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The

FRESNO

VOTER

Our 80th Year!



Monday, May 10
Regular Board Meeting
4:00 p.m. ZOOM

Thursday, May 20
Members Meeting
Homelessness
Noon on ZOOM

Members & Guests
always welcome to
League meetings
and events

HAPPY
Mother's
DAY



It Can Happen to Anyone . . .

Causes of Homelessness

Discussed by a Distinguished Panel

Amber Crowell, Assistant Professor
Sociology, Fresno State

Nicole Linder, Executive Director
Majaree Mason Center

Dawan Utecht, Executive Director
Fresno County Department
Of Behavioral Health



Fresno has the highest percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness in California. Life disruption has many causes, including job loss, eviction, the pandemic, mental health issues and poverty.

League members selected this topic as a priority for the year.

Thursday, May 20 at Noon

A link was sent to you on April 25



President's Message



Once I received my first dose of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine I resumed reading almost every travel-related brochure and email I receive. My mind became a swirl of cheap prices for air travel and opportunities for vacation all over the world. But, while still cautious about making visits to local grocery and home improvement stores, I'm alternately emboldened, then worried, about travelling. I'm wondering how our ventures out of the house may be changed permanently after this pandemic year.

There are some gatherings that are easier to attend when they are held online. Any sort of get-together with one or just a few people works well via Zoom or Skype, surely better than talking on the phone. Board meetings work well, too, though I do miss catching up with everyone before and after the meetings. Events with speakers and other public meetings suffer in online formats. We lose networking opportunities and broad, multi-participant conversations when we gather virtually. And it's difficult to introduce yourself to those you don't know, online. (Will you recognize them in person next time you see them?)

This summer I expect our League to transition to some in-person events. We have a collection of centennial events we were not able to hold once the pandemic hit. They are interesting and will be worth the effort to see. We have a number of new members we'd certainly like to meet in person. And, we have a lot of important issues facing our community that we are anxious to get working on.

We've scheduled almost monthly meetings with guest presenters since last July. And, we've begun to phone and email to remind you to join us at those meetings. The League's mission is to encourage an informed electorate and we do that by providing opportunities to learn about issues of concern to our community. We're happy to educate anyone, member or not, at our gatherings. Our goal is that you will be an engaged, active participant in our world.

One way to understand how the League works is to tune into this year's LWV California state convention, June 7-13, 2021. This online get-together doesn't have the networking and social opportunities of previous conventions, but for only \$25 any member can participate in all the workshops and caucuses, and listen to the plenary sessions. Schedules and speakers will be announced soon.

I hope you'll join us, in person or online, as the LWV Fresno begins its 81st year.

Marianne

WELCOME to TWO NEW DIRECTORS

Maureen Hayes is retired from San Joaquin College of Law where she worked as assistant to the CFO. As a retiree, she is the treasurer of a local chapter of San Joaquin Sisters in Crime, which is a women writers and readers group, in which she is a reader.



For the past three years she and her husband, John, have been volunteers for AARP, completing income taxes for an over 50 and lower income clientele.

Janice Maroot

Jan enjoyed 25 years with the Department of Defense, first as a guidance counselor at the Defense Language Institute and Fort Ord in Monterey. She retired from her last job at the Pentagon as a Program Analyst. She also worked as an education specialist for the Department's Dependent Schools.



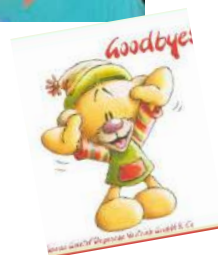
Jan graduated from UC Berkeley and holds a masters in Guidance and Counseling from Chapman University.

And a fond farewell to two directors who are leaving the League Board, with thanks for their dedication.

Liz Shields, Vice President for Voter Services



Marie Slater, Secretary



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.

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

Mailing address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 80, No. 5 Editor: Francine M. Farber

In the news...

First Notorious RBG Scholarship Winner Named

Beginning her fourth and final year as a law student at San Joaquin College of Law, Amreet Badesha was recently named by the schools scholarship committee as the first winner of the \$1,000 Notorious RBG scholarship sponsored by Francine and Murray Farber in coordination with contributions from LWVF members,

A native of Palm Desert, growing up she helped her immigrant family through various legal problems and other obstacles they faced as small business owners. Often she put aside her school books to assist them and realized the impact that the lack of education, fear and

language barriers have on the capacity to seek legal assistance. She came to law school to help people just like her parents.

