

Phone: 559-226—VOTE

Info.lwvfresno@gmail.com

Web site:
www.lwvfresno.org



March 1-30

100 Notable Women Exhibit
Fresno County Library

Tuesday March 8

100 Notable Women Program
5-6 p.m. on ZOOM

This event was originally scheduled in person at the Betty Rodriguez Library but has been changed to virtual.

Thursday March 10

James Kus, FC Registrar of Voters
5:30 p.m. on ZOOM

Monday March 14

Regular Board Meeting
4:00 p.m. ZOOM

Members and guests welcome
at all meetings and events



The
FRESNO
VOTER

Our 80th Year!

We're partnering with the Fresno County Library to explain the 100 Notable Women project on Zoom. You'll hear four of the Notable Women tell their stories in person.

And as a second chance bonus: if you missed the exhibit at the Fresno Art Museum in October, you can visit the FC Library any day through March 31 where the posters are on display.

M-Th 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
F-Sat. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m..

March is Women's History Month

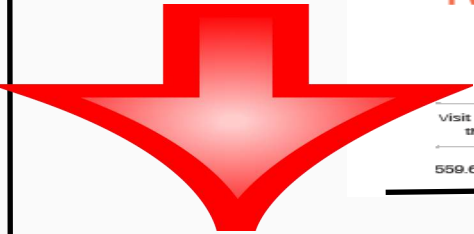
100 Notable Women
OF THE FRESNO COMMUNITY

TUESDAY
March 8
at 5pm

AN ONLINE EVENT ON ZOOM
Fresno League of Women Voters honors 100 notable women who have made a difference in our community, including Mrs. Betty Rodriguez whose name is on one of our library branches.
Register to join us on Zoom at: bit.ly/100valleywomen

Visit the photo exhibition recognizing these women at Central Library through March and receive a free booklet of their biographies.

559.600.6299 | fresnolib.org



Concerned about ...
So many elections?
Security?
Redistricting?
Join us to hear from
James A. Kus
County Clerk, Registrar of Voters
Thursday, March 8, 5:30 p.m.
Via ZOOM

President's Message



A new feature highlighting monthly Board activities!

February 2022

Membership: Annual dues letters will be sent out in mid-February. Our fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31

Program Planning: Paul Nerland will speak in February and James Kus, County Registrar, in March

Voter Services: The Registrar is going to request more voting machines because of the multiple elections coming up soon.

Legislative interviews: An interview was held with Anna Caballero and another scheduled for Melissa Hurtado. Others are planned. The primary topics are water, youth mental health, redistricting and affordable housing.

Annual Meeting: We will be scheduling an in-person meeting in April. If necessary it can be changed to virtual.

Special Event: The 100 Notable Women event at the Betty Rodriguez Library on March 8 has been changed to Zoom because of Covid concerns. It will be held from 5 to 6 p.m. with several of the Notable Women speaking to us.

LWVF IS A 501 C3 non-profit organization and all donations, including dues, are tax deductible. Donations are always accepted for the RBG Scholarship Fund at San Joaquin College of Law, the League's general fund, and any other purpose. Donations for RBG should note RBG in the memo line. Your estate planning is encouraged to consider LWVF. Please make out checks to LWVF and send to Treasurer, LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno 93710.



We will test these newly drawn districts later this year after the June primary election determines candidates for the November, 2022 general election. We'll all be curious to see how the new lines affect the distribution of influence in the Central Valley.

Marianne

Each year during January and February, the League of Women Voters of California encourages local leagues to interview their state legislators or staff. These interviews increase the League's visibility, gather valuable information, and remind legislators of the League's interest in the policies they are considering.

It is surprisingly difficult to get appointments for meetings with legislators. The demands of traveling to Sacramento while maintaining families and connections in their home districts, keeping up with legislation, and perpetually eyeing re-election, create very full work days. Over the years, however, we've met with Senators Anna Caballero, Melissa Hurtado and Andreas Borgeas, as well as Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula, and the staffs of Assemblyman Jim Patterson and former Senator Tom Berryhill.

