



Santa Cruz VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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LEAGUE ANNUAL MEETING

In this Issue

<i>League Annual Meeting</i> -----	1
<i>President's Message</i> -----	2
<i>Legislative Interviews</i>	
<i>John Laird & Dawn Addis</i> _____	2-5

Concerned about Climate Change?

Check out the LWVC's climate Interest Group:

lwc.org/california-climate-interest-group/



League of Women Voters
of Santa Cruz County
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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.

Featuring

Lisa Wooninck

Superintendent, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Intro to Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Priority Issues

Saturday

June 22, 2024

9:30 a.m. – Noon

Seascope Golf Course
610 Clubhouse Drive, Aptos

Cost: \$25 per person; includes garden scramble breakfast



Dr. Wooninck became superintendent of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary in November 2021. She has worked for NOAA for over 20 years; her first seven years with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the past 15 years in various roles for the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Prior to coming to NOAA, she served as a Knauss Sea Grant fellow for Congressman Sam Farr. Lisa completed her PhD at the University of California, Santa Barbara in Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology; she has a MS degree and a BA degree in Biology from California State University, Northridge.

Lisa is committed to using the best available science for resource management decision-making, as well as connecting people to the ocean and fostering coastal stewardship through innovative and collaborative science, education and outreach. She and her family live in Aptos, CA.

RSVP by June 14. Send a check, payable to "LWVSCC", to P.O. Box 1745, Capitola, CA 95010, or pay online by PayPal from the League's website calendar: lwc.org

This event is open to the public.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am looking forward to our June 22 Annual Meeting, which will take place at the Seascope Golf Club, include their garden scramble buffet brunch for a cost of \$25 per person, and feature Superintendent for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Lisa Wooninck as our speaker. Lisa's talk will be illustrated with a slide presentation on the sanctuary. Check in time starts at 9:30 a.m., followed by the buffet brunch at about 10 a.m., introductions, the presentation by our guest speaker and questions, then our meeting, which includes election of Officers, Directors, several members of the Nominating Committee, and votes on the proposed program and budget. More details about this program and making reservations for our interesting and important event are in this issue of the VOTER and will be in future emails. The full agenda will be included in the Annual Meeting Kit.

Thank you to Stephanie Harlan for arranging a program that promises to be inspiring and show actions being taken locally for environmental protection. Thank you to Jan Karwin for being willing to assemble the Annual Meeting Kit again, and to Mindy Ryan, Pam Newbury, and Marilyn Radisch for helping with event publicity. I also want to thank those on our current board of directors and members in off board positions for their service this past year and all those willing to continue in 2024-25 and those who are dedicating their time on the Nominating and Budget Committees.

---Barbara Lewis, President LWVSCC

LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEWS

Earlier this year, Leagues throughout the state interviewed their state representatives, asking questions agreed on by the California LWV. In our March newsletter, we included the responses from Gail Pellerin, who represents Assembly District 28. In this issue we are including responses from both State Senator John Laird and Assemblymember Dawn Addis. There is quite a bit of overlap between their districts.



State Senator John Laird represents the 17th Senate district, which includes all of Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo Counties, as well as parts of Santa Clara and Monterey Counties.



Assemblymember Addis represents Assembly District 30, which includes much of the southern part of Santa Cruz County, as well as parts of Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties.

Question 1: What can we learn about open meetings from the pandemic?

Senator Laird: The Senator provided background for SB 544, noting that the Governor's Executive Order regarding public meetings during the pandemic was extended to January 1, when any potential legislative action would take effect. A wide spectrum of bills was introduced and Senator Laird took the State Boards and Commissions bill and was the primary sponsor of SB 544. The amendments made to SB 544 addressed the large amount of feedback received from the public, newspapers, and the ACLU, who were concerned that people were being removed from their government and that officials could operate away from the public. With its amendments, SB 544 allows a state board or commission to choose to use the existing meeting framework and not include remote participation. Additionally, the legislation sunsets in a few years, so if problems or abuse arise, it can be addressed when it sunsets, and if there are no issues, it could be extended.

