor Newsom is requiring **all** counties to send vote-by-mail ballots to all registered voters for the November election. Discussions are still ongoing as to how the ballots will be returned, especially with the need to accommodate voters with disabilities and language difficulties.

Recently the Knight Foundation commissioned a study on why people who are eligible to vote do not do so. In recent elections 100 million people eligible to vote did not cast a ballot. The study surveyed 12,000 persistent non-voters in 10 swing states on their views, attitudes and behaviors pertaining to their voting records. Their responses were compared to a group of 1,000 active voters who consistently vote in elections and 1,000 young eligible voters, 18 -24 years old. Focus groups were also employed during the study.



This is  
not happening!



The chief results of the study indicate that non-voters have a lack of faith in the election system and have serious doubts about the impact of their own votes. Non-voters tend to not follow the news but do not seek other sources of information about candidates or issues. Interestingly there are only slight differences between voters and non-voters with respect to party affiliation or social and fiscal philosophies. Unfortunately young eligible voters, ages 18 – 24, are even less likely to follow political news and feel less informed at election time than non-voters and do not seem to care about politics.

The full study including methodology and findings may be accessed at <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/the-100-million-project/>  
[elizs44@yahoo.com](mailto:elizs44@yahoo.com)

## California's Water:

from the LWVC

Water Committee



When you turn on the tap in your home, where does the water come from? Where does it go? The answers may surprise you. The California water system is bewildering in its complexity. Some water rights date to the Gold Rush and are held jealously. Our population and economy grew as they did because we engineered dams, viaducts, channels and more that move water from hundreds – sometimes thousands – of miles away.

Giant water projects have allowed us to build an agricultural juggernaut that demands water, even when the rivers and aqueducts run dry. Local rivers and streams are an important source of water for many communities and farms in Northern and Central California. When surface water is not available, we turn to groundwater, but that resource is being overdrawn.

Water is important to all aspects of life – ours, and that of plants and other animals. Water and water policy also have influence on and are influenced by many other aspects of natural resources – climate change, forests, sea level rise, land use, and many more.

The League of Women Voters of California has more than 30 members dedicated to understanding California's water. The Water Committee, co-chaired by Jane Wagner-Tyack and Roberta Borgonovo, has members from all across California with both scientific and policy expertise on California's unique water supply and distribution systems.

To help share our information, the Water Committee is planning a series of articles on California's water to inform you, to intrigue you, and to share the team's expertise. The articles will be offered about once a month to Local Leagues for possible publication in their VOTER newsletter, and accessible online.

*The topic for July is:*

*Water is Related to Everything – How water links to energy, health, environmental justice, agriculture, recreation, and so much else.*

Thanks to Diane Merrill, our rep on the Water Committee, for submitting this article.



by Kay Bertken



**NEXT FUSD Meetings: June 10, 17**

**Watch streaming on FUSD website, Xfinity ch 94;  
comment at [publiccomment@fresnounified.org](mailto:publiccomment@fresnounified.org)**

As is usual this time of year, most of Fresno Unified Board meetings have been occupied with budget discussions. The difference this year has been the certainty of cuts and the great uncertainty of the future. In the Governor's May revision of his budget proposals, the current projections are for a \$79.1 million dollar reduction in Fresno Unified's general revenue plus some specific program reductions that are mostly offset by a bit of relief from the escalation of the district contribution retirement programs.

### Budget reductions

The total anticipated revenue reductions that the Board will be planning for include \$79.2 million for the current budget year, \$103 million for 21-22, and \$109 million for 22-23—the latter two figures assuming some state supplemental appropriations. There is already anticipation of further revisions this summer after the legislature votes in June.

### No layoffs

The Board had planned to consider exactly where it will be making cuts in its next meeting on June 10, but several trustees are suggesting a postponement until their June 17 meeting. The district staff and board members have committed to avoiding layoffs, and there is no interest in following Governor Newsom's suggested 10% pay cut for state workers.

