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Monday, March 8
Regular Board Meeting
4:00 p.m. ZOOM

Thursday, March 18
Members Meeting
Redistricting
5:30 p.m. ZOOM

Saturday, March 27
RBG Scholarship
Award
See page 2

Members & Guests
always welcome to
League meetings
and events



The

Our 80th Year!

FRESNO

VOTER

Is it March Madness?

No, it's our March
Members Meeting on
Redistricting, one of our two new
priorities



To learn how to score with no fouls,
listen to Helen Hutchison, past
president of the League of Women
Voters of California and current state board
member.

Join us on Zoom
Thursday, March 18, 5:30 p.m.

A link will be sent to you in advance



Helen
Hutchison



Why is redistricting important?

See page 5

What happened at Program Planning?

See page 8

President's Message



I admire our city leaders' enthusiasm so far this new year. "Beautify Fresno is engaging residents to clean up events all around the city; "Operation Homekey" is relocating people experiencing homelessness from the edges of state highways to transitional housing; FAX busses will soon be fare-free. Each of these projects plus the prospect of funding for parks and cultural projects through Measure P brings a glimmer of hope for Fresnans following a fairly grim 2020.

Big challenges also loom on our horizon in 2021. Small business failures are likely to continue with the resultant loss of jobs, increases in vacant commercial space, and degradation of business districts in our city. Residential evictions will continue. We know that those evictions lead to poverty, and recovery from an eviction can result in unemployment, disruption to education, mental health crises, and decades of instability for families. Fresnans who are homeless will need permanent solutions after a temporary stay in transitional housing. And then we face educational losses to our children from a year of uneven, sometimes inaccessible, distance learning.

Community wide, redistricting at local and statewide levels will occur this year, assuming that delayed 2020 census information eventually reaches us. There will be concerns about water supply since it's turning out to be another very dry year. The County is going to offer a general plan update and that needs review. We're about to start implementing a barrel full of recommendations for reshaping policing in the City of Fresno. Among the failed small businesses are in-home daycares and small preschools even though their existence is a crucial requirement for returning parents to work.

Every one of these issues is a potential League issue. You may think of the League as primarily dealing with issues of voting, but we are much more than that. Each of us lives here and strives to make our community a better place for all to live. The League gives us voice and tools to advocate for our community.

I look forward to working with you this year on an issue of interest to you.

Marianne

The Voter is a monthly publication of the League of Women Voters of Fresno
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Volume 80, No. 3 Editor: Francine M. Farber

MEMBER NEWS



NOTORIOUS RBG SCHOLARSHIP

Donations for the Farber/League partnership scholarship fund at San Joaquin College of Law are welcome. Make out your check to LWVF and write RBG in the memo line. We will forward it to the College.



Generous donations for the RBG Fund were made this month by:

Pat Campbell
Terri Figgs

LEAGUE DONATIONS TO RBG SCHOLARSHIP FUND TO DATE
\$2,950

Note: The first annual RBG Scholarship will be awarded on March 27 by SJCL.

Donations are a great gift for any occasion. LWVF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization so your gift and membership are tax deductible and gratefully accepted.

Please remember us in your estate planning. Help us continue the fight to defend and build participation in the democratic process. You can designate a gift amount now, or state a gift as a percentage, which will automatically adjust no matter what the future may bring.



Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



Recently as I began the drive home from Santa Cruz, I was entertained by a group of people installing a banner on a Highway 1 overpass railing. Unfurled, the banner read, “The vaccine makers will not be held liable!” Further down the railing, a smaller banner read, “You have been lied to.”

Vaccine litigation

At that moment I did not recall any public figure promising to permit lawsuits over vaccine injuries. Quite the opposite. I knew that the U.S. process of approving and advocating vaccines includes protections against vaccine injury litigation. These protections include the FDA (and all state and federal government agencies) as well as all the vaccine makers. How could any government bargain urgently and effectively with potential vaccine vendors when the cost of litigation is uncertain but potentially bankrupting?

