



Santa Cruz VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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HELP WANTED!

Our local League Nominating Committee is asking new and experienced members to join one of the following 24/25 Committees:

VOTER SERVICE (be part of this fall's important election activities)

PROGRAM COMMITTEE (enjoy organizing engaging meetings)

NOMINATING COMMITTEE (involvement only in spring 2025)

INTERESTED? PLEASE CALL OR TEXT

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope this message finds you well and looking forward to the arrival of spring. We are glad the legislative interviews went so well and are sharing some extensive reporting of what we learned in this March VOTER. We were given first-rate treatment and thoughtful answers to our questions that were very interesting and informative, as well as the time to deal with questions of state and local concern. I coordinated and participated in the in-person interview with Assemblymember Gail Pellerin in Santa Cruz and participated in the interview with State Senator John Laird on Zoom. Both interviews included members of all Leagues in their districts. LWVSCC was also represented in the March interview with Assemblymember Dawn Addis.

Our local League of Women Voters served at the candidates' event for 5th District Supervisor on February 7 at the Highlands Park Senior Center, sponsored by the Valley Women's Club with local co-sponsors, with moderator Dinah Sapia doing an excellent job and Dorothy Fry, Kit Hein and Dee Takemoto serving on the team to sort questions and do the timekeeping. The follow up coverage in the Press Banner included praise for the contribution of the League of Women Voters for this very successful event. Some of us also provided voter service before the March 5 primary by answering questions about voter registration that were received in our email. The January 27 program featuring County Clerk/Elections Tricia Webber as speaker, which focused on voter service, the ballot, and elections, was well received by our members and the community we serve.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this wonderful start of the 2024 year!
---Barbara Lewis, President LWVSCC

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEB?

As webmaster for our local League website, [LWV Santa Cruz County](#), I encourage members to visit our site occasionally to see what's new. We've recently added an accessibility widget to enable customization of the website for easier reading.

When you launch the website, look for a small blue wheelchair icon that appears in the bottom right corner of the screen; clicking on the icon pulls up a menu that allows you to see options to customize text size and spacing, contrast, image style, and other choices that can help with viewing the website. Changes you make affect only your view of the website. You can also scroll down to the bottom of the list for options to change the widget's position on the screen or hide it.

If you missed last month's program with county elections clerk Tricia Webber, you can access it from our video [LWVSCC Videos](#) page.

You'll also find current and past issues of the VOTER newsletter [LWVSCC VOTER](#) as well as information on voting and elections [LWVSCC Elections and Voting](#), a calendar [LWVSCC Calendar](#) of upcoming events, and our League's positions on issues of local interest [LWVSCC Positions](#).

I encourage all members to log in and explore the members' page (the link to that page will only appear after you login). There you will find board minutes, the current budget for our League, and other League documents. If you need help logging into the website, contact me at webmaster@lwvsc.org.

---Pam Newbury, LWVSCC Webmaster

INTERVIEW WITH ASSEMBLYMEMBER GAIL PELLERIN

Assemblymember Pellerin represents California Assembly District 28, which includes parts of both Santa Cruz and Santa Clara Counties.

This interview was held on Friday, February 9, 2024, in the conference room of the Assemblymember's Santa Cruz County office.

Those in attendance: Assemblymember Gail Pellerin
Staff members: Lisette Jones and Maureen McCarty

Barbara Lewis, Pam Newbury, Mindy Ryan, Lydia Nogales Parker: Santa Cruz County League
Eleanor Yick: Southwest Santa Clara League
Kathleen Muller: San Jose/Santa Clara League

Q1: Eleanor Yick: What can we learn about open meetings from the pandemic? What changes would you like to see to our public meeting laws, and how do we maintain increased accessibility and public participation in meetings without diminishing transparency and accountability?

