



Santa Cruz VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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**It's that time of year again –
Time for us all to renew our memberships.**

Membership renewal is \$65 per person or \$100 per household. Student membership is \$10 for the year. Additional donations are encouraged and greatly appreciated.

Please consider adding a donation to help cover local program expenses. Make your dues check payable to League of Women Voters of Santa Cruz County or LWVSCC. Dues are not tax-deductible. To make a tax-deductible donation, please write a separate check to LWVC Education Fund. Mail your check(s) to: LWVSCC, PO Box 1745, Capitola, CA 95010.

This is also a good time to update your contact information if there have been changes - or to let us know if there is contact information you don't want made public.

If you would prefer to renew using PayPal, you can use this link:
<https://my.lwv.org/join/membership-using-paypal>

We truly appreciate your support in the past, and we hope that you will continue to support the work we do.

ANNUAL MEETING

**Please join us for our
ANNUAL MEETING**

**Saturday
June 10, 2023
9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

**Seascape Golf Club
Seascape Room
610 Clubhouse Drive
Aptos, CA 95003**

**Featuring
Gail Pellerin
Assemblymember and LWVSCC Member**

**Gail will speak about her perspective on current
legislation in the State Assembly.**

Check-in will begin at 9:30 a.m. with the Classic Breakfast Buffet from 10:00-10:30 a.m., followed by the program's speaker and our most important business meeting of the year.

If you wish to attend, please pay in advance - \$25 per person, either by PayPal, or by check made out to LWVSCC. Please indicate 'Annual Meeting' on the check, and the names of guests or additional members. The check may be mailed to Santa Cruz League of Women Voters, PO Box 1745, Capitola, CA 95010. Payment must be received by May 31 - but: the earlier, the better!

If you would like to learn about Gail Pellerin's work in the Assembly before the meeting, check out her website at this link:
<https://a28.asmdc.org/>

Our Annual Meeting Kit will be sent separately.

We look forward to seeing you there.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Saturday June 10 Annual Meeting and classic breakfast buffet brunch at the Seascope Golf Club's Seascope Room. We are fortunate to have a distinguished League of Women Voters member, Assemblymember Gail Pellerin, as our featured speaker. Following her talk, there will be time for questions and answers. Since check in time starts at 9:30 a.m. and brunch at about 10 a.m., the Annual Meeting is one of the best times to socialize and be part of the votes at our business meeting that will enable our group to move forward to the 2023-24 year's activities. If you are available that morning and can be there, I would encourage you to put in your paid reservation without delay, as well as reservations for guests and additional household members. We plan to publicize this event in local newspapers.

With considerable support from the 2022-23 Board of Directors, meeting hosts, Sandy Warren and Joyce Anderson, and our website managers, Jan Karwin and Pam Newbury, we are completing another successful year. Thank you to Marilyn Radisch, who has so ably produced our VOTER; Marilyn McCusker, who coordinated and helped with presentations of our Pros and Cons of state ballot measures throughout the county; Laura Grossman, who produced our local roster, contacted members, and communicated for us with LWVUS; Lydia Parker, who has served as secretary at our Board meetings, as well as for Program Planning, and recorder at our legislative interview with Asm. Gail Pellerin; Geri McGillicuddy, who regularly checked our p.o. box, filed our government forms, and produced our

monthly Treasurer's Reports, as well as serving on the Budget Committee led by Jan Karwin; Mindy Ryan, who has updated our list for sending publicity releases, and is using her background in this area as needed for our programs. Our League Coach, Ann Havlik, has been a regular attendee at our Board meetings and a real help.

I want to thank all who helped with the Pros and Cons of ballot measures presentations to community groups, the program co-sponsored with the American Association of University Women, and with voter registration, as well as members who participated in State and Local Program Planning, new member events, legislative interviews, and served on committees or donated financially to our group.

We hope you will continue to support the League of Women Voters in the coming year by renewing your membership, donating, and, if available, attending our programs.

--Barbara Lewis, President LWVSCC

LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEWS

In our March VOTER, we brought you the views of our two new – and female – Assemblymembers, as they answered the questions the League asked. In this issue we bring you the views of two more seasoned members of the California Legislature – State Senator John Laird and Assemblymember Robert Rivas. Here are our questions and their answers:

Question 1: Shrinking California's Voter Participation Gap

- **Measures taken to date have increased participation largely in older, non-Hispanic white voters vs. voters who are younger, people of color, or underrepresented. Improvements in access to voting have been noted in the recent past.**
- **Would targeted outreach help to shrink the CA participation gap?**

John Laird's Response:

Yes, but I also think that there are much broader issues.