LWVC provides questions each year in three areas of potential future legislation as well as extensive background information so that we are well prepared for these interviews. Sometimes legislators are very knowledgeable in the areas of our inquiry; other times they are not, but our questions serve as warning for the lobbying to come. The final question we ask is always, "What are your legislative priorities for the current session?" The answers to that question reveal the most important issues for each legislator and allow the League to plan its efforts efficiently.

This year, every state legislator seems to agree on one issue: the new district maps drawn by the independent California Redistricting Commission (CRC) are not satisfactory. To me, this is their predictable reaction to the line drawing having been taken out of their hands. No matter the party, every legislator is thinking about re-election, and new district lines present the challenge of converting a new batch of voters to supporters. I suggest that this universal dissatisfaction with the CRC maps may be a strong endorsement for the independent redistricting process!

In Fresno, we were fortunate to have Judi Steele, a League member, listen to hundreds of hours of the CRC's meetings, alerting us when discussion and testimony featured the Central Valley and Fresno County. Many of us listened online, sent in comments, and called in with suggestions. We were not alone following this process; other local organizations suggested maps, encouraged communities of interest testimony, and closely followed the line drawing process just as we did.



The Voter is a monthly publication of the League of Women Voters of Fresno

Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 81 No. 12 Editor: Francine M. Farber

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



The Fresno County Behavioral Health Board held a Public Hearing on the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Annual Update prior to its February meeting. There was a 30-day comment period before the meeting, and the public had another opportunity to comment at the hearing. During its regular meeting, the board voted to recommend the acceptance of the Annual Update to the Board of Supervisors.



Innovation project is working

At its meeting the Board received a report on The Lodge, which is an Innovations project funded by MHSA. Innovation projects must have aspects never tried before and must have specific learning goals. The purpose of The Lodge is to explore, identify, and understand engagement strategies for individuals who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, who have limited engagement with care, and are not sure that they want to accept treatment or change their lives. At The Lodge they are encouraged to participate in services by working with a team of peer support specialists, case managers, and clinicians for mental health support. During the program's first 10 months, 361 clients were served, with successful linkages to services for 66 individuals. Staff members are learning which engagement strategies work with this particular population, so we should expect to see higher percentages in future years.

Peer support certification is coming

Supporting the workforce by employing people with lived experience has been a longtime goal of the board. Now the Department of Behavioral Health is working with the California Mental Health Services Authority to devise a process for certification for peer support specialists. Certification will recognize their valuable services with greater financial compensation and respect for the work that they do.

It was announced that Fresno County has opened the recruitment process to select a new Director for the Department. Former Director Dawan Utecht resigned in December. Since that time Deputy Director Susan Holt has served as Interim Director.

evansalca@comcast.net

Water News

by Diane Merrill



As required by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, local water agencies submitted detailed groundwater sustainability plans to the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) in 2020. The goal of these plans is to address problems caused by groundwater overdraft and bring groundwater basins to sustainable condition no later than 2040. Our league is focusing on the plan for the Kings Groundwater Basin, which includes the cities, unincorporated communities and farmland in central and eastern Fresno County.

Valley plans were incomplete

Nearly all San Joaquin Valley groundwater sustainability plans were deemed incomplete by DWR and must be amended by July 27 to address the deficiencies.



The incomplete parts of the Kings Basin plan include insufficient information about chronic lowering of groundwater levels, land subsidence, and water quality problems that can be worsened by overpumping of groundwater. There is particular concern about water levels and water quality in drinking water wells. Similar problems have been identified in other San Joaquin Valley plans. If deficiencies are not addressed, the plan will be considered inadequate and the groundwater basin may be subject to intervention by DWR and the State Water Resources Control Board.

Amending process is a challenge

Amending the King Basin plan will be a challenging task as there are many organizations involved in the process. This includes Fresno, Clovis and eleven other cities, Fresno, Kings and Tulare County governments, irrigation districts, private water companies, and other water agencies.