Currently Amreet works as a law clerk at Mark A. Broughton P.C.

She is interested in criminal, immigration and family law. She speaks four languages and also loves to cook. In fact, looking far ahead, when she retires she hopes to own a food truck to travel the country and share her love for food.



Amreet Badesha

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE NOTORIOUS RBG SCHOLARSHIPS, PLEASE SEND YOUR CHECK MADE OUT TO LWVF RBG FUND AND WE WILL FORWARD IT TO THE SAN JOAQUIN COLLEGE OF LAW.

A scholarship will be awarded annually as long as funds exist.

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In the news . . .

Three to Speak on Causes of Homelessness, May 20 at Noon on ZOOM



Amber Crowell

Amber Crowell is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Fresno State. She holds PhD and M.S. in Sociology and a B.A. in Sociology with a minor in Mathematics, all from Texas A&M University. Her work focuses on White-Latino segregation particularly. Dr. Crowell studies residential segregation, racial and ethnic inequality, social demography, and quantitative methodology.

Nicole Linder is the Executive Director of the Marjaree Mason Center. She is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the agency, including the administration of programs and activities, and participating in domestic violence legislative advocacy efforts to support the agency's mission. She worked in fund development for Fresno Pacific University and has a B.A. in Mass Communications and Journalism from Fresno State.



Nicole Linder



Dawan Utecht

Dawan Utecht is the Fresno County Director of Behavioral Health and the Public Guardian. Previously she served as the CEO of the Community Behavioral Health Center, a 61-bed adult acute inpatient psychiatric facility in Fresno. She is involved with the Fresno County Health Improvement Partnership, Pre-Term Birth Initiative, Children's Movement and Cradle to Career Initiative. She has a B.A. in Kinesiology from UCLA and an M.S. in physical therapy from Columbia University.



Local education issues this month mirrored much of what is happening broadly in the country right now—voices raised around Covid restrictions, identity claims, and broadening inclusion.

Fresno Unified has just returned its students to school on a hybrid schedule—two days a week in school (for those opting to return) and two days of remote learning. Parents are expressing frustration with remote learning



and their desire to have their children back in school full time. They largely blame the Fresno teacher's union, though the

State and health department advisories still advise phased reopening plans plus extensive mitigation measures. Interestingly, there is a current drive by Clovis Unified teachers to unionize, prompted in part by their alleged exclusion from decision-making on school re-opening.

Schools reopening differently

Other area districts are only slightly varied in their reopening responses. Clovis Unified just returned to full day, four days a week instruction after adopting a hybrid model since last fall. Central Unified has just implemented hybrid schedules for elementary students only, so Fresno Unified is certainly not unique in its approach. Schools and cities all over the country and abroad are struggling to balance safety with the desired return to normalcy.

Controversial Warrior mascot

Another loud voice at FUSD board meetings has been alumni of Fresno High school asking the Board to rescind its recent determination to change the Warrior mascot image at Fresno High school. The number of

alumni who are signing petitions and speaking out at board meetings, is striking. However, current FHS students support a change.

At the first in-person board meeting since last spring, a presentation was made by students at CART (a half day high school program supported by FUSD and Clovis Unified) of their project in their Law and Justice Lab. That lab course has participated in the civic engagement program developed through the Civic Education Partnership that the League has participated in since its beginning. Their project developed an LGBTQ unit to be included in the high school sex education curriculum. Two very nervous young women presented their plan to the board and delivered a pamphlet they had developed in response to their feelings of ignorance about their own sexuality. It was a remarkable presentation and positively received by the Trustees.

Early education policy

Two new avenues of work with other leagues and the state league have emerged. Our Education Committee has been invited to participate with leagues in northern and southern California in an advocacy group to influence state



policy around early education. Governor Newsom's initial preschool budget proposals were re-prioritized because of Covid. Some of the new federal dollars coming into the state might well be allocated to preschool and daycare programs.