What the U.S. and 25 other nations have done to bring a measure of justice to their advocacy or imposition of vaccinations—rarely but invariably causing debilitating or deadly injuries—is to establish vaccination compensation funds.

Funding sources

The details of injury compensation and funding of these programs vary dramatically. In several countries, the programs are an extension of national healthcare or workers compensation systems. The funding may come from general federal revenues, specific state or federal healthcare budgets, taxes on the vaccinations, or some combination

thereof. Regardless of the modalities of this no-fault compensation, there is a strong, internationally shared rationale behind prompt and generous indemnification of those injured by immunizations. These programs play a vital role in inspiring trust in the populace, especially during epidemics that require novel vaccines.



They are part of *epidemic preparedness*, a government task that we must take more seriously.

Uncertainty about the long term

Compensation programs have been cheap in the context of mass immunizations precisely because the vaccine approval processes around the world are rigorous. Serious, durable, compensable adverse effects have been rare. One zone of vulnerability of the Covid vaccines—all released through the FDA’s Emergency Use Approval—is the lack of long-term follow-up. Our current detailed information is reassuring about the potential for delayed harm. But there is still uncertainty that must be weighed against the present benefits.

COVAX is a global consortium of nations pledged to find, purchase, and distribute vaccines to countries that cannot do so themselves. COVAX

will begin immunizations this spring, with plans to complete vaccinations for 2.8 billion people by the end of 2021. Every COVAX immunization will include an excise tax of 10 cents (included in its price) to fund immunization compensation. This mimics the U.S. National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program started in 1988 primarily for childhood vaccinations. Here the excise tax has been 75 cents per vaccine. This fund has distributed several billion dollars to injured people over its lifespan.

Vaccine indemnification

The Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act of 2010 was our legislative response to a piling up of communicable diseases: HIV-AIDS, Ebola, dengue, West Nile, SARS, and H1N1 flu. It empowered the Secretary of Health and Human Services to waive liability for vaccines and to provide vaccination indemnification through the Countermeasures Injury Compensation Fund. This fund has been widely criticized by vaccine experts and vaccine lawyers for its complexity and delays, filing time limitations, and low payouts. The fund also increased the threshold for proof that an injury was directly attributable to the vaccine.

Resistance to vaccination is a well-established problem in many countries, and educational programs on the risks and benefits of vaccination play a key role in getting improved adherence to immunization schedules. As part of these programs, which now should be regarded as important components of epidemic preparedness, we should be able to tell everyone that their country stands behind them with much better vaccination injury insurance than the U.S. currently offers.

drbertken@comcast.net



The new semester is underway in Fresno Unified. Small cohorts of students are coming back to campuses where they have stable internet access and places to work. The vast majority of FUSD students are engaged at a distance. A plan to provide in-person supports on Mondays has seen hundreds of teachers voice interest in coming back to provide that support.

Phased return planned

The district has planned a phased return once the county reaches the orange tier (1--3.9 cases per 100K and 2--4.9% positive tests). Fresno County is still in the purple tier (more than 7 per 100K and more than 8% positive tests), but both case rates and positivity rates are down by about half since mid-January.

Clovis Unified's elementary students have been back to face-to-face instruction in a hybrid model (a mix of in school and online time), and middle and high school students went back starting February 22. Central Unified plans a phased return to school beginning with the lowest grades first, once Fresno County reaches the red tier (4-7 cases per 100K and 5-8% positive tests). Big differences in school approaches around the country and in our own area have increased pressure on districts to reopen.

FUSD eligible for grants

While Governor Newsom's proposal to provide big financial incentives for districts to bring students back to in-person learning is tied up in the legislature, FUSD is on target to receive ongoing state funding for special education early intervention preschool. It will also be eligible to apply for new state grants for community schools and children's mental health services.

The primary business of last month's FUSD board meeting was a vote to authorize the Golden Charter Academy. This new charter school proposes a TK-8 program targeting the underserved children of central Fresno with a program emphasizing environmental education in partnership with the Chafee Zoo

It would open in the fall of 2021 with TK-3rd grades, adding a grade per year after that.