As reported in the December 2021 issue of *The Voter*, water agencies in the Kings Basin have completed, or are in the process of developing, 600 acres of groundwater recharge basins to increase groundwater supplies during wet years. While these efforts will help bolster groundwater supply, more attention needs to be put on demand side management efforts including water conservation and other actions to reduce the amount of groundwater pumping.

Transportation

by Mary Savala



In order to expedite the preparation of a ballot proposal to renew the local transportation sales tax and place it on the ballot in November, Measure C Renewal Technical Working Group (TWG) and the Executive Committee (EC) are holding two meetings a month in March and April

The draft programs, subprograms, and projects submitted to the TWG by staff were approved in February and forwarded to the executive committee, which accepted them. Only two written comments with recommendations were sent in response to a request by staff, from myself and the bicycle representative. There was no discussion despite several questions, including who was making decisions about how the comments and recommendations would be incorporated into the draft. The TWG was told that the specifics of the proposals would take place in subsequent meetings when it would be asked to comment on the funding allocations for the projects.

Transit agencies want increased funding

The EC heard presentations by the three transit agencies in Fresno County receiving current Measure C funding: Clovis Roundup, Fresno FAX, and Fresno County Rural Transportation Agency. They made a very strong pitch for continuing and increasing that funding.

Several EC committee members offered recommendations for transit projects, including light rail. Professor Aly Tawfik from the Transportation Institute at Fresno State noted that buses were not cost effective methods of public transportation, while transit agencies pointed out that while buses were not always full, there were periods and places on the routes which accommodated standing room only, necessitating large buses for those routes. All transit agencies said that increased funding would allow them to expand frequencies and hours, attracting "choice" riders, a position with which Dr. Tawfik did not agree.

Newer roads need maintenance, too

Staff made a case for spending money on newer roads to keep them in condition, and showed figures that streets in very bad condition required significantly more money to reconstruct. While there was no answer to a question about an equity category, it was noted that climate change and air quality projects were addressed as being eligible for telecommuting, drones, electric buses, transit vans, and charging stations.

Leadership Council inquired regarding the renewing of Measure C in relationship to the new policies on transportation reflected in CalTrans planning. Caltrans was focusing on maintenance of built roads and "tweaking" the current plan.

rudysavala@comcast.net

We can have bicycle safety for all by Diana Durham



I know all too well the cost of unsafe crosswalks in our town. My brother was killed on a bike in the crosswalk at Friant and Audubon on January 12. His was the third crosswalk death in the last year going into or out of Woodward Park.

It is time for Fresno to embrace Vision Zero. In the last year, Fresno has had 58 traffic deaths of pedestrians and bicyclists, well above the 35 average deaths in past years. Traffic deaths are preventable. Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.

Vision Zero recognizes that the road system and related policies should be designed to ensure that inevitable mistakes do not result in severe injuries or fatalities. This means that system designers and policymakers are expected to improve the roadway environment, policies (such as speed management), and other related systems to lessen the severity of crashes.

Vision Zero is a multidisciplinary approach. It acknowledges that many factors contribute to safety -- roadway design, speeds, behaviors, technology, and policies -- and sets clear goals to achieve the goal of zero fatalities and severe injuries.

Supporting Vision Zero, last month Mayor Dyer, along with council members Bredefeld and Karbassi, announced some safety changes coming to the intersections by Woodward Park that are happening now and in the near future, along with some changes that will take longer. This is a start to improving safety for pedestrians and bicyclists in just one area in Fresno.

The Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee will be presenting Vision Zero to the City Council in April and asking them to formally adopt it. You can help by writing to your district council member and Mayor Dyer urging them to support adopting Vision Zero for all of the City of Fresno.

Is there selective implementation in the county General Plan?

by Radley Reep

What was different about the Planning Commission hearing for the Annual Progress Report (APR) on the implementation of the General Plan for 2021 was that for the first time since 2003, the Commission made recommendations to the Board for improving plan implementation. The recommendations were based on public testimony that the County had not been able to implement large portions of the plan.

