



# The Fresno VOTER

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## Dr. Blair Presents Mary Todd Lincoln at February Lunch and Learn

By Murray Farber 226-5455

Was Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the 16th president, insane? Her son Robert had her committed for four months, probably because he was embarrassed that she bought multiples of the same items and carried all her money sewn in her dress. Afterward she lived in fear that he would have her confined again.

Was Mary Todd Lincoln a spend-thrift? She ran up large debts with New York merchants when her husband was only a country lawyer. She grossly exceeded the funds Congress provided for refurbishing the White House, although the Lincolns did find their new residence in shambles with all of the wallpaper and furniture in need of replacement.

These were just two facets of the controversial First Lady that emerged in a balanced presentation by Dr. Diane Blair at a League of Women Voters Lunch and Learn in February, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Lincoln's birth. Speaking to an audience of almost 40 members and non-members, Dr. Blair, associate professor of communications at Fresno State University and a member of the LWV board, noted that Mary Todd was the first president's wife to be called the *First Lady*. Mary Todd preferred to be called Mrs. President Lincoln.

Her admirers called her brilliant, noting that she advised her husband on cabinet selections. They respected her resilience in the face of continued tragedies and her devotion to her husband. Although Mary criticized Lincoln's coarse manners, she



**Mary Todd Lincoln**

would not tolerate anyone else's negative comments about him.

Others called her satanic. Some of the derision sprang from the Mary's reaction to personal tragedy. Three of her four sons died before the age of 19, traumatizing Mrs. Lincoln and prompting her to bring a medium into the White House for séances.

In many ways, she foreshadowed modern First Ladies. She visited wounded soldiers, bringing them fresh bread and writing letters home for them. As the nation's official hostess, she splurged on new china for the White House, buying a 190-piece Limoges service.

As a lively plump person, she contrasted sharply with the president's moodiness and his 6 foot 4 inch gaunt frame. Mrs. Lincoln was an active

**Continued on page 2**

### Calendar

#### Wednesday . April 15

Regular Board Meeting, 5 p.m.  
League Office

#### Saturday, April 25

Annual Meeting and Lunch  
See cover of Call for details.

#### Tuesday, May 12

Mini-Grant Expo  
Kremen Center, 3-5 p.m.

#### May 15 -17, Friday through Sunday

State Convention  
Long Beach Marriott

#### Wednesday, May 20

Regular Board Meeting  
5 p.m. League Office

**Mary Todd Lincoln**, continued from page 1

campaigner for her husband and helped him clarify his views on slavery. Rebutting critics, Dr. Blair maintained that Mary Todd actually encouraged the president to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, prompting residents of Kentucky, her home state, to malign her as a traitor.

Based on her interest in First Ladies, Dr. Blair also reviewed how Rosalyn Carter edited her husband's speeches; Laura Bush campaigned for her husband in swing states; Edith Wilson was the surrogate president after her husband suffered a stroke; and Eleanor Roosevelt helped her husband win the nomination for a third term by becoming the first First Lady to speak at a national convention.

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## EDUCATION REPORT

By Kay Bertken 226-2720

Fresno Unified School District is anticipating more than a 13% state funding reduction over each of the next two years in addition to a mid-year reduction in this year's budget.

Lower than anticipated State revenues suggest that the Governor's May revision of the state budget may contain even more bad news. Currently, Fresno Unified is dealing with the cuts without laying off employees. While the federal stimulus package may bring more than \$30 million to the district, school officials are anticipating losing more than \$40 million through State reductions.

*Lower than anticipated State revenues suggest that the Governor's May revision of the state budget may contain even more bad news..*

The reductions have been accompanied by a loosening of state restrictions on the expenditure of categorical funds. School districts around the state will have more discretion in the expenditure of these funds.

While dealing with a difficult budget, the District is continuing to pursue several major reforms. The Superintendent's English Learning Task Force and the Superintendent's Commission on Workforce Readiness and Career Technical Education presented updates to the Board of Education at its March 11 meeting and will be presenting their final reports and recommendations to the Board this spring.

