



Santa Cruz VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

March 2026

Volume 59, Number 5

LOCAL PROGRAM PLANNING- Please Join Us

In this Issue

<i>Welcome New Members</i> -----	1
<i>Local Program Planning</i> -----	1
<i>President's Message</i> -----	2
<i>John Laird Interview</i> -----	2
<i>Gail Pellerin Interview</i> -----	3
<i>Dawn Addis Interview</i> -----	5
<i>A Couple of Definitions</i> -----	7
<i>The SAVE Act</i> -----	8
<i>Earth Hour</i> -----	8

When: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 1:00 p.m.

Where: The home of Sandy Warren
150 Scenic Street, Santa Cruz

RSVP: email Sandy at:
sandra333warren@gmail.com

As a grassroots organization, the League of Women Voters looks to its members to determine our focus. Each spring, we ask what local issues and topics you want to know more about or bring to the attention of the community. Then, during the next fiscal year (July to June), our Santa Cruz County League will base its programs and events on topics chosen by members.

What facet of local government concerns or interests you: infrastructure, transportation, governance, law enforcement, or the judiciary? Do you have concerns about our health systems, immigration, agriculture, or the environment? Any topic of local interest will be considered.

Bring your ideas to this month's meeting; it's helpful (but not required) if you let us know in advance via email at league@lwvsc.org. If you cannot attend the meeting in person, submit your ideas via email.

All members and prospective members may attend our local Santa Cruz County League's Local Program Planning meeting on Tuesday, March 31, at 1 pm, at the home of Sandy Warren, 150 Scenic Street in Santa Cruz (driving directions below). To attend, please RSVP by email to Sandy Warren at sandra333warren@gmail.com

DRIVING DIRECTIONS TO MEETING

From northbound Highway 1/Mission Street, turn right onto Bay Street (towards UCSC). Continue along Bay 0.7 of a mile, turn left onto Escalona Drive (past Kenneth Street), then make an immediate right onto Bayona Drive heading uphill. Take the first left onto Scenic Street; 150 is the last house on the left at the end of the cul-de-sac. Street parking is available.

Welcome to Our New Members

We are delighted to see seven new League members this year. They are:

- LeeAnn Bjelle
- Judy Elder
- Leslie Kloes
- Catherine Larrick
- Jody Len
- Diane Pacholski
- Sharon Wiley

We look forward to meeting you in person at our local program planning meeting, or at another future meeting.

President's Message

Participating in the legislative interviews included in this issue of the VOTER increased my awareness of how many challenges our state legislators face and how skillful they are in dealing with multiple issues facing our local communities. Representatives from Leagues in each district were included in the planning and execution of interviews that all included numerous local questions as well as those provided by LWVC. One of the most interesting features was meeting with members from other areas of the state and discussing our ideas in the planning sessions and then hearing the diverse answers to our questions by Assemblymember Gail Pellerin, Assemblymember Dawn Addis, and State Senator John Laird. Other Leagues participating were San Jose/Santa Clara, Monterey County, and San Luis Obispo County. At the time of this writing, an interview with Assemblymember Robert Rivas has been scheduled for this month, including members from Santa Cruz County, Monterey County, and San Jose/Santa Clara. This should appear in the next issue of the VOTER.

Now that we have completed our National Program Planning meeting on February 17, I have submitted the results online to LWVUS. We supported the proposed program focus, Women Defend Democracy/Democracy Under Siege and chose to recommend another issue in addition to the proposed program. The additional issue was a concurrence with LWV of Colorado State opposing religious nationalism, supporting separation of church and state and freedom of religion. In this survey, I also reported on ways our local League has provided information and supported actions on many different LWV national positions and added two additional ideas supported by members at our Program Planning: updating the national position on privatization proposed by LWV of Port Washington-Manhassat New York and concurrence with the immigration position proposed by LWV Washington State. The National Program will be discussed and decided by the vote of delegates at the National Convention June 25-28 in Columbus, OH. Our Santa Cruz County League has been allotted 2 delegate spots. As your president, I have registered to be a delegate, using the virtual Zoom option, and 1st Vice President/VOTER editor Marilyn Radisch intends to be the second delegate.