Specifically, the Commission recommended that the Board fund five new staff positions to help with plan implementation and also arrive at a strategy to adequately fund plan implementation for the first five years of the life of the new General Plan (2023 – 2042), which is likely to be adopted later this fall.

In making its recommendations, the Commission assumed that the lack of implementation was primarily due to a shortage of staffing and funding. While a lack of resources is a factor, it may not be the whole story. Based on information in the 2021 APR, I calculated to what degree the programs out of those listed within each of the first six elements appear to have been successfully implemented.

- ◆ **Health and Safety** **Good**
- ◆ **Transportation and Circulation** **Good**
- ◆ **Public Facilities and Services** **Fair**
- ◆ **Agriculture and Land Use** **Fair**
- ◆ **Economic Development** **Poor**
- ◆ **Open Space and Conservation** **Poor**

Are these differences simply a funding problem or are they also a matter of selective implementation?

At the Commission hearing, the public faulted the APR for failing to satisfy State and County regulations and for not explaining why the County was having difficulty successfully implementing the plan. As currently written, the APR tells county residents and decision makers very little about progress toward Plan implementation or the achievement of General Plan goals. As a result, there is little to no information to help remedy the situation.

The board is likely to hold a hearing on the content of the APR either March 8 or March 22.

Climate Change

by Andrea Farber De Zubiria



All is not lost. The ambitious Build Back Better Act (BBB) contained many significant climate provisions to help our country meet President Biden’s goal of 50% reduction of greenhouse gases from 2005 levels by 2030. It has become clear that there are not enough Democratic senators willing to vote for it (and no Republicans), so that it cannot pass as currently written. However, over the next few months, Congress will be re-negotiating much of the content.

LWVUS lobbies for caps on pollution, investments in renewable energy, carbon pricing and stronger EPA regulations on methane, supporting a coordinated government response to global climate change. You can help make sure that climate provisions remain in BBB. Use the link cclusa.org/action to let the President and your Senators know that strong climate legislation is important to you. Share the link with people outside California as well.

Meanwhile, our committee has turned its attention to understanding local efforts to decrease greenhouse gas emissions. After reviewing the recently approved Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan for the City of Fresno, we discussed it with city planner Sophia Pagoulatos and city attorney Talia Koluri.

A critical part of the plan is to evaluate applications for new projects to be sure they reduce the “vehicle miles traveled” for those who would work or live at the new developments. There will be a mitigation fee for developments that cannot meet the requirements.

We also discussed our concern that PGE’s plans to raise the rates for grid connection for residential solar might dissuade people from purchasing solar panels. This could interfere with one of the city’s strategies. Our guests reported that Mayor Jerry Dyer has expressed concern and will be doing what he can to address this issue. There will be public hearings with the California Public Utilities Commission about PGE’s application to raise its rates on March 1, 10 and 22 at 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Go to www.adminmonitor.com/ca/cpuc for more info. If you wish to make a comment, participate by phone 1-800-857-1917 passcode 60327788# and press*1

Continued on page 8

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



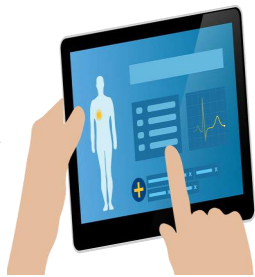
This report updates selected previous healthcare reports

My first dozen articles, starting in August of 2013, focused on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) installation in our area.

Initially there were major problems with enrollment in both MediCal and Covered California. These largely resolved over a few years. A residual problem was sustaining healthcare services for undocumented immigrants who lost Fresno County's special programs. This appears to have been solved by expansion of Federally Qualified Health Centers and by administrative actions in applications for MediCal. However, the ability to obtain a health insurance card does not, to this day, guarantee the ability to get a timely appointment in our underserved Central Valley.

Technology still lagging

In the May 2015 Voter I first discussed the hopeful future for information technology in medicine. Prominent physician-authors anticipated a transformation of "the work, the people who do it, and their relationships with each other and with patients." Seven years later, we still see the potential. However, very little solid progress has been achieved at the sites of care. Doctors in separate arenas are still communicating with each other by FAX or phone. Progress to shared electronic medical records



with standardized data fields and decision support is moving at a snail's pace. Money specifically allocated for medical practice innovation by the ACA seems not to have accelerated this pace.

