



The Voter

Kick Off speaker explores the “Wealth Divide”

The San Joaquin County League of Women Voters 2014 Kick Off Fund Raiser at Delicato Winery on September 14 featured Dr. Gene Bigler speaking on “Can Democracy Survive the Wealth Divide?”

Dr. Bigler is a writer and consultant on global affairs, a retired diplomat, and a former professor and Osher Lifelong Learning (OLLI) lecturer. A community activist, he serves on the board of the Puentes Community Farm Project.



Dr. Bigler began by noting that Americans still embrace several myths that create obstacles to dealing with the changes confronting us. We believe that America is a land of opportunity for a wide range of people and that U.S. politicians can come together over important issues. Neither of those beliefs is true any longer.

A Super Elite now dominates, with 400 individuals accounting for 11% of U.S. wealth; a group he called “mega wealthy” represents an even smaller percentage of the population. Dr. Bigler said that we’ve always had an oligarchy in this country, with control in the hands of a small group; but we now have a plutocracy, where that control is in the hands of the wealthy. He quoted Justice Louis Brandeis: “We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.” He noted that the wealthy dominate lobbying.

Dr. Bigler said studies find that the wealthy have less sympathy than the general public for issues like support for a minimum wage and government responsibility for helping with access to jobs. Party and ideology have taken on new kinds of meaning that exacerbate the great size of the wealth divide that we are experiencing.

One illustration of the wealth divide is the ratio of the pay of CEOs to average employees. In the 1950s, the ratio was 20 to 1; in 1980, it was 42 to 1; by 2000, it had risen to 100 to 1; and it has since climbed to 354 to 1. A gap exists as well in universities (the ratio of pay for presidents to pay for professors) and for executives across society. The assumption is that companies, governments, and universities must pay very high salaries to attract good people, an idea that discounts the possibility that executives might be motivated by a challenge rather than by a high salary.

Dr. Bigler said that cleavages are reinforced by phenomena such as gated communities, a symbol of a segregation more pronounced now than it was in the 1960s.

All these conditions create mounting dangers for society, with opportunity restricted for those at the bottom. The Great Recession did not alter this trend; the income gap has accelerated since 2007. Returns on capital, which benefit the wealthy, have remained in a normal range of 4% to 7%, despite a low rate of economic growth that works to the disadvantage of everyone else.

Dr. Bigler said that historically, changes in concentrations of wealth in a society have occurred as a result of progressive policies (such as the Progressive Movement of the early 20th century, which introduced the Income Tax); wars or conflicts; or economic recession or depression.

Citing Robert Reich, Dr. Bigler listed 10 civic actions that can be taken to combat the wealth divide that threatens economic and social stability:

1. Raise the minimum wage to \$15 and index the earned income credit to tie it to economic growth.
2. Unionize more workers; only 7% of workers are unionized today.
3. Invest heavily in education, starting at the age of 3.
4. Increase spending on public infrastructure, which benefits the bottom 50% of society.
5. Raise taxes on the wealthy.
6. Make payroll taxes progressive; exempt the first \$15,000 of income.
7. Increase estate taxes.
8. Constrain Wall Street; restore the Glass Steagall Act, passed in 1933 as the Banking Act, which prohibited commercial banks from participating in the investment banking business.
9. Make sure that all Americans have a stake in capital gains.
10. Reverse Citizens United, the U.S. Supreme Court decision holding that political spending is a form of protected free speech under the First Amendment.

Dr. Bigler's presentation addressed one of the issues identified in LWVSJC's Recommended Program for the 2014-15 year: Money in politics, especially in the wake of the U. S. Supreme Court's Citizens United decision.

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President's Message

Our wonderful board has accomplished a lot since my last letter of July 2014. It happened while I was the president, but our board members and committee chairs are truly amazing, so I can claim very little credit for our accomplishments. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you who worked so hard on a great variety of activities, from hosting our fall kickoff meeting and our excellent candidate forums to quietly representing the League in other venues, reaching out with our Pros and Cons.