1. Too much money in the electoral process turns people off when it turns to negativism.
2. There is a tendency to believe that government is far away from people and doesn't address their concerns

Senator Laird believes these factors are as much at play in poor voter turnout as the possible electoral reforms that would allow people easier access to voting. As part of increasing the reforms, Sen Laird said, “It would be great if, as far as we can go, we were able to have reforms in those areas as well.” In expanding on the problem of money in the electoral process, Senator Laird commented: “In the ideal world, we would not have Citizens United or the Valero suit from the 1970’s that said money talks, and we would have the ability to put limits on large contributions and reward people for small ones in order to facilitate democracy at the grass roots level. There are a few races in every legislative cycle where the oil companies, or other special interests, put a lot of money in which, in essence, buys the seat.”

- **Would you support funding to address the problem?**

Yes, however, we are experiencing a \$20-25 billion budget deficit, and the shortfall may get even worse by June. We are going to have problems funding anything new unless something else is defunded. This reality might also reflect on some other questions you might have later on.

The Senator expanded on the process of working through budgeting new programs: There are three ways to approach programming across the State. One is to mandate from the State level to ensure that it happens everywhere, but then it must be paid for from the State budget. Another option is to have local programming, but this doesn’t ensure consistency across the State. A more effective way to thread the needle, especially in lean budget times, is to get State support for local efforts.

Robert Rivas’ Response:

This is an important question. Yes, we must do everything we can. Around the entire country, voter participation is low. While other states are making it more difficult to cast a ballot, California continues to eliminate barriers to voting while ensuring our elections remain secure and fair. As a state, we have made progress in this area, but we must continue to lead the nation.

- **Would you support funding to the Secretary of State, county elections offices, and/or community-based organizations to address the problem?**

Yes, we are engaging with residents, so they understand how important voting is. We need to educate them that voting is our civic duty. Engagement, especially in communities with lower voting rates, is critical. Dr. Shirley Weber, our Secretary of State, is doing everything she can to engage eligible voters. I support the work of Dr. Weber to get out the vote and to educate people on the integrity of the electoral system.

Question 2: Equitable Funding for California’s School Facilities Program

- **Construction or modernization of school facilities is normally financed by issuing general obligation bonds at the state and local levels. Repayment of state bonds issued is financed from General Fund revenue. Local bond measures are financed by property tax increases during the lifetime of the bonds issued. California’s School Facility Program provides grants to local school districts to help fund new construction and modernization. Dependence on property taxes means that, to fund school construction/modernization, taxpayers in districts with low property value per student must pay a far higher property tax rate than those in wealthier districts to raise the same amount of money per student.**
- **Would you advocate for changes to the School Facilities Program to reduce this inequity? One way to do this would be to have the School Facilities Program structured so that the required match percentage from a school district is reduced for low-wealth districts.**

John Laird's Response:

This issue is very important to Senator Laird, as he serves as Education Committee Chair. School funding is administered by the State Allocation Board, of which Senator Laird is a member. He is grappling with this difficult question. Low wealth districts are places where you must ask for higher amounts of money and voters in lower wealth districts aren't disposed to approve property tax increases. When you require a property tax match, you empower wealthy districts. There's not been a state bond passed in a while and bonds have exhausted themselves. We've put the equivalent bond money into the budget for the last two years to keep the programs going. This is a larger reform question, and we are questioning how to deal with it. When dealing with the Legislature, you're dealing with representatives of different wealth districts. Legislators from wealthier districts may not be as supportive of greater matching funds for lower wealth districts. In our area there are a variety of districts from Carmel to Happy Valley, to farmworker communities that don't get basic aid. Senator Laird is trying to address the inequity but we are dealing with a 'one size fits all' program which doesn't work for California's diverse districts. The best time for reform is when the sun is shining economically. We need to make reform and we need to do it when the time is right.

Robert Rivas' Response:

There are gaps in education finance, and there is no doubt they lead to inequities in schools. If we want to close our achievement gap, we need safe, state-of-the-art facilities on campus. For example, San Benito has become warmer over time – we made major investments in air conditioning in the San Juan Bautista classrooms and added CTE programs for the students in Hollister. However, we recognize that students in Salinas do not have the same access to infrastructural upgrades. In addition, they do not have the opportunity to participate in

diverse curricula. That is why it is important that we advocate for school bonds to create equity in our schools.

- Follow up question – Would you support changing the funding match system?

Funding education is very complex, and we need to explore all options to get it right. If the change makes sense and helps with equity, we would support it.