Fresno Unified is better positioned, given the district reserves, than many districts in the state that are facing budget crises. FUSD staff is recommending a phased approach to cuts and to utilizing federal stimulus funds

(\$44 million from the CARES Act), delaying any anticipation of state distributions from the Covid Relief grants to the states, and delaying realization of about \$18 million in savings realized during this year's shut-down— all to accommodate the anticipated bigger reductions in the coming years.

### Draw down on district reserves

The current staff proposal suggests ongoing cuts amounting to \$27.4 mil-



lion for 20-21, adding additional cuts of \$18.5 million in 21-22 and \$15 million more cuts in 22-23. All of this is predicated on drawing down district reserves by half and no additional federal stimulus package.

Board trustees are leaning heavily and gratefully on the advice of the District CFO, Ruthie Quinto, to guide them through this budget process. There are clear disagreements about some of their early suggestions, which leaves some interesting bargaining ahead.

In addition to budget uncertainty, FUSD and all school districts are facing decisions about what school will even look like next year. Staff committees in FUSD have been formed to try to determine priorities and options while facing criticism

about implementation of online learning this spring. An accounting of online contacts is being prepared for the Board.

### Problems with special ed

The district has acknowledged difficulties meeting the needs especially of special education students. FUSD was in year two of implementing reforms called for by the audit of their special education services by the Council of Great City Schools. Staff proposals for the third year of implementation would add more nurses and further reduce offerings that span multiple grades. It is one of the few areas of early FUSD budget proposals that included increases; and while increases have been scaled back in the Governor's new state-level proposals, there is still some anticipated increase in state funding for special education.

Beyond the budget, the district celebrates its nutrition staff and the 2.2 million meals they have provided so far to students and their families. The summer meals program will kick off once school is out, and food will be available at 22 sites.

### Internet hotspots

A pilot program has launched at Kirk Elementary to test the possibility of using the District's buses to provide Internet hotspots for students who do not have Internet access. In addition, enrollment for preschool is open and online along with regular school enrollments—a first. It is impressive to see our schools stretching to try and meet the expansive needs of our students and families— way beyond the classroom.

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## A doctor's vision *(continued from page 1)*

Hybrid medical school experience split between the San Francisco campus (for basic science training) and UCSF-Fresno (for hands-on clinical training). The real fault with UCSF-Fresno lies with UCSF's complacency in its early handling of its Fresno asset. Having beaten UCLA in a war to capture Fresno's valuable teaching population, San Francisco failed for three decades to capitalize on this resource for expanding its classes, for performing research on population health, and for innovation in primary care.

My hope is that the trend to outsourcing the postgraduate training of doctors to areas of need in California will achieve more than the great goal of better distribution of health care. My hope is that all levels of government will see that they have a role of bringing the practice of medicine in America out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into interconnected systems with coherent data storage, display, and analysis. We must make rural doctors feel their work is respected and recognized by paying them better and by enabling ready access to the same resources as their urban hospital counterparts.

Einstein famously said something like, "We cannot solve our problems using the same thinking we used when we created them." Indeed. There are numerous constraints on using our existing healthcare workforce more efficiently. We do not need physicians to perform routine immunization and preventative care services, for example. Physicians should not have to solicit paper records from other practitioners or hospitals. Alternatives to fee-for-service billing and face-to-face doctor visits are promising options for increased efficiency. And so on. We need to be constantly testing correctives for pernicious constraints and adopting, recalibrating, or abandoning them based on carefully gathered data.