It was a busy fall for all of us, and we presented a very large number of candidate forums. We hosted a training for Pros and Cons, and many presentations were made. I continue to be impressed at what an excellent job we all do in maintaining an unbiased balance in our programs. Yes, I have even written a few letters to the editor, for which I owe credit to Diane Park and Colleen Foster, as well as the rest of the board, in allowing me to express our position and helping me make the point and keep a balance.

The new year offers a variety of exciting new programs, and I believe all of us will be learning something new. Please try to join us whenever you are available; I promise you will not be disappointed. I have one sad bit of news to report: Katrina Jaggears is taking a break from our board as she searches for a new job. We will miss her and wish her well in the job hunt.

Please feel free to contact me at my email address (kaschick@berkeley.edu) or my home phone number (209-464-8304) if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours truly,
Kathy Schick

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Program Planning meeting set for January 24

All local League members are encouraged to participate in planning the LWVSJC program for 2015-2016 and providing input on program emphases for the State League, all while enjoying brunch!

This is an enjoyable opportunity to discuss topics of current interest and decide what issues you would like speakers or studies to address during the upcoming League year. The meeting will be held from 9:30 to 12:30 on Saturday morning, January 24. The address is 4273 Boulder Creek Circle, Stockton. RSVP to JaneTyack@mac.com or call Jane at 209-642-5105 to let us know you will join us.

SJ County League supports strengthening Public Library

By Colleen Foster

Our local public library suffered severe cutbacks in the wake of Stockton's bankruptcy. The Library, which was sturdy though never flush, lost half its staff over the last five years with inevitable loss of hours and access to its resources. The LWVSJC Board looked to our League positions to see if we could support the reinvigoration of the Library as Stockton emerges from bankruptcy. We found support for libraries at both the state level and locally. Our local position mirrors the one adopted by LWVC:

LWVSJC Position in brief: Support a public library system as a basic community service with a long-term, assured, stable and adequate funding source. Support access by all persons to public library services as a major source of knowledge and information necessary for informed, active participation in a democratic society.

Using this position as a springboard, President Kathy Schick sent a letter to *The Record* in support of our local libraries. The letter stated, in part:

The League views the Library system as a basic community service which must be funded with a long-term, assured, stable and adequate funding source. Stockton's bankruptcy has disrupted this essential support. But the City is emerging from bankruptcy and plans for a brighter future for the Library must begin now. The Library's newly unveiled Strategic Plan sets the groundwork to focus on achieving robust technology to extend vital information services virtually. But the plan also focused on boots-on-the-ground services for children, from preschool storytimes which prepare kids for success in school and throughout their lives to homework help and books to solidify their reading skills, especially during summer breaks. Adult literacy, employment and entrepreneurial assistance are as crucial to our community's economic success as the efforts of business development groups. Once these services are restored or strengthened, we need adequate hours of service – Bring Back Saturday Hours at Chavez Library! – and a careful, continuous rebuilding of all levels of library staff to provide these services.

The League recognizes the Library as providing an essential service in our democratic society but we also recognize the Library's role in our community's economic success and resident safety. Our public library needs resources provide the vast array of services needed by our residents. As Stockton starts to rebuild, it needs to start with the Library.”

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Local Members Only website

No password is required for LWVSJC members to access our Members Only website. Here you will find reference documents such as our Local Positions, our Bylaws, and our Nonpartisan Policy. Go to <http://lwvnet.org/lwv/ca/sjc-members/index.html> .

Update on California water issues

By Jane Wagner-Tyack

Water Bond - California voters approved Proposition 1, the Water Bond, in November by a wide margin. Attention is now focusing on the \$2.7 billion of bond funding that is continuously appropriated to the nine-member California Water Commission for decisions regarding storage. The CWC is responsible for evaluating public benefits of water storage proposals but must consult with both the Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding ecosystem benefits and with the State Water Resources Control Board regarding water quality benefits.