In the February 2017 Voter I introduced the idea of a ceiling budget for our total national health care spending. At that time, that cobbled budget was 3.1 trillion dollars yearly, 18.1% of our GNP, and approaching \$10,000 yearly for every person living in the U.S. By comparison, the advanced countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on average spent 10% of their GNPs and about \$4000 per person on health care.

Lobbying maintains high costs

Our high healthcare costs are hard to address because they apply to all components of our system. One modestly popular approach is to lower drug and medical device prices through competitive bidding run by Medicare and Medicaid. This is going nowhere because of the financial power of the pharmaceutical industry, expressed by its commitment to lobbying.

Even if this approach somehow succeeded, we would remain the kingpin in healthcare spending. Adopting a single payer system appears years away. If adopted, it would still require aggressive cost control measures.

Well, I was wrong

In the January 2020 Voter I predicted that the COVID-19 would not mutate to become more dangerous. This opinion was based on its baseline aggressiveness and slow mutation rate. My Harvard epidemiologist advisor and I were wrong. We underestimated resistance to vaccination and sustained worldwide transmission.

In the March 2020 Voter I reported on the U.S. and international status of vaccine injury compensation funds. Most developed countries understand the need for medical and financial support for the rare victims of severe adverse reactions to national vaccinations. These programs are needed to develop collective confidence in government-sponsored immunization plans. Our Countermeasures Injury Compensation Program has been widely criticized for its excessively complex and miserly operation. It was never promoted by our public health officers, nor has its website been functional.

Only Canada supports monitoring

In three articles between June of 2019 and last January, I reported on the benefits and complications of marijuana legalization. At the federal level, marijuana bafflingly remains illegal. This blocks important research on its recreational use. Recent full-page ads in the Fresno Bee for high potency marijuana plant products including cigars and concentrates with 70% THC suggest that regulatory safeguards and monitoring of adverse events need to be in full force.

An extensive search for "monitoring marijuana or THC adverse effects" points only to Canada. Hats off to our northern neighbors! The California Department of Cannabis Control is not doing that.

drbertken@comcast.net

Education

by Kay Bertken



Largely absent from FUSD board meetings until recently, angry community members filled seats and dominated the public comment period at recent FUSD board meetings. They threatened trustees with removal over district Covid policies. Speakers contended that masking mandates were causing learning loss, illness and stress among children, and the district was facilitating long-term health effects and even death by urging vaccination and holding clinics on school campuses. Many speakers assumed the district was mandating student vaccination, which is not the case.

Are vaccinations dangerous?

Public speakers came armed with charts and references to articles that they found to support their claims of harm from Covid vaccines, some of it from creative social media posts. The claims of thousands of deaths from the vaccines originate from the CDC Vaccine Adverse Effects Reporting System data which requires health care



providers to report any death after vaccination even if there is no indication that the death was due to the vaccine. An elderly person in a nursing home may die two weeks after vaccination and be included.

Known deaths from any Covid vaccination in the U.S. are limited to less than ten from a rare blood-clotting side effect of the J & J vaccine. These deaths occurred early in the vaccination drive, and the potential side-effect has been publicized and guarded against by vaccine providers since.

Robert Malone was widely cited by speakers. He was once a highly regarded physician and researcher whose work provided a steppingstone to hundreds of researchers and decades of work that led to the vaccines for Covid. Recently he has made a name for himself, claiming he invented the vaccine and currently warning people against taking it. He claims approval was rushed and there could be dangerous delayed effects of the vaccine, especially for children. His claims have been widely refuted and attributed to his own expressed concerns of being “written out of history”.