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## Lwvus convention news

*Hello, Leaguers! Welcome to our 54th Biennial National Convention and our first ever national virtual convention! We're thrilled you'll be joining us for our centennial year convention, and we want to thank you for pivoting with us as we've made this difficult change from our planned meeting in Washington, D.C., to the virtual space.*

*Despite these very different circumstances, we are certain this year's convention will be filled with commemoration, connection, and celebration. Our foremothers worked through a pandemic—the 1918 flu pandemic—to get the vote over 100 years ago, so it almost feels fitting that we honor them a century later by moving the work forward through the COVID-19 pandemic. We know our League members can persist through anything, and we can't wait to see how you will bring your excitement and enthusiasm to our online convention space. We are so looking forward to connecting with you virtually this year.*

**Chris Carson, President**

**LWVUS Board of Directors**

Registration is now open for the virtual 2020 Convention scheduled for June 25-27.

Please read the following information carefully before completing your registration.

- The cost of registration is \$50 per person.
- **Registration is currently available for voting delegates only. We hope to offer registration for non-voting observers and more information on that will be offered as it becomes available.**

## Climate Change

by Lenore Yousef



LWVC has formed a Climate Change Task Force (CCTF) to combat climate change. I recently attended a subcommittee of this group, the Food, Soils and Agriculture Task Force, via Zoom.

We discussed “A Green Stimulus to Rebuild Our Economy, » an open letter to Congress to address three crises: the pandemic with its economic consequences, the climate emergency, and extreme inequality. Its purpose is to plan our economic recovery in a way that protects us from the impact of climate change while lifting up workers and vulnerable communities. To read this document, do an Internet search using the title of the letter.

We also discussed a recently appointed state committee, the CA Economic Recovery Task Force, which is co-chaired by Tom Steyer, a climate change activist and former Democratic presidential candidate. The Food, Soils and Ag Task Force will recommend to the CCTF Steering Committee that an appointee should keep food resources, food security, healthy soils and small farmers as a priority.

Most of the discussion at the May meeting centered around food. A TED Talk, “100 Solutions to Reverse Global Warming, » reports that the third major contributor to emissions is the result of food waste. CA SB 1383 (2016) recognizes the food waste problem, mandating a 75% reduction in organic waste from the 2014 level by 2025. One solution is to divert food that would go into landfill to the needy.



Another major contributor to emissions is non-plant-based diets. Plant-based diets promote health and decrease the use of animals as food. We can remind

people of the connection between animal product consumption and climate change. Animal husbandry is energy intensive and often results in negative impacts on soil, water and air quality.

The suggestion was made to introduce vegan and vegetarian foods at future LWV meetings and in our own homes. Another related suggestion is to promote “Climate Victory Gardens” which could acquaint people with the connection between healthy soils and carbon sequestration, the removal of carbon from the atmosphere.

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## Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



The Behavioral Health Board held its first meeting via Webex in May. The technology is not easy for some members, but meeting helps us get back to our job of advocating for the best possible behavioral health services—even during this pandemic.

Director Dawan Utecht reported that the Department of Behavioral Health and its contracted providers are continuing to serve clients to the best of their ability. The clinic at the Metro location is open for lab work, injectable medications, and dispensing of written prescriptions. Telemedicine, including phone calls, is being used with clients who have access to needed technology. Case managers and Peer Support Specialists are in contact with clients by phone. Overall the requests for services are down, as are the number of clients served.



Special guest Lance Nelson shared his poignant story as a gay student at Selma High School. Previously he had written an opinion piece published in The Fresno Bee, which revealed that there have been few changes in attitude toward or support for LGBTQ+ students at the school since his graduation fourteen years ago. Knowing that these concerns are not limited to Selma, the Behavioral Health Board voted to send a letter to the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools asking him to use his influence to encourage all schools in the county to provide education and training to staff members so that they might better serve and support students of all sexual orientations. Director Utecht agreed to support this request through the Department’s joint program (All 4 Youth) with Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. The Board hopes to follow through and to advocate for individuals from all diverse groups so that they will receive support to meet their behavioral health needs.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. We encourage awareness and understanding of mental illness and the need for appropriate and accessible services for all. And now, more than ever, we all need to focus on our own mental and emotional health during these stressful times.

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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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