CWC staff will have a timeline of tasks for the Commission to consider in January. The Commission needs a final draft plan for the Office of Administrative Law to review in the fall of 2015. They will use spring and summer to work with stakeholders, get other input, and get questions answered. The OAL will have until December 2016 to finalize the regulations. After that, the Commission can begin spending the money.

Planning for federal Central Valley Project storage referred to in the Water Bond is well-advanced. The feasibility study for raising Shasta Dam is already being considered in Washington D.C., and a Record of Decision (the formal decision document) could be released in mid-2015. A ROD for Temperance Flat Dam on the upper San Joaquin River could be ready by mid-2016. However, these projects still depend on state funding for public benefits. Planning is also underway for Sites Reservoir north of Sacramento, to be operated as part of the State Water Project.

In addition to surface storage projects listed in the Water Bond, the Water Commission is being asked to consider nonstructural strategies for recharging the state's overdrafted aquifers and for improving retention of water in the upper watersheds.

Regarding other funding approved as part of the 2014 Water Bond, the LWVC Water Committee is interested in learning how money is being spent locally for projects like watershed restoration, conservation, recycling, groundwater recharge, and water quality for disadvantaged communities.

Groundwater - As a result of state legislation passed in mid-2014, a law will take effect in January requiring local agencies to develop plans to sustainably manage overdrafted aquifers. If local agencies do not develop plans by 2020, the new law gives the State Water Resources Control Board authority to restrict groundwater pumping.

Meanwhile, the comment period has ended for environmental documents on the Bureau of Reclamation's plan to lock in ten years of water transfers of 500,000 af or more from willing sellers in the Sacramento Valley to the San Luis and Delta Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA). Some of this water ultimately supplies users in Southern California. Much of the transfer water would come from groundwater substitution, and some Sacramento Valley water managers are worried about the effect of these transfers on north state aquifers and streams.

Water issues update, continued

Federal water legislation - Drought relief legislation introduced by San Joaquin Valley Congressman David Valadao early in 2014 was the subject of a counter proposal by Senator Dianne Feinstein, leading to intense year-end negotiations that did not include Northern California Congressional representatives. In the waning hours of the Congressional session, the House passed a revised version, H.R. 5781, with no expectation that it would be approved by the Senate or signed by the President. Senator Feinstein has said that she will introduce a bill in the next session that will reflect earlier compromises but employ a more open process for presenting and debating the issues. A central concern is that the measure would weaken endangered species protections that have restricted water deliveries in the past, but would not produce more water to address the current drought. Supporters argue that the measure is intended to provide temporary drought relief for suffering San Joaquin Valley communities.

This is federal legislation, so LWVC will not be commenting on it. Interested League members should contact their own Congressional representatives.

Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) - The Department of Water Resources has announced "significant refinements" to the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. Here's a summary:

- There is no change in the number, size, capacity, or route of the twin tunnels or in the number of intakes (three) on the Sacramento River, but the tunnels will operate using gravity flow rather than pumps. This will reduce the construction footprint, and there will be no need for permanent maintenance facilities.
- The absence of pumps means that permanent high voltage power lines will not be necessary in the North Delta.
- Pumps to move water from new tunnel outlets in the South Delta to the state and federal canals will be installed at Clifton Court Forebay, an existing reservoir in the South Delta south of Discovery Bay. The tunnel terminus has been moved to reduce environmental impacts.
- Soil excavated on Staten Island in the North Delta, which is owned by The Nature Conservancy and managed for winter habitat for Greater Sandhill Cranes, will be deposited further south in the Delta.

Matt Weiser, writing in the *Sacramento Bee* on December 19, spoke of changes "aimed at appeasing local residents," who were concerned about the industrial appearance of the pumping facilities and power lines. The Nature Conservancy was concerned about impacts of tunnel muck and power lines on crane habitat. (There will still be power lines during the 10 years of construction, and the proposal is to mitigate that by installing bird diverters.)

Not clear at this point is how the gravity flow system will operate over the 30-mile tunnel route; how moving the tunnel terminus in Clifton Court Forebay will reduce environmental impacts; or how fish screening will be dealt with in the South Delta, where the fish screens are already inadequate.