Features of SB 544 include: Requires an in-person quorum, with a disabled person who is attending remotely counting towards

the in-person quorum; requires an official attending remotely to keep their camera on; officials are not required to provide remote personal address; requires remote participation for the public if any officials are attending remotely; and requires the meeting to be paused if the remote system goes down. The senator noted that the Bagley-Keene Act was adopted before the internet, so did not contemplate current technology and this bill modernizes it while maintaining in-person quorums.

Assemblymember Addis: During the last four years, Assemblymember Addis served in the legislature and on the Morro Bay City Council and received a lot of feedback that remote access increased meeting participation by the public. She noted that this interview via Zoom was attended by LWV constituents from three counties, whereas had it occurred in Sacramento, participation would have been less.

With remote access, she has observed an increase in participation by people with disabilities and caregivers, as well as by elected officials. Remote access to public meetings opens a pathway for diverse and inclusive representation and participation. She observed that in a changing world, in-person access is no longer the only access. She also feels this transition is ongoing.

Question 2: What kinds of legislation would you bring or support to mitigate health effects of climate change, particularly air pollution and extreme heat?

Senator Laird: Senator Laird stated that he has supported a lot of legislation with this goal, but there is much more to do. Last year he chaired the 12-senator Climate Workgroup that had 15 bills

adopted to address various aspects of climate change. Previously he backed a bill that was passed by the legislature to codify fire prevention programs with measurable goals that are adaptively managed to adjust to future conditions. Additionally, in 2023 the Governor signed his bill requiring sea level rise planning and suggested mitigation plans.

He indicated that a great deal can be accomplished by sticking to the current plans and funding them fully. The 2024 budget shortfall provides a challenge to allocating funds for coastal resiliency, forest management, and electrification of the transportation grid and he will fight for those programs.

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Assemblymember Addis: The Assemblymember stated that this issue is urgent and noted that the Legislature has done a lot of work, especially on fire and flood prevention and mitigation. She is chair of the Central Coast Caucus, which includes legislators from Ventura to Santa Cruz, and they are advocating for budgeted funds for prevention and mitigation of climate change. They recognize the negative health effects from wildfires on outdoor workers and other residents and want to ensure that budget dollars are spent in the right places.

She is introducing two bills in this legislative session that are concerned with this issue: 1) A bill that gives local agencies the authority to ban oil and gas drilling in their county. This was in response to Monterey County's Measure Z being overturned by the State Supreme Court; and 2) A bill to ban toxic chemicals in air fresheners.

The Assemblymember noted that, over the long term, we need to change our energy sources in an environmentally responsible

way. Regarding offshore wind development, she is working to ensure scientific monitoring and involve the California Ocean Protection Council, so that local communities have the information they need to engage in the conversation.

Question 3: Housing underproduction has been identified as one of the most significant problems facing California today. How do we make substantial progress to increase housing and decrease homelessness?

Senator Laird: Housing is a monumental issue. We tend to believe that if we just start building, prices will be lowered. Even if we do everything, it will take ten years to build enough. The crisis is in affordability. The State has implemented Density Bonuses to encourage building, but it took away redevelopment funds. He would support and vote for restitution of redevelopment funds for affordable housing. Senator Laird recounted when he was in the Assembly and he and the Speaker leveraged affordable housing into a bond package that netted 50,000 affordable units. That kind of State assistance is desirable but lacking.

There are many unique factors that mitigate against building affordable housing. On the Monterey Peninsula there is a de facto building moratorium until the issue of water and the Carmel River are sorted. He is working with the Water Board to approve two housing developments, one of which will be completely affordable. He thinks the Chair of the Water Board will be favorable to a workshop on looking into the path forward to lift the water moratorium so local government can begin to plan for future affordable buildings

As Chair of the Education Budget Committee, he has been working on a bill to provide, among other things, 625 units in Santa Cruz. For Cabrillo College,

this is a funding issue, and the University of California has stepped up and will use their bond authority to fund the housing.

Senator Laird noted that the underlying issues – affordability and removing roadblocks, available resources – is where he will work so that we can move forward.

As a follow up, Senator Laird was asked: how does he see the bill by Senator Scott Weiner to remove the Coastal commission oversight in order to build affordable housing in San Francisco?

Senator Laird noted that he did not agree with Senator Weiner's bill. He does not believe that we should be legislating what the Coastal Zone is. Every time there is a project to build in the Coastal Zone he will get pressure to pass a bill to exempt the proposed project and remove it from the Coastal Zone.

