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The *Our 81st Year!*
FRESNO VOTER



Monday, March 13
Regular Board Meeting
ZOOM, 4 p.m.
Farberfrannola
@gmail.com
to request link

Thursday, March 23
Healthcare Discussion
5:30 p.m. Stone Soup

Tuesday, April 18
Tulare League
Lunch with John Yun
State Water Commissioner

Sunday, April 23
“One Thousand Tries in
a Hundred Years”
Fresno Master Chorale
See page 7

Saturday April 29
Annual Meeting
Details to be announced



David Luchini, B.S., R.N.
Director
FC Dept. of Public Health

Thursday
March 23
5:30 p.m.
Stone Soup



Trinidad Solis, M.D.
Deputy Director
FC Dept. of Public Health

Please join us for a stimulating presentation and a chance to ask questions of the top administrators from the Fresno County Department of Public Health.

Refreshments will be served
No charge for members and guests
For more information call 559-226-8683



March 17
Happy
St. Patrick's
Day

Co-President's Message



Well, the jury is in.

At our Program Planning meeting in February we voted to tell our state league that we would like them to continue with the three priorities they have been following: Criminal Justice, Housing and Climate Change. Locally we had near unanimous votes for Voter Education, Climate/air quality, and Housing as the top issues we need to pursue in our region. The topics were introduced by our members: Carolyn Evans, Marianne Kast, Diane Merrill, Janice Maroot, Connie Young, and me. This was one of our best program planning sessions in a decade, with everyone participating in lively discussions about these topics.

Transportation: Although this was not voted for as one of our top issues the League is involved in it through our subsidy gift to the Fresno County Rural Transportation Authority. Our contribution is that we pay for 50% of riders' fares from unincorporated communities like Biola and Lenare to college classes, medical appointments and other serious needs in Fresno. The funds come from gifts from the estates of several generous deceased members.

Measure P: Again, not a primary focus issue, but amidst an uproar about who should control funds for public art projects, some of us will follow this issue. Initially it seemed like the Parks Department (a separate entity from the Parks Commission) might have been maneuvering to take over the 2% of Measure P tax money to plan projects and dispense the funds. However, the Department has acknowledged publicly that they "don't know anything about art." How true. It still remains to be seen what this means in terms of the Fresno Arts Council's wish to have control of the funds, set up grant proposals, and pass judgment upon grant applications.

It was special to have outside guests with us: Stacey Gamble and Ozena Floyd from Black Women Organized for Political Action, and Elva Rodriguez from the League of Mexican American Women. We hope to have working partnerships with their organizations in the near future.

You can see there is a lot going on and we need interested people to work with us by attending a meeting occasionally, helping to keep us informed on what is going on, and providing input into our next steps. If you think you can help with these tasks, contact Kay at kaybertken752@gmail.com, or

me at farberfrannola@gmail.com.

Francine



February 2023

Water Meeting: The Tulare League has invited us to attend lunch with them and speaker John Yun, Head of the State Water Committee. Time, place and date to be confirmed.

Suffrage Centennial: The Fresno Master Chorale is going to give an in-person performance of the League-funded suffrage work, "100 Years of a Thousand Tries." It will be held at the Shaghoian Theater on April 23. Details to follow. Our 100 Women exhibit will be part of it.

Annual Meeting: We began to make plans for our Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 29. We have to choose a venue and speaker.

Rural Transportation: Moses Stites, head of the FC Rural Transportation Authority, spoke about the incorrect impression and lack of correct information that appeared in the Bee recently. It also omitted the information he gave to them and wanted everyone to know that our Biola electrification project is moving along. There will be a ribbon-cutting and public event soon.

State Convention: We received a thank-you note from LWVC for our \$250 donation to support the June state convention.

Mural: Kay and Marianne approached the Downtown Partnership about a mural and that organization was enthusiastic and will research buildings and requirements

Nominating Committee: The Nominating Committee has been seeking candidates for several positions that will be vacated at our Annual Meeting in April. If interested contact Marie Slater at mcsfresno@gmail.com

RBG Scholarship: The Board voted to contribute \$1,000 from gifts from our members to the RBG Fund at San Joaquin College of Law.

