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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



Wednesday, May 3

Lunch & Learn
Charter Schools



Monday, May 15

Regular Board Meeting
League Office, 5 p.m.

Monday, June 19

Regular Board Meeting
League Office, 5 p.m.

Monday, July 10 (date change)

Regular Board Meeting
League Office, 5 p.m.

Members and their guests are invited to all League meetings and events. Please join us at a regular board meeting to listen and participate.



Education: A Program Planning Priority

Betsy DeVos has been appointed as the U.S. Secretary of Education. She is an advocate for vouchers and charter schools. Your Education Committee decided to educate itself, our members and the public on what is happening locally with charter schools and their legal background.

CHARTER SCHOOL LUNCH AND LEARN

WEDNESDAY, May 3 * Noon lunch, 12:30 speaker

Valley Public Television Studio * 1544 Van Ness Ave., Fresno

Speaker: Debra Odom

Director, Charter Schools Office, Fresno Unified

Free (and easy) parking across the street in the old Met Museum (CMAC) parking lot. No stairs at the studio. Bring your lunch—beverage and snacks will be provided.

Please bring a friend: the public is invited!

Need more information? Call Patty at 472-3018

Committee members: Kay Bertken, Chair; Janet Ryan, Amy Schmidt, Nyla Zender, Francine Farber, Sue Goldman, Lenore Yousef, Jacquie Canfield

MANY THANKS TO PHIL MEYER AND ELIZABETH LAVAL AT PBS FOR THEIR WILLINGNESS TO HOST THE LEAGUE IN AN INTERESTING SETTING!

President's Message



In a crumbling cardboard box of old pictures from my parents' house, there is a black and white photo of me riding on my dad's shoulders above a crowd of people, outside the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles, cheering the arrival of delegates to the 1960 Democratic National Convention. This is the first recorded evidence of my civic engagement.

Not all of my later involvements have been documented, but when I was about to be married, my parents wanted to be sure that my spouse-to-be's family listened to the news and was involved in community activities. This has long been a standard for acceptance in my family.

So, as I begin my term as League president, I arrive as a seasoned participant in civic life, but a newbie in the League world. I am timidly following the footsteps of those who have lead our League before me. I am fortunate that several previous presidents and board members are still active and available for advising. While I have been involved with the League's work in Voter Services, I have much to learn about our participation in local land use, transportation, water, behavioral health, and education issues.

This year, we've chosen three parts of our local portfolio for emphasis: Civic Engagement, Education, and Housing. The committee studying educational issues got going quickly, and on May 3 the League will host Debra Odom, Manager of the Charter Schools Office at Fresno Unified School District, in a "lunch and learn," focusing on charter schools. This event will be held in the studio of Valley PBS, at 1544 Van Ness, at noon. This marks the first time we've used the PBS facility, and we are excited about the possibilities of working with Valley PBS to extend the reach of our advocacy.

Marianne

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

Mailing Address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 76, No. 5 Editor: Francine Farber

Member News

Please edit your r

A new roster for 1917-18 will be e-mailed to you this month. Please keep it in your document file and make appropriate changes as they are published.

Welcome back

Judi Steele
650-208-9440
judisteele@st1.net

New Member

Nancy Hatcher
849 East El Paso
Fresno, CA 93720
448-0492
Nancyhat@aol.com

Correct Phone

Terri Figgs
355-7051

Diane Merrill
281-3119

A League donation is a great birthday or holiday gift or as a memorial. Please make checks out to

LWVF
1345 Bulldog Lane
Fresno, CA 93710

The League is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization so your dues payments and donations are tax deductible and gratefully accepted.



Thank You!

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



Early in my medical career, I noticed a peculiar literary style in consultations by a senior specialist. He would start by writing, for example, “I interviewed, examined, and counseled this patient on Tuesday, the 19 of January, in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred eighty-three, starting at three o’clock p.m. and finishing at four-fifteen o’clock p.m.” He included numerous additional verbiages such as “the neurologic sign of Sir Joseph Jules François Félix Babinski was absent on both right and left.” The report rambled on for perhaps a dozen pages. Was he daft? Pathologically obsessive? An uber-ardent admirer of 19th century British literature or of the King James Bible? It turns out, none of the above. He was just eccentric, according to experienced colleagues, padding his report to justify “**upcoding**.”