Open meeting laws are essential for keeping our government transparent and inclusive, ensuring everyone's voice is heard. With the pandemic, we quickly adapted to remote meetings, which turned out to be quite effective. However, the shift to online meetings has sparked discussions about maintaining transparency and accountability. I'm a big advocate for transparency and the convenience of remote participation. My experience with "Voting Matters" Zoom meetings has highlighted the benefits of digital engagement. Yet, we shouldn't let digital replace face-to-face interactions entirely. We need a balance that respects traditional meetings while embracing technology. John Laird's SB544, enacted last year, is a step in the right direction, updating open meeting laws to improve public participation and accessibility. It allows for teleconferencing with a condition that a majority of members are together in one place for at least half the meetings. The Legislature should continuously update our laws to reflect technological advances and the public's needs. Perhaps forming a group to examine effective practices would ensure our governance evolves to enhance transparency and participation, balancing the new with the traditional in a practical, conversational manner.

Q2: Mindy Ryan: What kinds of legislation would you bring or support to mitigate health effects of climate change, particularly air pollution and extreme heat?

I'm excited about the Climate Bond on the November ballot, introduced by Assemblymember Garcia, focusing on projects that include protecting Coyote Valley in Assembly District 28. This initiative is part of our broader effort to tackle the extreme weather and climate challenges affecting all of California, emphasizing the need for resilience, public health, and social equity. California's response includes a comprehensive \$400 million extreme heat action plan, and a new website, HeatReadyCA.com, which provides tips on staying cool and safe through

culturally informed outreach. Moreover, the state is aggressively moving towards a clean energy future, aiming for net zero carbon pollution by 2045 and a 100% green energy grid. Efforts include expanding renewable energy, boosting energy storage, transitioning to zero-emission vehicles, and advancing carbon capture technologies. We're also addressing indoor heat illness with new regulations from Cal OSHA, ensuring workplace safety, and reflecting our commitment to tackling climate change's health impacts comprehensively. Collaborating with Assemblymember Garcia, we're ensuring the Climate Bond includes provisions for coastal resilience and preserving open spaces. I'm also working on consumer awareness about gas stove emissions and addressing rising energy costs to promote equity and supporting low-income families. Additionally, we're challenging AT&T's plans to remove landlines in mountain areas, advocating for community needs and resilience in the face of climate change. This effort underscores our dedication to creating a sustainable, equitable future for all Californians.

Q3: Pam Newbury: Housing underproduction has been identified as one of the most significant problems facing California today. According to one estimate, we need 3.5 million housing units by 2025 to end the shortage. How do we make substantial progress to increase housing and decrease homelessness? Which proposals do you support? Roll back property zoning, financial bond measures, increased reduction of CEQA by the Legislature, state funded fees for builders of low and moderate-income housing, and state funded grants to communities for reducing the delay in granting building permits, and any others?

In response to California's housing crisis, 2023 saw a significant legislative push with 60 housing-related bills signed into law, underscoring a collective effort to meet the state's housing demands. Among these efforts, the conversion of motels and commercial properties into affordable housing stands out, with projects like Veterans Village off Highway 9 showcasing the potential of such transformations. Importantly, these initiatives have not encroached upon single-family zones, maintaining a balance between density and community character. Another innovative approach has been the promotion of ADUs. Monte Sereno was very creative; they put it out to their community that anyone who wanted to build an ADU could get a permit quickly and they met

their housing goals. A streamlined ADU permitting process is key. This process includes pre-approved plans, making it possible to obtain permits swiftly, a strategy that has proven essential in meeting housing goals without altering the essence of neighborhoods. Additionally, ADUs are being tailored for senior citizens, a group increasingly vulnerable to homelessness due to housing affordability issues. With 175,000 seniors unsheltered and more at risk, these efforts are vital in providing accessible and affordable housing solutions. I believe in the "Housing First" model, focusing on providing stable housing as a foundation for addressing broader social service needs. As California looks ahead to significant investments in housing through potential bonds in November 2024, the real task will be figuring out how to smartly use these funds to meet the wide-ranging needs of our diverse communities. We're embracing innovative projects, like transforming unused buildings into affordable housing, while carefully preserving the charm of single-family neighborhoods. This balanced approach highlights our commitment to creatively addressing California's housing challenges with a mix of smart, diverse solutions.

Q4: Barbara Lewis: What other major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2024? What are your personal priorities?