Later this month, our Local Program Planning meeting will be happening on Tuesday March 31 at the home of Sandy

Warren. This is a wonderful opportunity to help set the program for the coming year and socialize with others from our local League. Since our Program Co-chair Pam Newbury will be writing with more details in this issue of the VOTER, I will sign off for now.

---Barbara Lewis, President LWVSCC

Interview with Senator John Laird



Marianne Gawain moderated the LWV legislative interview with State Senator John Laird on Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026. In attendance were Sharon Miller and Diane Rowe of Monterey County, Marlys McPherson and Glenn Silloway of San Luis Obispo County, Barbara Lewis and Lara Triona of Santa Cruz

County, and two of Sen. Laird's aides, Jordan Montgomery and Isabel Meza.

Senator Laird gave the following answers to our questions during the one hour he spent on Zoom with us:

Question 1: What major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2026?

A: State Budget is top of the list. Revenues are coming in higher than expected for this budget cycle because of AI development, so the coming year's budget can be balanced. Because the bubble probably won't be sustained, there should be no new programs and cuts should be made now to cushion the following year's \$20-\$35 billion deficit. Other concerns: back-stop federal cuts; make sure money from a proposed \$10 billion dollar housing bond helps disadvantaged communities like those in the Salinas Valley; a five-year extension for Diablo Canyon; a unitary tax; the San Andreas Corridor Wildlife Crossing; a medical school for UC Santa Cruz; and distressed hospitals. He reported that legislation to restore cuts to Planned Parenthood was just passed.

Question 2: What are your personal legislative priorities?

A: The Senator chairs/sits on many committees and is still reviewing possibilities. They include allowing local tax measures to backstop federal cuts, the environment, and coastal issues to include combatting federal plans for offshore oil drilling.

Question 3: Congratulations on 300,000 comments regarding the federal proposal for offshore oil and gas leasing. What can California do with respect to closing gaps in California's Coastal Blue Wall?

A: Sen. Laird has long supported legislation allowing local entities to regulate onshore facilities tied to offshore drilling. Now only LA, Orange, and Santa Barbara Counties need to come on board. The current federal administration is accelerating its timeline, reducing public and environment reviews and community comments. State senators from both sides of the aisle are concerned.

Question 4: What can the state do to ensure we are still moving forward on alternative energy? Locally we are specifically interested in wind and energy storage.

A: Offshore wind and battery storage are crucial for alternative energy. After the Moss Landing fire, the Senator was behind a bill addressing permits and safety standards to prevent a recurrence of what happened at Moss Landing.

Question 5. What can the state do when federal policy is leading to immigration enforcement actions we do not want? Especially, to ensure that federal employees can be held accountable to obey the law and to ensure due process.

A: There is now legislation regarding face covering and civil liability, and the state Attorney General has been given funding to file federal lawsuits. It is important for everyone to speak up when egregious things happen.

Question 6: What can and should be done on the Central Coast to address sea level rise?

A: Besides having been the State Resources Secretary for eight years, Senator Laird has long worked on legislation to specify quantifiable measures regarding sea level rise. Discussions need to take place BEFORE extreme events like earthquakes or atmospheric rivers happen. The state should be able to fund any planning updates in local jurisdictions, but implementation needs to be shared by private, local, and state funding---and eventually the federal government will be back, too.

Additional Updates:

*It was originally proposed that 12,000 acres of Diablo Canyon land would be turned over for conservation. Discussions between PG&E, the Coastal Commission, and the public have resulted in about 8,000 acres for conservation and 25 miles of trails. PG&E wants to sell 4,000 acres for development but must wait 20 years.

*The state is struggling with how to make up for lost gas taxes from the success of electric vehicles. A study has been funded to consider a new road usage tax.

*The Builder's Remedy takes away local control. Senator Laird would like to do away with it if jurisdictions are indeed meeting their RHNA goals.