UPCODING

What is “upcoding?” It is the production of documents intended to support increased payments for physician services based on the recording of excess verbiage and data. Nearly all fee-for-service billing is achieved through Current Procedural Technology (CPT) coding, an exhaustive alphanumeric translation of everything doctors can do to earn money. It is copyrighted by the American Medical Association, which survives largely because of income from its widespread use.

Insurers such as Blue Cross, Aetna, and Medicare/Medicaid review samples of the patient encounter documents to justify fee-for-service payments under CPT coding. Many of the payments are scaled according to the extent or complexity of the services. For example, an office visit can range from 1 to 5, with a 10 to 15-fold increase in remuneration from bottom (brief) to top (complex).

About 20 years ago the AMA and the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services agreed on simple, objective criteria to distinguish between these levels. **The goal was to prevent upcoding without having to use medically sophisticated reviewers.** The result: a fully objective and nonsensical system of “bullet points” that awarded higher visit charges for increasing numbers of systems reviewed and examined, while disregarding more critical patient visit activities. Vital patient teaching and counseling codes were

created, but they provided inadequate incentive to document, for example, patient education about the nature and hazards of their illness and the prescribed treatments.

“STEALTH BATTLE”

The result of specific coding criteria was a vast expansion of the medical coding profession, serving physicians, hospitals, and insurers. The membership of the American Academy of Professional Coders tripled in the last 15 years to its current 170,000. The stealth battle between hospitals and insurers over bills for each hospitalization, office visit, image, lab test, therapy, and procedure has become a major contributor to the outlandish cost of American health care. **Nearly a quarter of our health care costs go to administration, largely billing, compared with the average among developed nations of 15%.**

At the extreme of coding dysfunction is oncology, whose practitioners are inadequately rewarded for the counseling and comfort they provide to terrified and grief-stricken cancer patients and their families, but instead derive sustaining income from highly remunerative CPT codes for the provision of chemotherapy agents.

PERVERSE INCENTIVES

These perverse incentives of the fee-for-service system are being magnified by the ability of medical computer systems to produce boilerplate patient encounter documents that fulfill high-level CPT charges while inadequately displaying key data on which treatment decisions can be based. There is a fearsome likelihood that computer boilerplate fosters fake data about the patient history and physical exam while failing to elicit the reasoning behind treatment decisions.

The advance of internet communication will eventually doom fee-for-service medicine because of the innumerable advantages of on-demand communications between doctor and patient, modulated by modestly intelligent computer intermediaries. These activities are steadfastly resistant to piecemeal coding. **As this happens, quality assurance in healthcare must become a national priority.**

Nominations Wanted for Women's Equality Day

- ◆ A leader in her field
- ◆ A major contributor to the community
- ◆ Non-traditional occupation a plus



Send your nomination of a Fresno County area woman to Francine Farber at fmfarber@hotmail.com, or 226-5455
Celebration will take place in August, date to be announced

Previous winners: Judge Hilary Chittick, Susan Anderson, Brandi Orth, Lynne Ashbeck, Kerri Donis, Deborah Ikeda

Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



In April the Fresno County Behavioral Health Board (BHB) voted to continue meeting on a monthly basis. There had been suggestions that the board meet less frequently to reduce the amount of time spent by County staff and board members, but after discussion, including comments from the public, the decision was made to continue with monthly meetings.

Updates from the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) included a report on the Suicide Prevention Action Plan. A Countywide work group, including schools, health care providers, and justice partners, continues to meet on a regular basis. The target date for the completion of the plan is September 1, 2017.

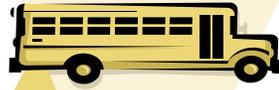
The Program Review of the month was Rural Mental

Health Services. Turning Point of Central California is the contracted provider for these services. The program provides three levels of care: Full Service Partnerships (FSP) for clients with the highest acuity, Intensive Case Management (ICM), and Outpatient (OP) services for those needing lower levels of care. Clinics are located in Sanger, Reedley, Pinedale, Selma, Kerman, and Coalinga, with service providers going into some of the smaller, surrounding communities on a weekly basis. Prior to its meeting, BHB members visited the Reedley clinic, and were impressed with the facilities and the work being done there.

Each year the BHB reaches out to communities to learn of their behavioral health needs. The board will begin a series of Community Forums in Prather on May 3. A forum in Sanger will follow, at a date to be announced. Locally, the BHB will devote one of its regularly scheduled meetings to a community forum in the fall. League members are invited to attend and provide input.