Still unresolved is how the project will ensure adequate water quantity, quality, and flows for fisheries and the ecosystem of the Delta, Estuary, and Bay.

Education matters

State level study

On the LWVC Convention floor in 2013, delegates approved a study on Public Higher Education. After a period to develop a scope for the study and appoint a Higher Education Study Committee, this state-level study was approved by the LWVC board last year.



LWVC has a position on K-12 education and on the community college system, but the State League has not had a position on public higher education. The Higher Ed Study will focus on the accessibility of quality public higher education, the funding sources and allocations, and student debt and affordability. The purpose of the committee is to research these issues; the study will help local Leagues to arrive collectively at a position that will enable the state and local Leagues to take action.

The study committee will be developing consensus questions, a study guide, a leader's guide, and a consensus response form and will be providing handouts. A Study Kit will be available to local leagues in August 2015, and consensus will be due in April 2016.

Go to <http://lwvc.org/study/education-0> for more information and a link to join the group discussion.

National level education blog

The LWVUS Education Team has introduced a blog to promote the exchange of information on school reform. The team does fact-based studies and encourages posts with reference citations that contribute to a better understanding of different points of view about school choice issues. The blog coordinator is Sue M. Legg, Ph.D. from Florida.

League members and non members alike can subscribe to the blog at <http://lwveducation.com>

Affordable health care update

For well over a decade, the League of Women Voters of California has a has been actively pressing for affordable, quality health care for all, with emphasis on a **single payer** health care system.

According to the LWVC Healthcare Reform Toolkit, "With the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and especially with California working to be in the lead in the implementation of the ACA, the LWVC is working on two efforts simultaneously. We are helping with the community education about the implementation of the ACA in California. At the same time, we recognize that the ACA is not perfect and we must continue to push for continued reform."

Affordable health care, continued

In a February 2013 letter to LWVC Single Payer activists, Helen Hutchinson, now State League President, wrote, "The Affordable Care Act is the law of the land, and provides help for some Californians. Californians must continue to push for continued reform . . . in the form of single payer. The ACA itself allows states to move to single payer systems in 2017. We need to start preparing for that transition now."

Single Payer San Joaquin

A local group, Single Payer San Joaquin, is actively working on education within the community and lobbying with legislators in efforts to move California towards Single Payer legislation. The group meets monthly.

Single Payer San Joaquin
2nd Thursday of every month, 6:30pm
John C. Moriarty Peace and Justice Center
231 Bedford Road, Stockton

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Local Citizen's Climate Lobby formed

By Margo Praus

The League of Women Voters of the U.S. is on record as supporting legislation "that seeks to protect our country from the physical, economic, and public health effects of climate change while also providing pathways to economic prosperity." Starting in January 2015 we can take more action locally, as a chapter of the Citizen's Climate Lobby is forming in our area.

The focus of this group is to educate, spread the word through the media, and lobby our legislators about implementing a Carbon Fee and Dividend (rebate/refund) with a return of all revenues generated to American families. The Citizen's Climate Lobby believes that until carbon use is priced to reflect its actual costs to society (health, environmental, etc.), the use of fossil fuels will continue to be an attractive, cheap source of energy. When businesses see the future of carbon as less profitable, they will have more incentives to shift to alternative energy sources and to plan for more profitable directions.

The proposal is for 100% of revenues to be returned to Americans to protect low and middle income families from the inevitable increased costs for fossil fuel products foreseen during a transition period. This is seen as bipartisan legislation supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

Continued

A special presentation by the Citizen's Climate Lobby will be open to the public.

Fire and Water
February 23, 2015, 7:00pm
Fireside Room of the Central United Methodist Church,
3700 Pacific Avenue, Stockton

Brought by our local Sierra Club group, the Sacramento chapter of the Citizen's Climate Lobby will present their program "Fire and Water" by scientist Dana Nuccitelli, who will discuss and answer questions about the latest scientific research into the possible links between climate change and California's wildfires and drought, and projections of their future changes in a warming world. The event will also include discussion of a proposed free market, bipartisan solution supported by many liberals and conservatives alike.

