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CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION SUMMIT HELD IN FRESNO

By Francine Farber

If you left the Constitutional Convention Summit thinking, "Wow, this is really complicated," you probably would have been in the majority. The non-partisan Summit was held on June 26 at the Cornerstone Convention Center and was sponsored by Fresno County Supervisor Henry Perea, Fresno City Council member Henry T. Perea, the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce and the Bay Area Council. It was attended by about 100 participants including eight LWVF members.

The Summit was called to discuss issues surrounding a constitutional convention. Participants agreed at the outset of the discussion that California's state government is dysfunctional. What was not so easy to agree on was whether the idea of a constitutional convention is workable and necessary to produce needed changes in our system of governance.

Newspaper columnist Dan Walters set the tone by pointing out that the government designed by founding fathers of the United States worked for the nation when it was initiated because society was more homogeneous then. The economy was based on agriculture and only land-holding white men could vote, so it wasn't so difficult to achieve consensus on issues. But California today is not a simple place; it is a highly complex society with myriad stakeholders on every issue with nobody in charge of decision-making, according to Walters. There are so



Supervisor Perea and Summit Participants

many checks and balances that nothing gets done. He called for changes in the system of governance so as to increase the authority of elected officials at the same time it holds them accountable.

Fresno Bee columnist Bill McEwen moderated the first panel discussion which dealt with needs of the state. Panelist Joe Altschule, an attorney and political columnist from Visalia, is looking forward to the changes brought about by redistricting. Right now we elect people who are good at raising money, he said, but we need to elect "real people" to deal with current issues.

Tom Fife, another panelist from Visalia, spoke about the pitfalls of opening up a constitutional convention, pointing that that we don't know what we will get and who will control it.

Sarah Reyes, now a program officer with the California Endowment but previously an

Continued on page 3

Calendar

Tuesday, August 4 :

Annual Board Retreat

9 a.m.—2 p.m.

707 West Fairmont Ave.

Fresno, All invited

Wednesday, August 19 :

Regular Board Meeting

5 p.m., League Office

Tuesday, August 25:

Ice Cream Social

See flyer for time and place

Wednesday, August 26:

Women's Equality Day

Thursday, September 24

Lunch & Learn

Panel Discussion on

Special District Governance

See flyer inside for more info

President's Message

Last month we printed the results of the Public Documents Audit conducted by a committee from LWVF in commemoration of Freedom of Information Day. You may remember that the Fresno County police departments from which we requested some documents were reasonably compliant. But most of the County water districts we contacted either did not understand their legal obligation to supply the documents or ignored it. The committee recommended that the special districts receive training in complying with laws such as the Public Records Act (PRA) and the Brown Act.



As a result we met with executive director Rick Ballantyne of the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to explore the districts' responsibilities to the public. He was not surprised that some of the districts had ignored our requests for documents. Although LAFCO regulates the scope and size of the 123 special districts in our county, it has no other regulatory powers over them. Every five years LAFCO is required to perform a Municipal Services Review for each district but can only make recommendations for improvement, without any enforcement authority. Mr. Ballantyne acknowledged that LAFCO might provide compliance training if he had a formal request to do it, although the training would not be mandatory.

We also met with Attorney Ken Price, who represents LAFCO as well as some special districts. He readily agreed with our assessment of the need for training and together we made two plans. First, Attorney Price, Mr. Ballantyne and a water district official will form a panel to provide a Lunch & Learn opportunity for League members and the public so as to shed light on how the special districts operate. This is planned for September 24 at noon at the League office. (See flyer)

Second, Attorney Price invited LWVF to co-sponsor with LAFCO a workshop on Ethics Training for County special districts. Attorney Price is an experienced presenter on this topic, which includes the Public Records Act and Brown Act as well as financial regulations. This will provide a wonderful follow-up to our Public Documents Audit and result in much-needed education in Fresno County. We hope it serves as a model for other counties throughout the state.