Question 3: Sustainable and Equitable Water Resource Management

- **Current management is neither sustainable nor equitable. How would you propose transforming management to preserve food production and jobs while protecting food security and other uses of water?**

John Laird's Response:

"I would love to do an hour-long seminar on that question since I have a 50-year history with the issue!" As a backdrop—nine atmospheric rivers may break the surface water drought but not the ground water drought.

Sen. Laird noted that when he was Secretary for Natural Resources, "we had an all of the above policy" which is still the case. All the above means we need:

- Water recycling wherever we can
- Sustainable ground water (which will be the law by 2040)
- Make water conservation a way of life—over time no lawns, etc.
- We do need to work on infrastructure improvement.

We have to do all of these things with everybody being more efficient, and that is how we are going to get there.

He then discussed the Governors Delta Project being misunderstood—that it is about keeping/diverting **storm** water while maintaining flow to the Bay the rest of the time.

Sen. Laird notes that our snowpack is changing and that our infrastructure, which depends on snowpack, was built for a climate that no longer exists. This is such a monumental issue in so many ways: stabilizing ground water, capturing water in key times, developing alternative sources.

Looking at the needs in the four different counties the Senator represents:

- **Monterey County:** Different interests are fighting every day; need reservoirs for the Salinas Valley; Monterey Peninsula will not be sustainable without a small desal plant, which brings its own set of problems associated with taking care of the Marina; ground water contamination is a problem in some areas.
- **Santa Cruz County** has classic sea water intrusion in two places, with 97% reliance on surface water.
- **San Luis Obispo County** has a whole range of issues.
- **Santa Clara County** has a great water sustainability program, but it only provides 45% of what is needed in water.

We must take all these different problems and try to fit them into what a statewide program calls for. This is a Rubic's Cube. One more piece of the puzzle is that infrastructure is aging and is breaking down all over, including our dams. For instance, Nacimiento and San Antonio need spillway improvements, Sen. Laird is trying to work with everyone locally to see if we can make things work for everybody in the local areas.

Robert Rivas' Response:

We have a long way to go in sustainable and equitable water resource management. I have spent a lot of time in this area and introduced many bills, including the creation of the Multi-Benefit Repurposing Program. We have opportunities when it comes to flood management and water quality. Furthermore, some communities don't have clean water. That must change. We are looking into a wide variety of options, including the ability to recycle water and store rainwater.

Question 4: Personal Priorities of Legislator

- **What other major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2023? What are your personal priorities?**

John Laird's Response:

Last year was the busiest and most productive year the Senator has ever seen in the Legislature. Many of the accomplishments were for local issues. Among Senator Laird's successes were getting money for Cal Poly, Veterans Hall in Cayucos, Carmel River, homeless, Watsonville hospital, two valves at the dam, and a well for Monterey One to help alleviate the drought. Additionally, he created bills to relax the costs of special school board elections, to provide California retiree survivor benefits for children of unmarried officers killed in the line of duty; also, Grey Bears recycling reimbursement, Watsonville Hospital bill enabling bankruptcy filing, and labor relations in the Santa Cruz metro.

Governor Newsom wanted to use the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Plant in San Luis Obispo for the power grid. Senator Laird submitted a 10-point plan to benefit Diablo Canyon and the Governor accepted all 10 measures. Among the measures introduced by Senator Laird were: \$80M in transition money should not have to be paid back; 12,000 acres in Diablo land should be reserved for conservation and ecological sustainability; additional land should be preserved for renewable energy and seismic safety. It will take five years to transition to renewable energy and offshore wind power.

This year's priorities will be focused on implementing or following up on priorities passed last year. Last year the Senate had a debate on whether the power grid could go down. It is important that battery storage is provided for electricity, which will help if backup is needed should that occur. The fire at the Moss Landing battery storage plant raised concerns about safety. There's a Morro Bay proposal--a bill for health and safety standards for their battery plant. \$1 billion has been allocated to be spread over three years for Diablo Canyon. 20 bills were sent to Governor Newsom. He vetoed one related to coastal resilience because there was no money to pay for it. The Governor proposed a disproportionate cut to the coastal resilience bill. Senator Laird reintroduced the bill in wake of coastal damage from the atmospheric river his district experienced.

Senator Laird will also be working on labor agreements and a climate trust to lower electricity rates. And there are many more priorities to come. The League of Women Voters can help Senator Laird accomplish his goals by putting a voice to the issues. We're going to have tough decisions in the coming year. Coastal infrastructure needs to be addressed, as we have seen during this year's storms. For example, the seawall at Seacliff Beach has been rebuilt six times, Big Sur roads were closed, water was in homes in Morro Bay, and there was damage in Atascadero and Capitola. Once the cameras go away, people forget. This summer there will be fires due to all the fallen trees and grasses. We need to make tough decisions about climate reform and infrastructure in California.