Interview with Assemblymember Gail Pellerin



On January 16, 2026, League members interviewed Assemblymember Gail Pellerin, who, since 2022, has represented California State Assembly District 28, which includes the northern portion of Santa Cruz County and

extends eastward into San Jose and Morgan Hill. ([link to map of district](#)). Attending from Gail Pellerin's office, along with the Assemblymember, was her field representative, Lisette Jones. Representatives from our Santa Cruz County League included Barbara Lewis, Pam Newbury, Jane Cohen and Mindy Ryan. Representatives from LWV San Jose/Santa Clara were Gloria Chun Hoo and Susan Skorey.

Question 1-Mindy Ryan: What major issues do you think the Legislature must deal with in 2026?

The California Budget deficit and the current Federal Government's policy to stop all Federal Funding to sanctuary states as of February 1st is of primary concern, especially given the rising costs of energy, health care, health insurance, food and the continuing Federal funding cut threats to the Child Care programs. The State

Legislature must pass a budget to be reviewed by the Governor by June 15.

Assemblymember Pellerin sees the budget as a reflection of our values, requiring tough decisions in the year to come as we try to protect our most vulnerable communities. Her legislative package will emphasize affordability, climate protection, mental health, democracy and consumer protection, especially from harmful Artificial Intelligence (AI) software systems.

Question 2 - Jane Cohen: What are your personal legislative priorities?

Speaking as Chair of the Assembly Elections Committee, having served 27 years as the chief elections official of Santa Cruz County – Elections are one major priority. As chair of the Select Committee on California’s Mental Health Crisis, another major area of focus is mental health. She is an active member of the committees for Natural Resources, Business and Professionals, and Privacy and Consumer Protection. She also serves on a multi-state working group concerned with the timely regulation of the growing influence of AI in every aspect of our society, especially in the areas of news, elections, child safety, and consumer protection.

Assemblymember Pellerin has introduced **AB1548 to establish the Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority**, a tri-county governing body to ensure long-term stewardship funding for land in Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

Other bills in the works include a Public Safety Bill to strengthen the DUI laws regarding self-driving cars, and a bill to provide mental health services for jurors exposed to traumatizing evidence during criminal trials, as occurred in the local murder of Madyson Middleton in 2015.

Question 3 - Barbara Lewis: What is going on in CA and locally to block offshore oil drilling as proposed by the Trump administration?

Assemblymember Pellerin has gone on record stating there will be no new offshore drilling, “Not in California! Not ever!” She elaborated that we have had no new offshore drilling in CA for 40 years. It is disastrous to our coastal economy and environment which currently generates billions more than any proposed oil drilling project. She is an active member of the California Legislative Central Coast Caucus (CLCCC), strongly urging

the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior to remove California from the [Bureau of Ocean Management proposal](#) to expand offshore drilling.

Question 4 - Jane Cohen: Are we doing anything to protect against interference with elections in California?

Assemblymember Pellerin authored **AB-502** in 2025 to specifically prohibit distributing election communications which deliberately contain deceptive content relating to candidates and officials. She is concerned that the current statewide ballot initiative to require voters to show photo ID at the polls would disenfranchise and discourage voters, noting that we already have rigorous voter ID policies in force in California and have used them to verify the identity of over 95% of our voters.

Follow up question - Barbara Lewis: Do you think there is a chance the Federal Government could take away the mail-in ballot option?

She thinks that is a concern but is not likely to happen. As a member of the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) and the bi-partisan multi-state Elections Committee, she is working to advance policies at the Federal level to guarantee full funding of the Post Office in order to ensure that mail gets delivered. She emphasized the importance of alerting voters to vote early and use drop boxes to avoid the obstacles to voting being advocated by the federal government to increase the ways in which votes can be rejected.

Question 5 - Gloria Chun Hoo and Susan Skorey: What actions are you taking to control the impact of AI on elections?

Assemblymember Pellerin has been working on amendments to the elections bill listed above to limit the increasing prevalence of false media and its influence on public perceptions of individuals and policies.

She is also very concerned about the impact of popular national and international prediction markets, namely online betting apps where people bet on the results of elections, creating financial incentives to influence elections. She is advocating for legislative ways to regulate and stop these activities.

Question #6 - Gloria Chun Hoo and Susan Skorey: Can you comment on the Trump administration suing Morgan Hill and Petaluma to end their ordinances to ban natural gas in new buildings?

Assemblymember Pellerin said this is no longer an issue since these cities have never implemented these ordinances.