Francine

Treasurer's Report

By Jane Worsley

Thank you to **Jackie Canfield** for making a donation to the LWVF Education Fund. If you would like to make a tax deductible donation to our League, make a check out to LWVF Education Fund and mail it to our local office. All donations are always appreciated.

NATURAL RESOURCES

By Mary Savala

The Measure C Citizen Oversight Committee met in June to hear the Status of Measure C Implementation Plans, to review the Measure C Extension Operating Budget for the fiscal year 2009-2010 and to review the allocation 2009-2010 of available funds through Measure C for local transportation purposes. The monies are to be spent for bike and pedestrian trail programs, ADA requirements, street maintenance and rehabilitation, and some flexible funding for the 15 cities and the County of Fresno.

The good news is that the School Bus Replacement program has finalized a list of 652 public and private school buses in the County that are slated to be replaced over the life of the program. Some of these buses have been operating for almost 40 years. The program, working with the air district bus replacement program, has identified approximately 15 buses for immediate replacement using existing Measure C fund balances as well as 2009-2010 Measure C Extension revenues. School buses are an expensive item, costing between \$140,000 for diesel buses and \$180,000 for buses running on cog. Once these pre-1980 buses are replaced, the program will balance agencies which are eligible to receive replacement funds so no one agency is favored over the others. All these buses will have seat belts and be air-conditioned.



The carpool program funded by the Measure C transportation sales tax kicked off July 1. Fresno County car poolers are encouraged to participate by registering at www.valleyrides.com. Participants must travel at least twice a week with at least one other person and complete a carpool log at the website every week. Qualifying participants are eligible for a monthly \$1,000 cash prize and will be included in annual grand prize drawings that included a new car. Sponsoring business partners will get major recognition on TV and radio as well as the benefits of contributing to cleaning Fresno County air.

A major discussion was held about the Measure C requirement for all jurisdictions to have a current Master Plan for Trail Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities that promotes connectivity within all of Fresno County and its urban area by Jan. 1, 2012. The question remains of just how old a plan

to require an update. Another concern is the lack of planning funding for the smallest cities like Orange Cove and Parlier.

There are vacancies on the Measure C Citizen Oversight Committee for representatives from an Incorporated City outside the Fresno-Clovis Metropolitan Area, from the Fresno-Clovis Metropolitan Area, and from the Unincorporated Rural Area East of State Route 99. Call Brenda Lauchner with the Fresno County Council of Governments at 233-4148 if you are interested in applying or have questions.

Constitutional Convention, continued from page one

Assembly Member for the state, addressed some of the issues that a Convention might study for revision. In order to raise taxes, a 2/3 majority is needed, while to lower them, only a simple majority is required. While there seemed to be some sentiment in the room to change these rules, Reyes cautioned against tinkering with them because of the importance of the issue. Speaking about term limits, she indicated that this law causes elected officials to be more worried about where they might go next, rather than where they are today.

Former Fresno Mayor Jim Patterson indicated that the so-called gridlock we now have in state government is not necessarily a bad thing. It results from making sure people are free to make choices and he doesn't see the need for a constitutional convention. He agreed with Altschule that re-districting may make a significant difference in how government runs.

The next panel was led by League Director Terri Figgs. It featured Chamber of Commerce CEO Al Smith and San Joaquin Valley Black Chamber of Commerce CEO Tate Hill. Hill expressed concern about the possibility of a "runaway" convention due to hot button issues like gay marriage and illegal immigration. Smith thought the convention might be a "noble idea" but wondered how we would get the appropriate 400 people together in one room to work on it.

The final panel of the morning dealt with priorities for reform. The budget process was the focus of most recommendations, with County Superintendent Larry Powell asking for greater flexibility in spending money. He gave the example of having \$27 million for after school programs but no money for other important programs, and the inability to transfer funds from one program to another.

Other Constitutional Convention Summits have been held throughout the state and more are planned. Participants completed a polling exercise at the end of the Fresno Summit and the results will be compiled and communicated to the public.