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

Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 82 No. 3 Editor: Francine M. Farber

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. Your estate planning is encouraged to consider LWVF. Please make out checks to LWVF and send to Treasurer, LWVF 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno 93710.

Housing

by Marianne Kast



In the “old days,” a landlord who failed to maintain his rental property lost money in two ways. First, he wasn’t able to charge market rent because his units were less inviting to renters and lowering the price was the only way to get the units filled. Second, when the perpetual pendulum of too few available units swung to too many available units, those poorly maintained units remained vacant much longer.

But these days in Fresno, the shortage of residential rental units has made any unit that can be occupied, no matter the condition, a place to live. There hasn’t been a swing to excess rental units in more than a decade. For landlords who are not committed to maintaining quality rentals, this shortage of units has been a boon to business. Why spend money on maintenance when units will rent quickly despite their condition?

Overall, residential rent in the City of Fresno increased by over 25% in 2021. The California Tenant Protection Act does limit rent increases for tenants in older units to 5% + local CPI (consumer price index = inflation rate), but units 15 years old or newer are exempt from this law, as are single family homes not owned by corporate entities. In any case, when a unit becomes vacant, the landlord determines the next tenant’s rent without restriction.

As a requirement of the Transformative Climate Communities grant that is directing the development and transformation of Southwest Fresno, the “Here to Stay” report was commissioned to assure that new projects don’t contribute to displacement and gentrification of long-established communities. Leading the list of recommendations from this report was “rent stabilization,” or rent control. Among large cities in California, only Fresno and San Diego do not have some form of rent control.

Last year Mayor Jerry Dyer presented his own “One Fresno Housing Strategy,” listing 47 priority policies which focus on building more affordable housing but also loosening restrictions for developers to build more market-rate housing. Noticeably absent from Dyer’s vision is a call for rent control.

It is years past due for Fresno to enact some form of rent stabilization. There are innumerable variations of such ordinances, and we need to give some sense of security to Fresno’s rent-burdened renters.

fourkasts@gmail.com

ATTENTION MEMBERS

Your annual dues letter will be going out this month with payment due in April. Dues have remained the same for many years: \$70 for one



individual, \$100 for two people at the same address.

We would appreciate it if you pay your dues promptly since it presents budgetary and staff issues to send out repeated reminders.

Thanks for your understanding.

CLEO BAUER

Cleo Bauer, a member of LWVF since 2020, passed away in February at age 80. She was the wife of Domenic Papagni, a League member since 2005.

Cleo was a 27 year member of the Educational Employees Credit Union, a 15 year member of their board and past chair, vice chair and secretary. She served for 40 years as an administrator at four CSUs, San Joaquin College of Law and Cornell University.

In Fresno she was a volunteer at Read Fresno, the Boys and Girls Club and the Fresno Fiber Arts Guild. At the Guild she taught poor and homeless women how to sew, knit and crochet.

She loved to travel and climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro twice.

Education

by Kay Bertken



Safety was a big issue last month. In Fresno Unified, a fight and resulting knifing outside of the Fresno High campus resulted in multiple FHS staff and students at a board meeting asking for more and better trained campus safety assistants, a full-time social worker, more cameras and fence improvements on the Weldon side of campus. Clovis has experienced multiple lockdowns and swat team visits after calls



reporting an active shooter. All were false alarms. Responding to the death of a Hoover high school student and other traffic incidents outside schools, some trustees called for additional help from the city to improve traffic safety around the school campuses.

Budget issues will occupy much of the spring. The initial Governor's January budget proposal would increase Local Control Funding Formula, special education, and arts and music revenues to the district. Concern for the future exists over the decline in average daily attendance that the district has experienced since Covid. Given a provision in recent state funding that based district revenue on a three-year rolling average, not counting 2020 and 2021, that decline has not yet impacted district revenue, but is likely next year.

Additional competitive funding grants for facilities will also be available. Our recent interviews with state legislators included a question by LWVC about the inequity of competitive applications for this kind of state facility funding. It favors districts able to raise matching funds and having those locally available so that they can get in their applications early in a first come first serve competition with other districts. The current system disadvantages small poorer districts. A new bond measure is likely on the schedule for FUSD.