For more information on the "Fee and Dividend of Carbon," see www.citizensclimatelobby.org
For more information on our local chapter and meetings, please contact Margo Praus
margopraus@msn.com

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THE CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

A big thank you to those who have contributed to date to our San Joaquin League **CIRCLE OF SUPPORT**. This is a donor fund designed to help our county League expand our scope of services and engage the community in timely issues of public policy.

It is astounding, but only \$6.00 of our \$60.00 in dues stays here, locally. The rest is divided between the state and national levels of the League of Women Voters. So every donation to the **CIRCLE OF SUPPORT** helps us to defray costs.

Below is a list of our generous donors. This year, we also included a place for donations to be made in honor of or in memory of others. Donations were made in memory of Sylvia Kothe, Al Matteucci, Cyndi Outlaw, Steve Stocking, Catherine M. Welsh, and to the Sylvia Kothe Scholarship Fund.

Lauren and Denny AhTye
Bev Blum
Judith Buethe
Donna Brown
Dr. Edward Caul
Tola Eley
Colleen Foster
Christeen Ferre
Craig and Denise Holmes
Gladys Ikeda
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Dr. Kathy Schick
Mary Lois and Syd Thompson
Jane and Steve Tyack
Barbara Walker
Walt and Cate White



Featured League Member

*Long-time San Joaquin County
League Member and Benefactor
Eleanor Shimeall*

By Diane Park

One of our bright LWVSJC stars is Eleanor Shimeall. In addition to serving on the San Joaquin County League Board, Eleanor served two terms on the California State League Board as Water Director. She was closely involved in development of the LWVC water positions that the State League still uses to evaluate water issues statewide. She chaired a two-year statewide water study resulting in frequent testimony to the state legislature.

Eleanor's father was a Kansas state senator, perhaps piquing her early interest in public policy.

Eleanor served for 11 years on the San Joaquin County Water Advisory Committee, which advises the county Board of Supervisors on water issues, and she served on the Stockton Water Crisis Committee.

In retirement, Eleanor and her husband Clark relocated to Borrego Springs. Those who know Eleanor will not be surprised to learn that she is still very active in civic affairs and maintains her LWVSJC membership, albeit long distance. The Shimealls built the first straw bale home in San Diego County, and their home is solar-powered. Eleanor was one of the first to see the benefits of solar ovens and has published several cookbooks on the subject.

In Borrego Springs, Eleanor was elected to the Borrego Water District in 2006, where she continues to be involved in water matters.

The Shimealls – now married 70 years! – share a love for the desert and are long-time volunteers at the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

Eleanor would love to hear from you. Her address is in the League Membership Directory.

Calendar

<p>Saturday, January 24 9:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Program Planning Meeting 4273 Boulder Creek Circle, Stockton</p>
<p>Sunday, February 15 5:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Susan B. Anthony Award Dinner Stockton Golf and Country Club</p>
<p>Saturday, February 21 Time TBA</p>	<p>“Why Fracking Matters” Location TBA</p>
<p>Saturday, March 21 Time TBA</p>	<p>“Groundwater in San Joaquin County: Challenges to Managing a Vital and Threatened Resource” Location TBA</p>
<p>Friday-Sunday May 15-17</p>	<p>LWVC Convention 2015 “Let the Sun Shine In” San Diego</p>
<p>Wednesday, May 27 Time TBA</p>	<p>LWVSJC Annual Meeting Stockton Hilton</p>

**LWVSJC
Board of Directors
for 2014-2015**

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Could be you! You know
who you are, person with
newsletter experience.
Very few and flexible
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latitude. Contact
JaneTyack@mac.com

The LWVSJC Board meets on the second Thursday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the home of President Kathy Schick, 940 N. Argonaut Street, Stockton. Meetings are potluck. LWVSJC members are welcome.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.