A lengthy evaluation of the charter's petition by *In The Public Interest* (a national nonprofit research and policy organization) enumerated problems with the petition. This outside evaluation plus the relationship between trustee Keisha Thomas and the school made the discussion of the charter petition unusually contentious. She is the founder's mother-in-law and is on the board of the charter school. The charter was eventually approved on a 4 to 2 vote. Keisha Thomas was absent.

The Board heard a report this month from its Student Voice Collaborative. The collaborative operates as part of the district's effort to be more inclusive and

reduce disparities among its diverse population of students. Students from the district high schools participate as representatives of various interest groups including the Special Education Advisory Committee, the Black Student Union, and the Global Student Union.



The Collaborative provides the schools and departments with ideas to increase multi-cultural learning and culturally responsive practices. Representatives

meet with the superintendent periodically and report out to the board on their concerns and proposals. This month they proposed a program to provide mental health supports and instruction in coping strategies during the new advisory periods. They also suggested a need to better explain Covid tiers and generally improve modes of communication from the district to students and parents, especially better employing social media.

kayb@csufresno.edu

What is redistricting?

Members of Congress, state legislators, and many county and municipal offices are elected by voters grouped into districts. But populations change. That's why district boundaries are redrawn every ten years to ensure each district has about the same number of people and that districts are reflective and representative of the electorate.

Who draws the lines?

Each state decides. In most states, the state legislature draws lines both for the legislature and for the state's congressional delegation. Typically, the governor can veto a map. A growing number of states have independent commissions where ordinary citizens rather than politicians draw districts.

Why does redistricting matter?

Redistricting affects political power. It determines which party controls Congress and state and local governments across the country. Consequently, redistricting has a direct bearing on what a legislature chooses to tackle, and what to ignore. Redistricting also affects whether the nation's diverse communities are represented in its legislative bodies. . .

How should the lines be drawn?

A good redistricting process should help a community secure meaningful representation. Many states consider "communities of interest" when drawing their districts and that's a good place to start. A district of farmers, say, and a district of city dwellers will probably elect representatives that reflect differing histories, priorities, and aspirations.

What is gerrymandering?

Gerrymandering refers to the manipulation of district lines to protect or change political power. A different kind of gerrymandering also can take place when maps are drawn in a way that disadvantages racial or ethnic minorities. Gerry-

Why is redistricting important?

by **Liz Shields,**
Vice President, Voter Services

Redrawing of political boundaries occurs after each census to ensure equitable representation in each of our governing bodies. This year distribution of the census data used in redistricting will be delayed due to the pandemic and other glitches found by the Census Bureau.

Due to the delay the California Supreme Court granted the legislature's emergency petition for an extension to the constitutional deadline of August for completion of district maps and directed the California Citizens Redistricting Commission to approve and certify the final statewide maps to the secretary of state no later than February, 2022.

Fresno County's Charter requires that any changes to supervisorial district boundaries be made within one year of a general election, i.e. November 3,

mandering affects what laws are created, and which communities receive meaningful representation. When district lines are drawn to favor or disadvantage a political party, meaningful representation is compromised and community interests are sacrificed to the partisan goals of political parties.



2021. It too may be impacted by delays in census data availability.

State boundaries drawn in 2011 were praised for being drawn by a citizens' commission with minimal partisan bias and criticized for inadequate minority representation and failure to make districts more compact. Locally county supervisorial boundaries have been minimally changed in decades in spite of population growth.

Everyone interested in redistricting could spend time examining the criteria for selecting the district boundaries and develop a list of improvements that could be presented to both the state and county redistricting commissions either orally or in writing.

For information on the current status of the CA Redistricting Process go to <https://wedrawthelines.ca.org/>

READ THIS PAGE

to PREPARE for

**REDISTRICTING
MEETING**

on

MARCH 18

at 5 p.m.