As far as committees, I am Chair of Elections and I sit on the Appropriations, Business and Professions, and Natural Resources committees. I am also vice chair of the Select Committee on California's Mental Health Crisis, a member of the Select Committee on Place Based Systems of Coordinated Care for Children and Families, and a member of the Select Committee on Workforce Development and Diversity in the Innovation Economy. I also serve on the Select Committee on Wine. We want to promote the wine producers in the Santa Clara Valley, many of them are small businesses. I am on the Bay Area Caucus and the newly created Central Coast Caucus, which is the brainchild of Assemblymember Dawn Addis. We are focusing on coastal resiliency and issues specific to the California coastline. I am also on the Jewish Caucus, the Women's Caucus, the Democratic Caucus, and the Senate Mental Health Caucus.

Having spent over 27 years as an elections official, safeguarding democracy has become a core part of my mission. This commitment led me to introduce AB 969, ensuring that our voting processes rely on certified, reliable systems instead of expensive,

resource intensive, and potentially inaccurate hand counting.

Mental health, too, is close to my heart. The introduction of the 988-crisis line was a significant step forward, but there's so much more to do. Imagine having 24/7 access to mobile mental health support, where help is just a call away for anyone in crisis. We need to ramp up our facilities and workforce to cater to this need, starting from our youngest — yes, even our three and four-year-olds are showing signs of mental health issues. It's a conversation that needs to start early, right in our schools, to build a supportive, understanding community. Removing the stigma around mental health is something I'm deeply passionate about; it's about making it okay to say you're not okay.

Then there's the issue of housing and homelessness, a pressing concern in California. Given our economic stature, the issue of homelessness is something we can and should solve in our lifetime. It's about doing right by our community, especially our kids. They deserve the basics: a safe home, food, education, and a community where they can thrive. Facing a daunting \$68 billion budget deficit, our priority must be protecting our most vulnerable, ensuring no one is pushed further into crisis.

I also address matters like energy rates, the future of AT&T landlines, and navigating our insurance crisis amid natural disasters. It's about creating resilient, vibrant communities and businesses, ensuring our planet is a place where future generations can thrive. This includes honoring the stewardship of our Native American communities towards our lands and resources.

My legislative work is broad, tackling issues from AI-generated disinformation in politics to enhancing civic engagement among our youth. This includes advocating for better mental health screenings in various settings and pushing for bills that support everything from mobile home park expansions to farm worker housing and ensuring insurance companies are held accountable. And then there's AB1850, a bill I introduced to declare the banana slug as our state slug — a small but meaningful nod to our environmental commitments.

With Proposition 1, I see a pathway to investing in the crucial areas of housing and mental health services. My experience tells me that families are in

desperate need of support, and it's our job to make it happen. From building necessary facilities to bolstering the mental health workforce and enhancing county programs, it's about making a tangible difference in people's lives.

Q5: Pam Newbury: Local Issues: You have brought up AT&T's request to be relieved of their status as the "carrier of last resort". Living in Bonny Doon, that is a big issue for us. I have an elderly neighbor who cannot get satellite service, there are tree coverings and mountains around him. He only has a landline. He is miles from anywhere. If he loses his landline, he loses his independence. He uses it daily to get in touch with his loved ones, his friends who support him, and people who help him. We still don't have power from the storm of last weekend. That means that we have the potential for our internet to go off. Sounds like you are tuned to the situation.

We are all over it. These landlines are a lifeline for many residents. We know what happens in rural communities when there is a fire or flood and power goes out; how isolated people are. I ran the election in 2020, when the AT&T cell tower was offline after the CZU fire. We had no internet to run the vote center in our San Lorenzo Valley location and had to revert to old-school paper records. It was a nightmare. With this current landline issue, we voiced our objections in a letter sent to the PUC. Initially, AT&T's application to proceed was incomplete, leading the PUC to reject it. With this current application, AT&T was instructed to inform their customers this time, but the public hearings are inconveniently located in remote areas. I'm advocating for the hosting of public forums within District 28, enabling residents to directly convey their concerns to the PUC, highlighting the critical importance of landline services in our mountain communities. In the interim, we're encouraging individuals to submit their testimonies electronically. We also plan to coordinate efforts with local tribes, who we believe are parties of interest.

---Lydia Nogales Parker, LWVSCC Secretary took the notes for this interview

Our April newsletter will include interviews with Assemblymember Dawn Addis and State Senator John Laird.