Robert Rivas' Response:

Our office remains focused on improving access to the California Dream for all residents. A major focus of ours is the anticipated budget deficit of approximately \$24 billion (according to the Legislative Analyst's Office estimates). The state has substantial reserves, and we should seriously consider using them to protect our significant investments in high priority areas such as health care, early childhood care, and K-12 education. Climate action and transportation programs were the most impacted budget items in the Governor's January budget proposal, but California's budget process is fluid. We must continue to work to find solutions to best serve the people of California.

As the soon-to-be 71st speaker, I will continue to fight to ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable people and families, to protect our environment, reduce, and prevent homelessness, and

proactively address extreme wildfires and flooding. We have the opportunity to do a lot for our state, even amid an anticipated budget deficit.

Our League interviewers did get a chance to ask Senator Laird some additional questions about local priorities. Also, interviewers for Robert Rivas were to ask an additional question of his press secretary, Spencer Hagaman:

Questions and answers with John Laird:

Question 5: Local Issues:

- **5.1 Regarding affordable housing for homeless & workers (teachers, firefighters, service workers, ag workers, etc.) Have state funds been used well?**

Laird stated: "One of the things we are doing this year, in general, is to do oversight on expenditures we have made in the recent past. I am confident there will be oversight done on housing expenditures." He discussed potentially positive impacts of funding housing for higher education, not only for students, but also for the surrounding communities. There have been some controversial bills about overriding local zoning to provide student housing—he has voted for and against some of these bills for various reasons. We have put \$3.5 billion into higher education and housing in the last two years. The housing shortage is tough for students and tough for surrounding communities because the lack of housing drives housing prices up. If we provide housing for students it relieves housing pressure in the community. He noted that SB9 money for adding additional housing on existing lots has not been used very widely.

Housing bills at State level are one-size fits all—however, each town/city has unique issues which need to be considered before many state level housing requirements can be implemented because of their individual issues—water being one of them. He suggests creating higher densities in urban areas with existing schools and transportation as a good way to proceed. However, this can also raise the rates on housing overall with increases in pricing that puts it out of range of working people, as happened in Morgan Hill.

- **5.2 How do you picture the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Court working in your district when fully implemented? (In San Luis Obispo County in particular?)**

This is one of the Governor's priorities, although it is being proposed without any additional funding to local governments for implementation. It also has civil liberty issues. The Governor went so far out on a limb to do this, it is incumbent upon him to force cooperation between all the agencies to make this a meaningful program. Also, to be considered are individual rights. The program needs to address the concern that the individual is not able to make their own decisions about their life.

- **LWV Comment: With Care Court—after the first year when the individual has a great deal of support, there is the option of conservatorship being established; this is seen as positive.**

Some counties have been allocated money for pilot programs, but in the overall framework last year the State has put no money in it yet.

Additional comments from Senator Laird on homelessness:

"We have not talked about homelessness, and we have seven minutes yet. In the fall I went to all the homeless projects I could across the District." He is now feeling more hopeful, in that local people are doing what works for them. Many organizations have prerequisites for tenants to get into housing, such as being drug free, and therefore housing goes unused. After two years of the Housing Matters Program trying family shelters, tiny housing, mailboxes, showers, and

respite for people out of housing, Santa Cruz has finally concluded that the only solution may be to provide low-income housing. Building low-income housing comes first; the other services follow. The state has provided some funding to help with this program. It is important to figure out how the State can provide further support.

- **5.3 Any ideas for lack of teachers and substitutes?**

The Senator commented: "We are introducing reforms to prevent limiting retirees in the amount of time they can substitute. We are working on teacher retention. Our Governor added special funding for training. We require so much from substitutes and I am looking into that."

Question and Answer with Spencer Hagaman (Assemblymember Rivas' Press Secretary):

- **Regarding equity in school facilities: What resources can we investigate for more information regarding this subject?**

Both the U.S. and California Departments of Education, as well as the California Legislative Analyst's Office, and community stakeholder groups and organizations are specializing in education research.

- **Regarding water. There is valuable work being done at various universities. For example, research on the management of water for agriculture. Do studies get to the legislators?**

Our office always appreciates communications from experts and stakeholders. Good policy is born out of good research and input from stakeholders.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

The LWVC has positions on these issues. Please use these links to check out our state positions:

For information on voting rights:
<https://lwvc.org/issues/voting-rights>

For information on education:
<https://lwvc.org/issues/education>

For information on water resources:
[California Water Resources | LWVC.org](https://lwvc.org/issues/water-resources)

For information on homelessness:
<https://lwvc.org/issues/homelessness>