Serious side effects rare

Deaths of children from the vaccine and serious side effects have been remarkably rare among the millions of doses that have been administered. The impact of the Covid virus, on the other hand, has been largely ignored or denied by the public speakers at the meetings. While certainly less frequent among children than among adults, 907 children in the U.S. are known to have died of Covid as of last month, and there were ten children with Covid in pediatric ICU’s in Fresno County, with 34 more hospitalized.

The normal business of the board meetings has centered on the budget. The governor’s proposals include extra funding for special education and a general 5.33% cost of living raise in revenues. Offsetting these increases are a \$28.2 million decline in the district’s average daily attendance funding and the annual increase in the district contribution to the STRS and PERS retirement programs, costing the district an additional \$12.4 million.

New positions funded

The governor’s proposals increase concentration funding, spent to increase the number of staff providing direct service to at-risk students.. Only five FUSD schools do not qualify. Meetings with school site personnel around the district led to a recommendation of 300 new positions including: enough psychologists to provide one at every elementary and middle school and two at each high school; one resource counselor at each high school; instructional coaches and campus culture teachers at each middle school; new vice principal positions, home school liaisons and child welfare and attendance officers. It will take time to fill all these positions. The district is also proposing to send millions more to each school site to fund specific plans for student achievement.



Police on campus

There was a discussion of ongoing negotiations with the Fresno police department about bringing back police resource officers to the middle school campuses once the police department has increased its own staff. There was no negative reaction from board members who previously have opposed police on campus.

kayb752@gmail.com

IT'S GRAND to be on a jury

by Lanny Larson

Are you dedicated, curious and committed to improving government? Then I encourage you to apply for service on the Fresno County Civil Grand Jury. I've been on four grand juries – two as foreperson – and enjoyed the experiences.



California requires a civil grand jury be impaneled by the Superior Court in each county to review governance by the county, cities, school and special districts and state prisons.

Recent grand juries have reported on deficiencies in Parlier city government; lack of coordinated response to homelessness; poor Fresno 9-1-1 service; inadequate response to elder abuse; and inadequate financial accountability of special districts.

There are 19 grand jury positions available each year, but up to 10 may be filled by court-appointed holdovers. At an impanelment in June, applicants' names are chosen at random to fill out the jury and establish a list of alternates, on-call to serve if needed. The Superior Court accepts applications through March 31 for the 2022-2023 Grand Jury. Applicants are interviewed by a judge and undergo a criminal background check before being invited as one of about 30 prospective grand jurors.

Grand jurors spend 40 to 80 hours per month during their one-year term, meeting weekly in the Fresno County Plaza Building downtown and receiving \$15-per-day, mileage and a free place to park. Besides meetings and investigations, grand jurors visit government agencies and hear from officials, learning how governments work and the value of citizen involvement.

It's immensely satisfying to see grand jury recommendations implemented and to better understand how government works. That's why I encourage League members to apply. Information and an application are at <https://www.fresno.courts.ca.gov/divisions/jury-service/grand-jury>. If you have questions, send them to me at lannylarson@att.net.

Voter Services

by Sue Goldman



Voter services will be busy setting up the phone bank and ballot opening for the upcoming April 5th election. We are looking for volunteers to staff the phone bank and participate in the ballot opening. This election will serve to replace Devin Nunes' congressional seat. If no one receives more than 50% of the vote, the run-off will be held with the June primary. This person will only be in office until January, 2023. The people who will be running for this congressional seat include:

Republicans:

Connie Conway – small business owner (and former Assembly Minority Leader)

Elizabeth Heng – small business owner

Michael Maher – aviation owner

Matt Stoll – small business owner

Democrats:

Eric Garcia – father/therapist

Lourin Hubbard – water resource manager

As the counting of ballots for this election will overlap that of the April 12 school board election, James Kus, county registrar, is requesting additional machines as ballots for each election must be counted on separate machines.



CLIMATE CHANGE *continued from page 5*

While the city's greenhouse gas emissions increased slightly between 2016 and 2020, Pagoulatos and Koluri expressed optimism that the implementation checklist in the updated plan will result in reduced emissions when next measured in approximately four years.

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Paul@paulepierce.com

559-246-7236