Our charter position draws attention

The LWVF study of charter schools and our proposed position at the 2019 LWVC Convention has been resurrected in the form of a state committee that is reviewing our position for possible reintroduction at this year's convention. I have been meeting with that committee and we are about to submit the position with minor changes to the LWVC Board for consideration.

kayb@csufresno.edu

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



In 2001 Laura Wilcox was working in a public mental health clinic in Nevada County, California, when she and two others were shot to death by a man with a delusional disorder who had resisted mental health treatment and his family's attempts to have him hospitalized. Following her death, Laura's parents advocated for Assembly Bill 1421, signed into law in 2002, which allows for Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT), often referred to as Laura's Law.

To qualify for AOT an individual must have a serious mental illness plus a recent history of psychiatric hospitalizations, jail incarcerations, or acts, threats, or attempts of serious violent behavior towards self or others, **and** also must refuse mental health treatment.

Referrals by family, friends, or treatment providers go directly to AOT service providers and do not involve law enforcement, unlike many crisis calls. Voluntary mental health treatment is offered to the individual, but if services are refused, court proceedings occur, where a judge may require psychiatric treatment in the community. If yet again the individual refuses treatment services, the judge may order hospital inpatient confinement.

As helpful as this law appears, it was left to each county whether to opt in and provide AOT. Many counties throughout California have implemented AOT and report successful results. **Fresno County has not.** However, Assembly Bill 1976, passed in 2020, requires that counties either provide AOT programs or opt out. The county Board of Supervisors must approve if a department of behavioral health chooses to opt out.

Fresno County Behavioral Health Board has recommended to the Department of Behavioral Health and to the Board of Supervisors that rather than opt out, they should approve a program to provide Assisted Outpatient Treatment. This would be a valuable tool to serve individuals who are seriously mentally ill, refuse treatment, and do not respond to existing services.

You, too, may encourage our Board of Supervisors to support Assisted Outpatient Treatment.

evansalca@comcast.net

Climate Change

by Lenore Yousef



Fresno's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Plan is being updated and a draft is available for public comment until May 10. Fresno City Planning Manager Sophia Pagoulatos provided a summary of the proposed update.

The Plan includes the updated GHG targets adopted at the state level in 2016, which set a statewide goal of reducing GHG emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. GHG reduction measures are needed at all levels of government to achieve these goals. State measures include regulations for vehicle emissions, building efficiency, and renewable energy generation. Regional measures include transportation planning through the Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy. Local measures include linking transportation and land use, transportation demand strategies, energy and water conservation, waste diversion/recycling, existing uses, and municipal uses.

Since the majority of Fresno's GHGs are from transportation, local measures to reduce transportation-related GHGs merit focus. The City's strategy for reducing these GHGs is contained in its General Plan, which calls for transit-oriented development around its highest performing transit corridors: Blackstone Avenue and Ventura/Kings Canyon Road. These corridors have been zoned for mixed use development, placing retail and housing in easy proximity to public transit, thus making transit, walking and bicycling a real option for residents.

But it takes more than zoning to make this happen. It takes the willingness of property owners, the acceptance of adjacent neighborhoods, and lots of creative financing of new infrastructure. Planning projects related to these corridors are The Southern Blackstone Smart Mobility Strategy (in the implementation phase) The Better Blackstone Design Challenge, and the Kings Canyon Transit Oriented Development Plan, which will kick off soon.

By supporting the transformation of these corridors, single occupant vehicle trips will be reduced and the City will be closer to achieving its GHG reduction goals. **For more information, contact Pagoulatos at Sophia.pagoulatos@fresno.gov**

lenorey@csufresno.edu

County rescinds Friant approval

by Radley Reep

After a decade of litigation brought by the Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter and our League, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors has rescinded its 2011 approval of the Friant Ranch project, a 2,500-unit residential development near the community of Friant.

Court orders new Environmental Impact Review

The Board action was the result of a court order directing the County to (1) vacate its decision to approve the project, (2) void its certification of the associated EIR and (3) not reconsider approving the project until the EIR has been revised and recirculated in accordance with the 2018 opinion by the California Supreme Court, which stated in part that the EIR must include a discussion that reasonably informs the public and the Board of Supervisors of the degree to which the project's anticipated air emissions could adversely affect human health.

The Board action also rescinded its approval of a use permit for the construction of the project's wastewater treatment facility.