ZOOM link will be sent

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



The Department of Behavioral Health is assisting with the effort to vaccinate residents of Fresno County against Covid-19. Director Dawan Utecht reported that staff members are working with the Department of Public Health and are beginning to vaccinate their own clients. Individuals who are in conservatorship and in mental health treatment facilities are at the top of the list and many already have been vaccinated. The Department is prioritizing other clients for vaccination when vaccine becomes available. Many clients of the Department have underlying health conditions and are vulnerable to the disease.

The Department continues to serve clients remotely, though will see individuals in person if necessary. The number of clients has remained steady throughout the pandemic, but the quality and effectiveness of care is being evaluated.



The Behavioral Health Board makes site visits to various programs in the county throughout the year. During Covid these have been virtual tours. In February the Board visited the Perinatal Program that

is an in-house program of the Department, located at the West Fresno Regional Center. This program provides outpatient mental health services to pregnant and postpartum teens, adults and infants, and to fathers who are experiencing Paternal Postnatal Depression. Short-term treatment includes outreach, early mental health identification through screening, assessment, and referrals to treatment, as well as Public Health Nurse visitation, assessment and preventive services. Clients learn coping and bonding skills and self-management for wellness and recovery. This very successful program was begun 10 years ago, and today serves 200 clients.

The Behavioral Health Board meets virtually on the third Wednesday of every month at 3:30 p.m. Its committees are meeting again virtually, and you are invited to attend any and all of them, including Adult Services, Children's Services and Forensic Services. Information is available on the Department website.

evansalca@comcast.net

Climate Change

by Lenore Yousef



A small rise in average temperature could severely impact plant and animal life by increasing the number of hot days and decreasing the number of cold days per year. This was shown on a graph explained by Dr Eric Arens, a retired Berkeley physicist, at our February meeting. The rest of his presentation focused on electrification for mitigating climate change, specifically for transportation and to replace gas as an energy source.

Dr. Arens recommends replacing gasoline-powered vehicles with electric vehicles, using electricity generated from renewable sources. He noted that California's policy is to stop selling gas vehicles by 2035, thereby incentivizing innovation in electric vehicles and charging stations.



Natural gas is used to heat and cool our buildings, to heat water, to dry clothes and to cook. Burning of natural gas is cleaner than burning other fossil fuels, but still contributes to greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Methane is the primary component of natural gas and traps heat 85 times more effectively than carbon dioxide. A major source of methane is leaks from wells and the network of pipelines used to deliver the gas to where it will be burned.

Gas appliances for heating and cooling can be replaced by electric heat pumps; induction stoves are more responsive to temperature change, safer since only the pan and its contents are heated, and less polluting than gas. One useful action item would be to influence local governments to enact policies to construct all-electric new buildings and retrofit old buildings.



Join us via Zoom on April 23 to honor Earth Day by celebrating projects designed to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and economic hardship in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Fresno.

lenorey@csufresno.edu



When our Centennial Celebration Committee selected 100 Notable Women from our area, we knew their achievements weren't over. Periodically we'll tell you about their current contributions to society.

Lynne Ashbeck is an incumbent candidate for reelection to Clovis City Council . The election will be held on March 2. She appeared at the League-sponsored Clovis candidate forum on February 17.

Audra McDonald heard about the pending sale of the Tower Theatre from other celebrities and contributed \$1,000 to the fund to save the theatre from purchase by a local church.

Baines talks on police reform

Attracting more participants than our usual in-person gatherings, the League's Zoom meeting featuring Oliver Baines last month included three dozen members and guests. Baines spoke about the work of the Fresno Police Reform Commission which he chaired.

The commission recommended over 70 changes, some large and some small, to police policies and procedures. An Implementation Committee will be in charge of deciding which ones and in what form to put them into practice. However, the Implementation Committee has yet to be formed by the City.

One of the most important recommendations includes a change in the policy regarding the use of force, which will be justifiable only for the preservation of life. A fleeing felon will not be responded to with lethal force, for example.