Mentoring and scholarships were also on the agenda. The head of the mentoring office reported a big increase in the program that provides one-on-one mentoring, peer mentoring and group mentoring. Volunteers are encouraged to contact the Mentoring Office. Applications are open for students to apply for an increased number of student scholarships provided by the district to graduating seniors.

The district has contracted with a vendor for chefs to be hired and housed at the district's high schools. These will be overseeing meals for their respective school areas. The district will also be hiring its own executive chef to oversee those in the field. They are meant to help plan improved meal planning and meal appeal—a major concern of parents and students in the recent annual local control accountability planning meetings held across the district.

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



The final virtual meeting of Fresno County Behavioral Health Board was held on February 15. The March 15 meeting will be in-person at the Health and Wellness Center at 1925 E. Dakota Avenue, Fresno, at 3:30 pm.

A new Mental Health Services Act Innovations project was introduced. Innovation projects are learning opportunities with projects that have not been tried in the past. This project is the Participatory Action Research with Justice involved youth using an Adverse Childhood Experiences framework. Adverse childhood experiences encompass various forms of physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction experienced in childhood. The harm can be long-lasting, affecting people even in their adulthood.

The focus is to determine what interventions or efforts may be most effective with youth in Fresno County, as identified by youth; more specifically, research will address what



approach, services or intervention the youth believe would have been effective for them. The goal is to use first-hand lived experience and professional research efforts to inform and help develop strategies across sectors to prevent youth involvement in the justice system. This project is now open for public comment for 30 days prior to a Public Hearing on March 15. If approved by the Board, the plan will be forwarded to the state for its approval. We encourage you to attend the meeting to review the new Innovations project, and to offer your comments.

The Independent Living Association (ILA) encourages operators of independent living homes (Room & Boards) to join their program to assure high quality homes. Currently ILA has 13 homes with a total of 93 beds. Many operators are unwilling to join the association because of its restrictive rules. The parent organization, Community Health Improvement Partners, has supported Independent Living Homes in other areas of the state that allow and encourage more support for residents. The Board would like to learn more about this program and to consider supporting independent living homes with more services for residents.

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, MD



What Happens
now in
Madera?

The closure of Madera Community Hospital (MCH) early this year came as a shock to Central California's medical community. Even those familiar with the extreme economic stress faced by our nation's small hospitals were surprised and dismayed. The sudden closure provided Fresno's overburdened hospitals and clinics with no time to design a transition plan.

In the months before the closure, MCH arranged a takeover contract with Trinity Health, a Catholic hospital chain goliath that operates Fresno's Saint Agnes Hospital and its affiliated health services. But two familiar and irremediable problems ended the contract: money and religion.

The money was diverse government support for MCH, all based on the hospital's commitment to provide full services for low-pay or no-pay patients. In spite of this financial support, MCH went bankrupt when federal pandemic relief payments were exhausted. Trinity ultimately did the math that showed inadequate return on their investment, given the impoverished Madera patient population.

Trinity's traditional reluctance to deal with even emergency pregnancy complications for religious reasons was the other death blow to the deal.

Small community hospitals (100 beds or fewer) improve access to healthcare, especially among the disabled and needy. Several rigorous studies have demonstrated improved health outcomes attributable to our country's portfolio of mini-medical centers. Conversely, their closure is

associated with local problems of unemployment and diminished public health and medical research activities, while the closest major hospitals endure prolonged crowding. Both the small and large towns experience sustained lower quality healthcare.

The pandemic throttled US healthcare everywhere, resulting in a durable "healthcare debt." This debt is the cost of addressing health problems long after they might have been minimized or eliminated at much lower cost. Remediation of these debts in healthcare and education will be costly. Larger early investments would result in immediate increases in government fiscal debt, but in long-term major savings.

In California, one of the avenues to stabilizing healthcare in small counties and cities is the formation of healthcare districts. This requires a consortium of local community interest groups and office holders to set up a governing board, propose a set of needed healthcare functions, describe appropriate boundaries, and devise a property tax plan. The Local Agency Formation Commission and the voters residing in the district must approve the plan.

While this seems a daunting task, 79 localities in California are operating healthcare districts. Some representative nearby examples are Delano Exeter, Dinuba,

and Mariposa.