Question #7- Pam Newbury: Would you give us an update on how the legislature is addressing fire regulations and insurance issues?

Assemblymember Pellerin hosted a recent successful town hall on home hardening and how to protect property against wildfire threats. Her team is planning more educational activities, and she has been working with Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council, San Jose Fire Department, Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, Agriculture and Natural Resources Network, Komodo Fire Systems (a Morgan Hill business selling a federally certified fire retardant being used in homes and on utility poles), and Santa Clara County Fire Department.

She reported that Santa Cruz County has second largest number of Firewise USA® Communities in the nation. Firewise USA®, a program led by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), promotes collaborative efforts among residents, local fire departments, and other key stakeholders to bolster the fire resistance of homes and surroundings. She also noted, with optimism, that there have been many new technological developments, including Blaze Guardian® Autonomous Fire Fighting systems which can continuously monitor a property for fire.

The California Insurance Commissioner submitted his plan for the year shortly before the Los Angeles fires. Since then, there has been legislation to help L.A. get the tools needed to rebuild. A strategic plan has been developed to get insurance companies to come back to California and write comprehensive policies. Californians have been under-paying for our insurance for years, and, given the high real estate values, there needs to be a major restructuring because the California FAIR Plan (Fair Access to Insurance Requirements) will not be financially sustainable in the future. Some initiatives have been adopted such as Catastrophic Modeling that will account for climate change but may cost homeowners more. Several new laws were recently enacted regarding fire and its consequences including:

AB 1 ensures consumers who responsibly harden their homes against wildfires receive the largest cost-reducing benefit.

AB 1455 requires the State Board of Forestry to implement Zone Zero: : a 5-foot zone of ember-resistant materials and other rules regarding defensible space.

AB 429 Ensures that insurance settlements for certain fire-affected properties in Northern California are exempted from the homeowner’s gross income.

In addition, the Governor allocated \$72 million for forestry management and restoration.

Ms. Pellerin acknowledged that the concept of a “fire season” is no longer valid. It’s “fire season” year around. The Central Fire District’s measure to build a new facility on Soquel and 41st failed two years ago which is very concerning. This is an indication that we need to increase public awareness of the dangers we face.

In Conclusion: The League appreciates the time Assembly member Pellerin took to talk to us.

---Thanks to Jane Cohen, LWVSCC Secretary, for this report

Interview with Assemblymember Dawn Addis



On January 20, 2026, League members interviewed Assemblymember Dawn Addis who, since 2022, has represented California State Assembly District 30, which narrowly rounds Monterey Bay and continues through Monterey County into San Luis Obispo County. All three County Leagues had representatives in the conference.

Question 1: What major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2026?

Assemblymember Addis commented that the Trump administration continues to attack the things that California holds dear and the methods we use to pay for these things. SNAP benefits, housing dollars, healthcare dollars, and many other funds are under siege.

The Assemblymember noted that last year California allocated \$25 million to the Attorney General for legal action against the Trump administration. To date, the

Attorney General has initiated or signed on to 53 lawsuits, many of which concern cuts in funding initiated by the president.

She reminded us that California is a donor state, meaning that we pay more in federal dollars than the state gets back. As a result, we pay for federal services in many red states. At the January 20 budget hearing, there was discussion about the \$3 billion to \$12 billion state deficit and how it will be impacted by IPOs, stocks, and taxes paid by California's high net worth individuals as they attempt to navigate the federal administration attacks.

The Assemblymember also noted that our environment and fair elections are under attack, while ICE enforcement is creating fear and uncertainty in our communities. As a result, this is a big year for the legislature to stand up for California's 40 million residents and 6 million public school children.

Follow-up Question: What are the priority issues of the California Legislative Central Coast Caucus?

The California Legislative Central Coast Caucus (CLCCC) has coalesced around environmental issues such as the Sable oil pipeline in Santa Barbara. In end-of-session budget negotiations, they ensured a high level of accountability before oil drilling comes back online. She noted that Sable had tried to restore operations on the 10-year anniversary of the Gaviota oil spill. The CLCCC has submitted public comment on proposed onshore and offshore drilling expansion and held a press conference on January 6 regarding this issue. Protecting our coastline means protecting the region's economy. Additionally, the CLCCC will develop their legislative platform in the coming months.