Another important policy shift will divert police presence from calls which are not for criminal activity and instead require mental health intervention. Although there are two crisis teams operating now one in the city of Fresno and one in the County areas, these teams require both a police officer and a mental health clinician to work together on the call. According to Baines, a newer procedure is being studied which will not necessarily involve a police officer.

One of the main recommendations of the Commission is for the establishment of a Civilian OverSight Commission to monitor the work of the Office of Independent Review.

— *Francine Farber*

Water News

by **Diane Merrill**



There is good news for residents of our local Kings River watershed which is located in Fresno, Kings, and Tulare counties. Recently the California Department of Conservation awarded a \$300,000 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Watershed Coordinator grant to the Kings River Conservation District. The District is a regional public agency with duties that include efficient management of surface and groundwater and environment oversight.

The grant is meant to help address the major "human right to water" issue of the longstanding, widespread, and difficult to address problem of nitrate contamination in groundwater in the Kings River area. Nitrate contamination is most prevalent in rural agricultural areas and is especially dangerous for pregnant women and young children. The problem tends to fall disproportionately on individual well owners and small rural disadvantaged communities that must rely on expensive bottled water for drinking and cooking. Larger communities with multiple wells and access to surface water supplies can deal with nitrate contamination by shutting down wells with high nitrate levels and reducing the amount of nitrate in drinking water by mixing and diluting high-nitrate water with clean water.

In its Watershed Coordinator role, the Kings District is tasked with preparing and implementing an Early Action Plan to: provide an immediate safe drinking water supply to residents with nitrate exceedance; develop and implement a plan that outlines milestones for nitrate dischargers to reduce or cease nitrate contamination into the groundwater; and identify projects and strategies that will be implemented to restore groundwater quality where reasonable and feasible.

In implementing the grant, the Kings District will collaborate with a wide range of interests including affected communities, domestic well users, tribes, the State Water Resources Control Board's Division of Drinking Water, local planning departments, local county health officials, groundwater sustainability agencies, and disadvantaged communities.

HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED AT PROGRAM PLANNING

The local priorities selected by members are:

- ◆ Redistricting, especially at County supervisory level
- ◆ Homelessness

** **

The state priorities selected by members are:

- ◆ Redistricting
- ◆ Homelessness
- ◆ Environmental concerns/water/climate/land use



REDISTRICTING

SEE PAGE 5 FOR EXPLANATION

Other topics that were discussed:

POLICE REFORM

Luisa Medina, a former Commission member, reviewed some issues and recommendations, including regarding use of force, school resource officers, how to address mental health calls, building trust in the community and others.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Diane Merrill, Lenore Yousef and Radley Reep reviewed concerns about water, climate change and land use issues.

PRE-K AND CHILDCARE

Kay Bertken discussed the dearth of facilities and spaces for children from birth through early school age, including during non-traditional time frames.



Pat Campbell, Director of Program Planning, led a group of 36 members through presentations of five issues that had been identified previously by Board members. After questions and some discussion, a vote was taken which resulted in the priorities on the left.

The members voting for the two top local priorities will be contacted to establish meeting times to begin planning how each committee will move forward with education and/or advocacy.

The state priorities will be forwarded to LWVC for consideration.

INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE HOMELESS

Fresno has the highest percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness in California. There are many programs which have attempted to address the issue, including Federal Stimulus Homekey Funds, City Cares and Federal Emergency Grants. Mayor Dyer has begun an initiative to remove homeless encampments along free-ways. These individuals are among those who have been moved into former motels. Life disruption has many causes, including job loss, eviction, the pandemic, mental health issues and poverty.

Assembly Bill 816 is going through our legislature and would establish a homeless inspector general, would require cities to submit proposals with detailed plans to reduce homelessness by 90% by the end of the decade, and address racial and ethnic disparities.

The League priority committee will educate itself on the scope of the problem, funding and other resources, and also advocate for appro-

Even if you weren't at the meeting, if our priorities interest you please contact Pat Campbell to let her know which topic you would like to work on.

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DIVERSITY POLICY: There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the LWVF on the basis of race, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socio-economic level.

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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