Healthcare districts' activities are diverse and hyperlocal. They may run a hospital (36 districts); primary care, emergency, and common specialty clinics; senior centers and recreation programs; and ambulance and air transport services to major medical centers. A few offer search and rescue squads.

Kaweah Health in Visalia, formerly the languishing Kaweah Delta Hospital, is now a thriving hospital district birthed by leaders in the community. While the transition required some difficult reconfiguring of hospital and clinic services, Visalia's self-imposed taxpayer support provides stable funding for both its 581-bed Kaweah Health Medical Center and for a portfolio of ancillary health services.

Could Madera use Visalia as a model to resurrect MCH and its clinics? Madera has half the population of Visalia and twice the poverty rate. The re-activation of MCH would therefore require major investments by the state, unlikely to happen given California's very tight budget and the multitudes of small California towns with similar healthcare needs.

The remaining but difficult, long-term solution to this dilemma is to dramatically reduce the outrageous cost of American healthcare.

rbertken@comcast.net

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Fresno County omits LWVF notice of revised EIR draft

by Radley Reep



The League attorney in the Friant Ranch case has found a procedural omission which could have put our lawsuit at risk.

In 2011 the Fresno County Board of Supervisors approved the buildout of the Friant Ranch project — a 2,550-unit residential development near the town of Friant. Immediately thereafter, the League and Sierra Club filed suit, citing a lack of compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In 2018, the California Supreme Court ruled in the League’s favor, finding that the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) failed to include an adequate analysis of how increased air pollutants from new homes and thousands of additional vehicle miles traveled between Fresno and Friant would affect human health.



Note: The American Lung Association’s 2022 *State of the Air* report ranked both the city of Fresno and the county of Fresno as having the worst short-term particle air pollution (PM 2.5) in the entire nation. In that same report, Fresno County also received failing grades for year-round particle pollution and ozone formation.

As a result of the 2018 Supreme Court decision, in 2019 the Board of Supervisors decertified the Friant Ranch EIR and voided project approvals. To reapprove the project, the County would need to revise the Draft EIR and the Board of Supervisors would need to recertify the EIR and reauthorize project entitlements.

Wanting to participate in the review of any future revision of the Friant Ranch EIR, in April of 2013, the League formally requested notification by the County should a revised Draft EIR be released for public review. I personally made the same request in 2021.

The requests for notification were not actually necessary but were more a safeguard, as both parties were entitled to notification by the fact that they were ongoing participants in the review of the Friant Ranch EIR in 2011 and thereafter

Nonetheless, in the second week of February, the County of Fresno released a revised Friant Ranch Draft EIR for public review without informing either the League or me. This omission was discovered by Attorney Doug Carstens, who has represented the League in Friant Ranch matters following the

Supreme Court decision. On February 16 while exploring the County’s website, he came across a document publicizing the fact that the County had released a revised Draft EIR a week earlier, on February 10, and that the deadline to submit public comments was March 27. Had he not visited the County website, the comment period would have closed without the League knowing that the revised Draft EIR was available for public review, and twelve years of League work would have been put at risk or brought to an end.

In an effort to recover days now lost to review the Draft EIR due to the County’s failure to provide proper notice, the League and Sierra Club will ask the County to extend the comment period beyond March 27.

League members are encouraged to review and submit comments on the revised Draft EIR. I am available to assist those who have trouble locating the Draft EIR on the County’s website.

radleyreep@netzero.com



FRESNO MASTER CHORALE

Sunday, April 23, 2:30 pm.

Shaghoian Auditorium

The program features works by women composers

Our Centennial exhibit will be on view in the lobby.

Now's your chance to see "100 Notable Women" again!

For tickets go to www.fresnocommunitychorus.org

It's time for the State League Convention May 19-21

Hyatt Regency Downtown, San Francisco

Your League is planning to send representatives to the State Convention in San Francisco. We are entitled to four voting reps according to our membership. Usually one or more board members attend but we also encourage other members to experience this energizing and fun event.

Full registration is \$415, which includes daily continental breakfast. Other meals are not included. Hotel is \$229-\$239 per night.