Question 2: What are your personal legislative priorities?

She has introduced two bills in the first 2026 legislative session: AB 1536 the Save Our Shores Act and AB 1539 the Protect Our Democracy Act. The intent of the Save Our Shores Act is to identify and close any loopholes for offshore drilling that the federal administration may try to use. The Protect Our Democracy Act is specifically to stop a third term presidency. While the 22nd Amendment is clear, this bill makes it a felony for any political party to submit a candidate for president or vice president who is not eligible to serve under the 22nd Amendment.

As a result of the tragic Renée Good shooting in Minnesota, she is looking at legislation to deny qualified immunity to ICE agents who withhold or refuse

emergency medical care to those injured during their activities.

Other legislation currently under development covers a wide range of issues. She is working on housing legislation specific to the coastal zone with the League of Cities and on mobile home eviction legislation. She is in conversation with the California Fair Political Practices Commission regarding the transparency of campaign financing and considering reef-safe sunscreen labeling and communications.

Question 3: What recourse does California have to prevent the expansion of offshore oil drilling and encourage wind energy projects in federal waters and on federal land? What actions can California take to advance its alternative energy goals and policies?

Assemblymember Addis shared that this is exactly the question they are working on now with their analysts. The courts are one avenue, which is why \$25 million was allotted to the Attorney General. She noted that if oil that is extracted in federal waters makes an incursion into state waters (which reach out 3 miles from shore) it allows state courts to step in. In the case of the Sable pipeline, which moves offshore oil to onshore facilities, regulations needed to be strengthened, and this was passed in a budget bill in 2025. They are looking at additional policies that might be needed.

The CLCCC makes it a priority that its members are on all working groups that affect our coastline and Assemblymember Addis is a member of the Cap-and-Invest working group that advances alternative energy goals and policies. Last year the legislature reauthorized the Cap-and Invest Program (formerly Cap-and-Trade). With Cap-and-Invest, polluters can buy credits for their emissions and pay into the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) while entities that pollute less can sell credits. Hundreds of millions of dollars from that fund are being used to encourage electrification and fund green energy projects. This year, the working group is looking at how to refine their use of the funds. For instance, they may be used to help California to backfill the EV credits that the president has cut. GGRF funds will be used for Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant lands conservation in San Luis Obispo County.

Question 4: The Central Coast is home to many undocumented residents and protections for immigrants vary from county to county. Has the state done enough to protect our immigrant communities from federal actions or is there an opportunity for greater protection through state legislative action?

Assemblymember Addis observed that, while California is a nationwide leader in protecting immigrant rights, there is still a lot more to be done. Already in 2026, four immigration bills are under development in the legislature, including hers, which would end qualified immunity for ICE agents who deny medical care to those injured during enforcement activities. Another bill that she may coauthor would stop local law enforcement from moonlighting with ICE. This is problematic because in California there are strict barriers between agencies as outlined in SB 54 and the TRUTH Act. Another bill she is reviewing will temporarily allow immigrants to attend court appearances remotely, to keep them from being detained by ICE at the courthouse. She anticipates seeing a lot of legislation being introduced in 2026 to tighten protections for immigrants.

Question 5: Many local school districts in our counties are facing significant budget cuts due to declining enrollment and the end of COVID emergency relief funds. What is the legislature doing to help districts address these funding shortfalls?

The Assemblymember shared that the issue of how California calculates per pupil funding came up at the January 20 budget hearing. While there is historically high funding -- in the range of \$24,000 to \$27,000 per student -- districts are being impacted by the way funding is allocated. For example, if a child does not go to school or if enrollment declines, the school receives reduced funding. The Legislative Analyst's Office is providing suggestions for changes to funding allocations that will be assessed by the Budget Subcommittee on Education.

The Assemblymember noted that there was legislation introduced last year to address the issue that funding for transitional kindergarten was only for ADA districts, not basic aid districts. However, they found that moving away from ADA funding was difficult because it would harm other districts financially.