At the hearing, Dennis Bacopulos, Operating Manager for Friant Ranch L.P., told Board members that his company was *“committed to working to fulfil and comply with the court request and to come back, working with County staff, with a revised air quality section to the EIR in this year.”*

The low point of the hearing was a pronouncement by Board Chairman Steven Brandau that project re-approval was a shoo-in, irrespective of what comes out of the revision and recirculation of the EIR.

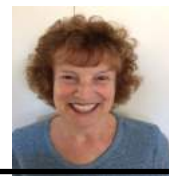
Regardless, we're committed, Brandau says

Said Brandau, “I've been familiar with this project for many years, and it's been painful to watch a wonderful project being completely, you know, faced with the kind of obstacles that we've seen, and sometimes when you see those kind of obstacles, staff has a tendency to even wonder, ‘Is this project ever going to happen?’ The answer is ‘yes.’ The project is going to happen....Like Dennis mentioned, this is one more hurdle. I do agree with you, Dennis, that language in our own agenda item staff report is a little less than I wanted because it is [reads] ‘possible reissuance of project approvals,’ when in reality, the developers have already signed an applicant agreement, right? So, it's still going to continue. So my message to everyone paying attention, and including our own staff, is... we're committed to this project.”

radleyreep@netzero.com

Water News

by Diane Merrill



A study exploring the potential for energy and water savings from installing a modular system of solar panels over 4,000 miles of California's exposed water canals was published recently in the journal Nature Sustainability. Researchers from UC Merced and UC Santa Cruz compared the canal system to ground-mounted solar systems. This study is an important one as California's canal system is the largest in the world.

The study was funded by NRG Energy and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Institute of Food and Agriculture. The study shows an annual savings of 63 billion gallons of water, which is comparable to irrigating 50,000 acres of



farmland, or providing water for two million people. Water savings would be especially important in the San Joaquin Valley and other areas that are chronically short on water.

The projected 13 gigawatts of electricity generated by the panels would be significant in helping the state meet its 2030 decarbonization goals.

Solar panels shade canals; the study found a substantial reduction in evaporative water losses, while the evaporation that does occur cools the panels and increases their efficiency in converting sunlight into electricity. The shading provided by the panels also slows the growth of aquatic weeds, a costly maintenance expense for canal operators.

In addition to water and energy benefits, solar canals also have the potential to provide air quality benefits, especially in the Central Valley, by encouraging the retirement of diesel generators and pumps in favor of solar energy.

The study identified significant potential for water, renewable energy, and air quality benefits. While pilot projects in India have confirmed the technical feasibility of several solar panel designs, questions remain about the cost of installing solar panels on a large scale over California's extensive canal system.

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



No genetically modified brain activities were used in the creation of this column. While it might have helped, that technology is not yet available. Many bioethicists (and everyday humans) are pleased that it is not.

However, if you were a victim of Huntington chorea (chorea means involuntary, continuous muscular movement) or an offspring of someone with that terrible genetic disease, you would view editing of your DNA as a magnificent achievement. Uncontrolled movements and progressive brain degeneration might be slowed, halted, or prevented.

During my medical residency I was assigned to minister to several unfortunate people with Huntington chorea and many more with sickle cell anemia. Our remedies were of minimal and transient benefit.

Both sickle cell and Huntington disease are caused by single aberrant genes. It is astonishing that just one letter change in the DNA code can convert one's red blood cells into vessel-clogging obstructions to blood flow. In Huntington chorea, multiple repeats in the coding sequence of one gene cause, by unknown processes, relentless and ultimately fatal motor and cognitive brain degeneration.

The list of single-gene diseases goes on and on. These conditions collectively summon huge costs in direct medical care, support services, and lost opportunity and productivity of the victims and their friends and family. Our society now confronts

the possibility of correcting these gene defects in both victims and their offspring. Why would we not work to perfect this new technology?

Unlike genetic modification used to improve our foods and to induce bacteria to produce biologic medications like insulin, gene editing by CRISPR can remove specific genes and, if needed, replace them with normal or better ones. CRISPR is an anagram for an exact molecular scissor. It can cut out any targeted stretch of DNA that has been synthesized in a lab and equipped with enzymes at both ends like a seamstress with a dress pattern. For the first time ever, two women shared a Nobel Prize (in Chemistry, 2020) for their supreme contributions to the development of CRISPR. Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier were cited for



Jennifer Doudna (l)

Emmanuelle Charpentier (r)

their work in creating “genetic scissors: a tool for rewriting the code of life.”