Education

by Kay Bertken



Most of Fresno Unified's Board meeting time over the last months has been taken up with 2017-2018 budget proposals and discussions. Those discussions will continue through May and will include an evaluation of the Governor's May revision of the State budget proposal in late May plus a final adoption of the District Local Control Accountability Plan and the District budget on June 14.

Highpoints of the budget discussions so far included the expansion of dual immersion (Spanish and English) programs at two new schools—Rowell and Wawona. Both schools will begin the programs with pre-K and kindergarten classes next fall. The Wawona proposal begins a transition of that campus to a dual immersion pre-K to 8 grade school.

The District will also absorb the costs of free SAT, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate testing for its students. For the last two years testing has been free for students, the cost absorbed by the College Board and federal reimbursement programs. The availability of free testing plus the fact that the SAT is now given during school hours has greatly increased the number of students who can participate. On April 5, 3,000 FUSD students took the SAT during the school day.

Other budget proposals involved increases in campus safety assistants beginning this year at schools next to parks plus continuing discussion of more help at schools with particularly high levels of school police reports. The Department of Prevention and Intervention has proposed hiring 9 more social workers to augment the current number plus

a manager to oversee a substance abuse program being piloted at four high schools. The District is also poised to take over and centralize the purchase of greatly expanded numbers of student computers, a chore that has been variably undertaken by the individual school sites.

After hearing presentations from four different firms that had responded to a request for proposals, the Board has hired Leadership and Associates to conduct a national search for a new superintendent. That search is supposed to culminate in a hire this summer.

The withdrawal of a facilities contract with the low bidder—Nelson and Sons— and the approval of a new contract to the second highest bidder was the subject of two Board meetings and will undoubtedly go to court next. It was determined that Board President Ashjian had begun to do work and had done work for Nelson and Sons within five years of the awarding of the contract and therefore prohibited work between that firm and the district.

There was argument presented that there had been a longer term work relationship between Nelson and Ashjian that would have made a simple recusal from the vote sufficient, but that argument did not hold up to review by a special lawyer brought in to consult on the case or in an appeal before the Board. The new contract will cost the District an additional \$160,000 and also inhibit further work with Nelson and Sons, a local firm that has frequently bid on projects and done an enormous amount of work for the District.

Next Board Meetings, 5:30 p.m.

May 3, 17, 31

Comcast Ch.98 / AT&T U-verse Ch. 99

Streaming on Board website

Voter Services

by Marianne Kast

Last month the League monitored the Associated Students, Inc. elections at Fresno State. In addition to filling the usual slate of offices, students voted down a proposed \$400-per-year fee increase to fund a new student union building. With just over 10% of the eligible students casting ballots, the “Bold New U” project stirred more interest than usual in the annual election. Thanks to Ruth Afifi, Liz Shields, Kay Bertken, Mary Savala, and Marianne Kast for volunteering during the 3-day election period.

The League has been asked to receive and count ballots for the Cascadel Homeowners Association (Madera County) later this month. The neighborhood association will be deciding on a change to their Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs).



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Water News by Diane Merrill

The LWVC Water Committee will host a Water Caucus on June 2 at 9 p.m. during the LWVC bi-annual convention in Sacramento. The topic will be “Water: What’s Your Issue?” The goal of the caucus is to get input and information about water issues of importance to League members from around the state. Our League will be an active participant in the caucus and will provide information about water conditions and priorities in our area.

January 2017 was the start of a busy two-year 2017-2018 California legislative session. As of mid-April the LWVC has taken a position to oppose or support 17 pieces of legislation and is following an additional 179 bills of interest. As the legislative session progresses, LWVC may decide to take a position on some of the bills it is following.



Three water bills being followed are SB 49, SB 252, and SB 623. SB 49 is part of a three-bill Preserve California legislative package introduced by the Senate leadership to insulate California from any roll-backs in federal environmental regulations and public health protections by the Trump administration or by Congress. SB 252 requires cities and counties in critically over-drafted groundwater basins to make new well permit applications public prior to approval. SB 623 would establish a fund to assist communities without access to safe or affordable drinking water.

In Memoriam

We deeply regret to inform you that Judy Ann Anderson, a member of LWVF since 1972, passed away on January 14. Judy had been a teacher for Sanger Unified and served on the Sanger Planning Commission. She worked as a realtor until macular degeneration forced her to retire in the late 1980's. Donations may be made to the San Joaquin River Parkway.

We are grateful to our sponsors for their support in "Making Democracy Work."
 League members who wish to be sponsors or to secure sponsorship for us, may contact Francine Farber at 226-5455



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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. 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.

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 - \$30

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

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