*You're Invited
to the
Annual
Ice Cream Social*



GUEST SPEAKER

FRESNO MAYOR

ASHLEY SWEARENGIN

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 7 P.M.

In the lovely gardens of Clara and Dr. Juan Touya
2351 West Warner Avenue, Fresno



League of Women Voters of
Fresno

Questions?

Call Georgia, 439-5410

LUNCH

And

LEARN

**There are 123 special
districts in Fresno County.**

**How are they governed?
Who Holds Them Accountable?**

***** Panel Discussion *****

Kenneth J. Price, Esq.

Attorney for LAFCO

Rick Ballantyne

Executive Director, LAFCO

Bob Van Wyk

General Manager, Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District

Thursday, September 24

Noon

League Meeting Room at Stone Soup

YOU bring your lunch

We will supply the snacks and beverage.

Questions? Call Georgia at 439-5410

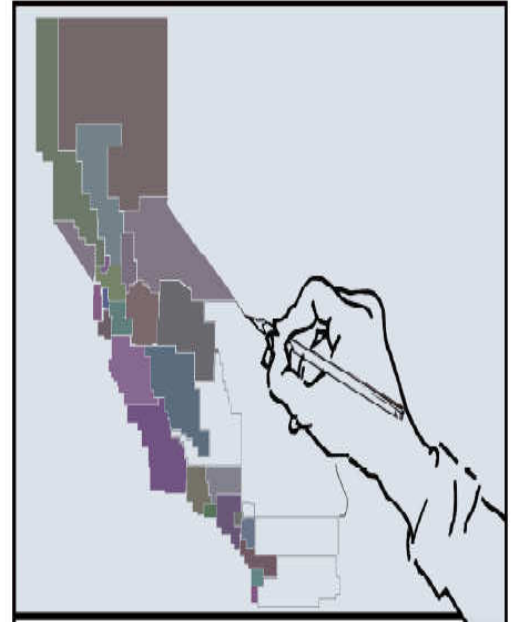
The following is from the July issue of the League of Women Voters of California July newsletter. Their website contains a calendar of the step by step process for redistricting, along with much more material on the subject.

Redistricting : What's Going On in There?

When Can I Apply?

People often ask us what is being done about the independent re-district commission called for by Proposition 11 of November 2008. Right now the regulations for the process of selecting the Applicant Review Panel and the Commission itself are being drafted. The application period the Commission will open January 1, 2010. The best way for you to keep current on what's going on and when the application form will be up on the Web is to sign up for news bulletins from the State Auditor. Here's what to do.

Email the State Auditor and tell them you want to be put on the list of Interested Persons for notice of the Prop. 11 redistricting implementation process. You need to give them your name, the email address at which you want to receive news, your mailing address, and your phone number. Within a couple of days you should get an acknowledgement that they received your email. And keep an eye on the LWVC Web site for news of the Leagues work on this important reform.



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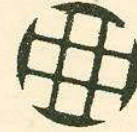
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League members who wish to be sponsors or to secure sponsorships for us, may contact Francine Farber at 226-5455

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to our community



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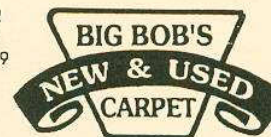
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Democracy is not a spectator sport

JOIN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS!

Men and Women of Voting Age Making Democracy Work

MISSION: The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens and influences public policy through voter education and advocacy on issues .

NONPARTISANSHIP: The League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

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.

TO PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS: For more information, please leave your name and phone number on the League message phone, 226-8683, or contact our **Membership Chair, Dolores O’Neal, at 435-1185**. Prospective members receive one issue of *The Fresno Voter* free.

JOIN US! Members receive newsletters from national, state and local Leagues, may access local, state and national League websites and list-serves, and may participate in League studies of issues.

Yearly Dues Individual - \$60 ~ Family - \$90 (2 members, same address) ~ Student - \$30

Please send your check payable to the League of Women Voters, Fresno, with registration form (below),
 to: LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Suite 4, Fresno, CA 93710.

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