There is little controversy about the revolutionary opportunities the technology offers in diagnostics and vaccines. But in human genome editing, we are confronting the uncomfortable arena of eugenics. Curing people of devastating genetic diseases is an admirable goal. Getting there will be expensive. While the DNA scientists have consistently argued against government regulation of the

uses of CRISPR, ultimately federal guidance and funding will be necessary to assure equality of access to therapeutic genetic engineering.

The World Health Organization has added its imprimatur to consensus statements that bar editing the genomes of sperm, ova, or zygotes. This durable messing with evolution could permanently eliminate some genetic diseases, but, as the consensus recognizes, could also have everlasting, unanticipated health problems. It could also lead to a privileged, genetic enhancement culture and industry.

A Chinese researcher challenged this ban with an apparently successful edit of germ cells leading to the birth of two girls in 2018 with newly acquired resistance to HIV infection (their parents were both chronically infected). In 2020 he was sentenced to three years in prison. China has laws against germ cell genetic engineering. But his work served as an example of how far the field has advanced.

Meanwhile, in the U.S. several patients with sickle cell disease and related defects in hemoglobin appear to have been cured by CRISPR technology. There are 100,000 people with sickle cell disease in the U.S. and one million worldwide which challenges the scalability of CRISPR therapeutics. The redoubtable Doudna is working on it.

SHIRLEY VALETT

Past president Shirley Valett passed away on April 22. She was 91. Shirley was president from 1989-1991 and was one of our Life members. She lead League studies on health care and education and was the League spokesperson for the right to choose.. Shirley was also president of the Unitarian Church .

Voter Services

by Liz Shields



Eighteen League members have signed on to work on our redistricting project at both the state and local level.

Redistricting is center stage

At its first meeting the group discussed the constitutional basis for redistricting and the method by which the Census Bureau reapportions Congressional seats based on populations shifts between states – it is expected that California may lose a Congressional seat during the current reapportionment. Once the Census Bureau delivers the data to the states each state will determine the boundaries of each representative’s district.

Due to the pandemic and other difficulties the timeline for Congressional Reapportionment and the delivery of population data to the states has been moved back. A Power-Point presentation on redistricting may be found at the Citizens Redistricting Commission (CRC) website/ Commission members are not allowed to discuss or receive information on redistricting outside the commission meetings.

Plans for state redistricting

Sue Goldman, Judi Steele and Janet Baker volunteered to focus on state redistricting and keep us informed about CRC deliberations. Currently CRC members are urging people to send information to them on “communities of interest” either in the form of descriptions of these

communities or by drawing maps using a tool available on the CRC website.

The California Constitution defines a community of interest as a population which shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation. Our group is gathering names and contact information for such communities in Fresno County with the intention of contacting these communities about redistricting.

Local and special districts



At the local level Marianne Kast, Amy Arambula, Jacquie Canfield and Cathy Caples offered to contact local governments, school districts and special districts whose boards are elected by county voters, to ask about their redistricting plans. This information will be available to the public in the form of a spreadsheet highlighting those plans.

No public input for county plans

On April 8 we discovered that the County staff had sent a report to the Board of Supervisors asking them to select a Commission format to conduct redistricting for supervisorial districts at their meeting on April 13

League members were concerned that there had not been any input from the community.

Board chose “ignorable” group

The County staff provided a brief description of three types of commissions: an Advisory Commission, whose recommendation the Board could ignore; a Hybrid Commission, who would supply the Board with two or more maps for the Board’s decision; and an Independent Commission, whose map recommendation would be binding. The Board chose an Advisory Redistricting Commission format with 11 members: two selected from each of the supervisorial districts and one chosen by the County Administrative Officer.

Subsequently the League sent a memo to the Board of Supervisors, the County Administrative Officer and the County Counsel recommending a process and criteria for selecting members of the

Advisory Redistricting Commission based on Election Code requirements. At its meeting on April 27 the Board was to have discussed a resolution outlining the commission’s format and responsibilities

Note: if you have contact information on a “community of interest” that you would like included in the redistricting process please contact Sue Goldman at 121143pvct@att.net

elizs44@yahoo.com

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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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