**REGISTRATION IS OPEN NOW AT
LWVC@WORDPRESS.COM**



Yes, the convention is expensive but we will subsidize your costs. The amount will depend on how many members will attend.

If you are interested, please contact

kaybertken752@gmail.com or

farberfrannola@gmail.com

Behavioral Health *(continued from page 4)*

- ◆ The Board approved the following 2023 Recommendations to the Board of Supervisors:
- ◆ Support recruitment and retention of behavioral health professionals, including fiscal incentives and technological flexibility
- ◆ Expand permanent supportive housing inventory with less restrictive criteria for individuals with

behavioral health disorders at all levels of need, regardless of current housing status

- ◆ Educate and disseminate information to the community about behavioral health services and programs that are available, along with a navigation system for accessing those services
- ◆ Establish inpatient substance use disorder treatment programs for individuals with severe mental illness

evansalca@comcast.net

Climate Change

by Ruth Afifi



Our climate action committee has learned that there have been electric school buses in Fresno County since 2019. That year, Central Unified in Fresno had two, and the Fowler school district, using a combination of state funds and grants, obtained one bus which cost \$400,000 and could go 120 miles on a



(the side of the bus says "Zero Emissions on a single charge")

single charge. However, electric school buses may not be practical for some of Fresno County's eleven rural school districts with very long bus routes; for them, buses running on compressed natural gas offer a low-emission alternative to diesel. In April 2022, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced a \$30 million program to subsidize electric school buses. Also in 2022, the EPA's Clean School Bus Program awarded \$1 billion to 389 school districts nationwide to purchase 2400 electric school buses. Coalinga-Huron Unified in Fresno County received \$5 million from the program, which is providing \$5 billion over five years to replace diesel school buses with zero- or low-emission buses. Funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 support the program, and the EPA website explains who can apply for a grant for the coming year.

Currently, through the School Bus Replacement Program of the California Energy Commission, \$94 million is available to school districts for clean buses, with priority given to grant applicants from disadvantaged, low-income communities. In 2018 the program awarded nearly \$70 million for electric buses to replace more than 200 diesel school buses, eliminating their emissions of nitrogen oxides and fine particulate matter (PM2.5).

Unlike diesel buses, electric school buses are pollution free and do not affect the health of children sitting in them. As supporters say: "Having a zero-emissions school bus is not only good for the community but think about the kids who are riding the bus."

Ruth37@gmail.com

Water News

by Diane Merrill



California is faced with rapidly changing climatic conditions as evidenced by the worst drought in a millennium followed by extreme flooding in some areas of California, and a huge snowpack in the mountains.

A big question is how California as a whole, and our local water managers, will avoid destructive flooding while capturing and storing as much water as possible in wet years for use in dry years. In Fresno and other areas of the state that depend on groundwater, there is a major emphasis on replenishing overdrafted groundwater aquifers during wet years.

As of February 1, both the Kings River and San Joaquin River snow packs were close to 250 percent of normal for this time of year. As storms continue, and to avoid flooding as the snowpack melts, water has to be released from both the Pine Flat Lake and Millerton Lake.

In wet years, during periods between storms, water is moved out of urban stormwater basins to rural areas to leave room for stormwater from the next storm. As part of this effort Fresno Irrigation District has been offering water free of charge to farmers on a voluntary basis to flood their fields to recharge groundwater.

In the Fresno and Clovis area, the Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District has constructed more than 150 stormwater retention basins to prevent local flooding, capture stormwater and recharge aquifers. In recent years, the Irrigation District has built, or is in the process of building, a number of new groundwater recharge basins. Some of these basins are located near disadvantaged communities to replenish groundwater and improve water quality.

Education *(continued from page 4)*

Complaints about late bus arrivals have led to the district creating a bus routing committee that will review the district bus routes each month. The district has 63 different regular school bus routes plus 124 special education routes it coordinates with a contracted bus service provider.

kaybertken752@gmail.com

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Men and Women age 16 and above Making Democracy Work

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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.

Yearly Dues Individual - \$70 ~ Family - \$100 (2 members, same address) ~ Student - Subsidized

**Please send your check payable to the League of Women Voters, Fresno, with registration form (below),
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