Question 6: The safety of battery storage plants near communities faced additional scrutiny after the Moss Landing fire and SB 283 was signed by Governor Newsom last year. Has the legislature done enough to improve safety? How can public safety be balanced with California's battery storage need of 52,000 MW by 2045?

Assemblymember Addis co-authored SB 283, which codified best practices that the battery storage industry was moving towards. She indicated that she thought it was a good bill, but that more needs to be done to ensure safety. Issues that still need to be addressed include statewide site requirements. Currently, battery storage plants can be built anywhere without regard to neighborhood, such as on farmland or next to schools or estuaries. Additionally, there are not adequate statewide regulations for water runoff and water disposal regulations. While a battery fire must burn itself out, water and rain wash away fire debris. She commented that Santa Cruz County is establishing its own regulations and Monterey County is attempting to pause battery storage plants until regulations are in place. To reduce confusion and ambiguity, Assemblymember Addis recommends adopting statewide regulations.

Additional comments or observations:

League attendees appreciated Assemblymember Addis's willingness to speak candidly about these issues as well as her continued engagement with League members at our events and in the community.

---thanks to Joanne Schultz of the San Luis Obispo League for this report

A Note on Robert Rivas' Interview

The interview with Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas was scheduled too late for inclusion in this newsletter. His interview will appear in our next edition.

A Couple of Definitions

In his final comment, Senator Laird mentioned doing away with the Builder's Remedy if jurisdictions are meeting their RHNA goals. So - what is the Builder's Remedy and what does RHNA stand for?

The **Builder's Remedy** is a legal tool in the United States, particularly in California, that allows developers to bypass local zoning laws to expedite

the construction of low or middle-income housing when a municipality fails to comply with state housing development laws. This mechanism aims to address housing shortages by facilitating the approval of new housing projects that include a certain percentage of affordable units.

The **Regional Housing Needs Assessment** is the California state-mandated process within the housing element of its General Plan; to determine how much housing must be planned for each jurisdiction according to Housing Element Law to meet 'projected and existing' housing needs at a variety of affordability levels. Based on demographic data, the state calculates housing need in coordination with each region's planning body, known as a Council of Governments.

From LWVUS

What is Happening with the SAVE Act?

This statement comes from the League when the House passed the SAVE (Safeguard American Voter Eligibility) Act:

“Today is a dark day in politics. The passage of the SAVE Act in the US House is a direct attack on the fundamental right to vote and a dangerous step backward for our democracy.

The *SAVE Act* is based on misinformation and fearmongering rather than facts, as there is no evidence of widespread non-citizen voter registration or voting in state and federal elections. Instead, the *SAVE Act* will create new barriers to voter registration by requiring submission of documentary proof of citizenship materials in person every time a voter updates their registration, which particularly harms rural voters, voters of color, married women who have changed their last names, and other voters who have been historically marginalized who already face obstacles in accessing the ballot box.

The League of Women Voters of the United States strongly opposes this legislation, which now moves to the Senate. We call on senators to do their job to protect American voters and reject this dangerous bill.

We will continue to fight to protect the voting rights of all eligible Americans and ensure that every voice is heard in our elections. The League is committed to working with our partners and legal advocates to pursue all avenues in fighting against this harmful law. We will use every tool at our disposal to defend voters from unjust restrictions and uphold the integrity of our electoral system and democracy.”

The League of Women Voters envisions a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate. We believe in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy.

The League has joined over 100 other organizations in writing to House members opposing the SAVE Act.

And Finally – Earth Hour is Coming

Earth Hour was started by the World Wildlife Fund in Sydney, Australia in 2007. This event is held annually, encouraging individuals, communities, and businesses to give an hour for the earth by switching off non-essential electricity for an hour between 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. on the last Saturday in March. Before that became a worldwide event, the City of San Francisco held its own earth hour in October of 2007 – the first time it was held in the US. After the success of the March event, however, the SF organizers decided to rally behind the March Earth Hour being scheduled for 2008.

Earth Hour is additionally marked by landmarks and businesses switching off non-essential electric lights, for one hour from 8:30 to 9:30p.m., usually on the last Saturday of March, as a symbol of commitment to the planet. So – this Saturday, consider giving an hour to the health of the planet.