On January 26, he was in San Luis Obispo County and met with homeowners in Shell Beach and Pismo Beach who are fighting with the Coastal Commission to build seawalls etc. Were Senator Weiner's bill to pass, it would only be a matter of time before exemptions will be requested.

Assemblymember Addis: The housing problem is complicated, partly because, in the coastal zone, we need to build safely and responsibly. Some places are not safe for building.

Data is showing us that there are specific populations that are more heavily affected by the housing crisis. One group is adults who are over 50, as some in that group are falling into an unhoused situation for the first time in their lives. We need to provide funding, not just for housing, but for residential care facilities for the elderly. Some service providers may have beds for the elderly, but not the skilled nursing that is required.

Housing for college students is also a challenge, as many students are unhoused. At Cuesta College, for example, they have opened a parking lot for students who live in their cars. Some community colleges will be building housing, and we need to be strategic in addressing these problems.

Question 4: Personal Priorities of Legislator: What other major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2024? What are your personal priorities?

Senator Laird: The Senator reflected that when he was running for the Senate four years ago, he highlighted housing, climate change, education, economic development, and local issues as his focus and he feels that is what he has done. In education, K-12 has had a 40% increase and moved out of the bottom of spending per capita in the states and into the middle third. But is the money going to the right places? We have real challenges as a result of the pandemic and learning loss and we are working through that, but it points to the real issue: the budget.

Senator Laird noted that the California revenue system is dysfunctional. It relies on sales and personal taxes for its revenue. They overperform in good times and underperform in bad times. Two years ago, California had a surplus, but this year there is an inadequate budget because we did not address the fall in revenue in last year's budget. Legislative analysts say the shortfall is \$58 billion (in a general fund of \$220 billion) while the Governor says the shortfall is \$38 billion. The Governor proposed a budget lower by \$8 billion which, in Senator Laird's estimation, does not address the issue. In his view, the real budget will come in May and there will be tough decisions to be made. The sleight of hand that has enabled Sacramento to put expenditures in different fiscal years just masks bills that will eventually have to be paid.

Senator Laird said that he is going to have to work on the budget in a sound and intellectually honest fashion to right the budget with cuts and handle the reserve.

Assemblymember Addis: The Assemblymember was a special education teacher and education is a priority for her. She is especially concerned about addressing issues for special needs students and for English learners. 20% of the students in the schools she worked in were English learners. She is concerned about community college access for students with disabilities and would make loans available to community college students where necessary.

At this point, the Leagues had a chance to ask a question of local importance. Different questions were asked of each legislator.



For **Senator Laird:**

Thank you for sponsoring SB 977 to create an Independent Redistricting Commission for San Luis Obispo County. Do you foresee opposition or problems in getting the bill passed by the legislature? Could it be the prototype for IRCs for other counties of similar size?

The Senator noted that legislation for previous counties will be the template, and it will need to make adjustments for the special characteristics of SLO County. He thinks that opposition from State Senate Republicans is likely due to the highly politicized history of redistricting in SLO County and he will frame the legislation as good government, not as a partisan issue. He is optimistic about a positive outcome and will develop the legislation in consultation with SLO County Board of Supervisors to meet local needs.

He also noted that State Senate redistricting has changed his district significantly, losing 300,000 from Santa Clara County and the southern 18 percent of SLO County, and gaining voters in Salinas and San Benito County.

For **Assemblymember Addis:**

Do you support NOAA's most recent boundaries for the Chumash Marine Reserve without the carve-out for offshore wind development? How do we resolve the competing interests of marine protection and green energy?

Assemblymember Addis submitted a letter to NOAA supporting the largest possible boundaries – from the Monterey Marine Sanctuary in the north to Gaviota in the south. She sees that the biodiversity of the ocean and the need for climate-friendly energy sources are sister interests.

The state won't be able to legislate on the wind farm project, as the federal government (NOAA) is in charge of that project and will develop a specific approach. There have been cases in the past where sanctuary boundaries have been temporarily adjusted to get a project completed. These are two sister interests, and she believes both can be accomplished.

(A further note on wind energy: According to the Associated Press, the Biden administration is currently planning lease sales for wind energy at a number of ocean sites around the country. It is anticipated there will be a sale off the California coast in 2028.)