FUSD has 32,079 students with a non-English primary language, more than 20,000 of whom are identified English Learners. The English Learner Task Force will be recommending improvements in District services to these students. The Career-Tech Ed Commission will be proposing a comprehensive program to prepare students to be career ready graduates. One objective of a revived, engaging career-technical education program is that more students will stay in school and graduate. Designing career-tech courses that meet University of California A-G admission requirements would also increase higher education access for many of Fresno's children.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

By Mary Savala 434-1227

### SIDEWALKS

Gary McDonald Homes' appeal to the City Council for approval of a gated community in Copper River Ranch has been postponed indefinitely while the City Planning Department plans a Council Workshop on that issue. In the meantime, League's attorney, Patience Milrod, has written to the City reminding them that the approval of Copper River Ranch development was conditioned on environmental mitigation which includes sidewalks, and that the City is legally obligated to see that mitigation is implemented.

### FARM LAND

The committee charged with distributing the settlement funds to establish a Farm Land Trust is waiting for a proposal from the California Rangelands Trust for that funding. The committee has been advised that we should wait to compare proposals from the California Rangelands Trust and the Sequoia Riverlands Trust to be sure that we have the best success.

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## CSUF STUDENT UNIT

By Diane M. Blair 244-0239

### Opinion Editorial on Funding Higher Education

The student unit editorial appeared in the *Fresno Bee* (February 28, 2009), the *Community Alliance* (March 2009), and the *Fresno Voter* (March 2009). It is also being sent to local legislators.

### National Popular Vote Compact

Jacque Canfield was a guest speaker at our March 4 meeting and she presented information on this proposal for the direct election of the U.S. President by popular vote. Some student members will be working with Jacquie Canfield on this proposal.

### ASI Elections

The student unit has expressed an interest in promoting voter turnout at the upcoming Associated Students Elections by hosting forums for the student candidates, and they will be working with ASI to coordinate these activities.

### Other LWV Student Units

Francine Farber suggested the student group research the existence of other possible student units throughout the country. The group agreed that this was a good idea, but due to time constraints and the need to prioritize activities, the students will seek to attend this issue at a later date.

# VOTER SERVICES REPORT

By Liz Shields and Terri Figgs

## May 19 State Election

Kathy McClue, Assistant Registrar of Voters, has confirmed that the Elections Department would like us to assist the department with the absentee ballot processing and the phone bank for the May 19 election.

We have ordered 3000 Easy Voter Guides in English and 1000 in Spanish for distribution. We'll also be gearing up the Speakers Bureau to make presentations on the propositions.

LWVC has announced its opposition to Propositions 1A, 1C, 1D and 1E on the May 19 Special Election ballot and is urging voters to reject them.

**“The LWVC opposes these measures because they are NOT the solution to our long term financial crisis, with the continuing structural deficit in the state budget and flawed budget process,” said Janis R. Hirohama, president of LWVC. “We make this decision with regret. We would support real reform to make the state budget process more accountable and give the Legislature and Governor effective tools to advance state priorities. However, these hurriedly drafted propositions, produced at the end of a flawed process that kept both the public and most legislators in the dark, will only make our fiscal situation worse.”**

**Proposition 1A** is touted by its proponents as the way to bring stability to the budget process. But what it will *really* do is tie the hands of the Legislature and Governor as they face changing needs for state and local government services. It will keep them from taking into account the state's changing demographics and growth in the actual cost of important services like health care. Additionally, “most of its provisions will not take effect for two years—two years that should be spent hammering out *real* solutions to our budget and fiscal challenges.”

**Proposition 1C.** This proposal attempts to raise money for the short term by selling bonds that would be paid off by future lottery revenue. In light of California's poor credit rating and the state of the economy, those bonds would have to be sold at very unfavorable interest rates, if they can be sold at all. The Legislative Analyst says that in the long term, lottery profits probably would not be enough to cover the higher payments to education required by Prop. 1C.

**Propositions 1D and 1E.** Voters will also be asked to improve the temporary taking of funds from early childhood and mental health programs that were established by two previous initiatives. These are illusory, stopgap measures, and the League opposes these propositions as part of this objectionable package. It is ironic that these initiatives, which did what many consider “the right thing” by providing a source of funding, now face reductions.

**The League is neutral on Proposition 1B. State responsibility for the funding of public education is essential, and we appreciate the need to pay back the devastating cuts that our schools and community colleges have sustained. On the other hand, the Legislature will have the ability to restore school funding without Prop. 1B, and it is not needed in this package of propositions.**

Since the League has no position on setting salaries for public officials, we take no position on **Proposition 1F**, which would prevent pay raises for legislators and statewide constitutional officers during budget deficit years.

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## LWVUS URGES HEALTH CARE REFORM

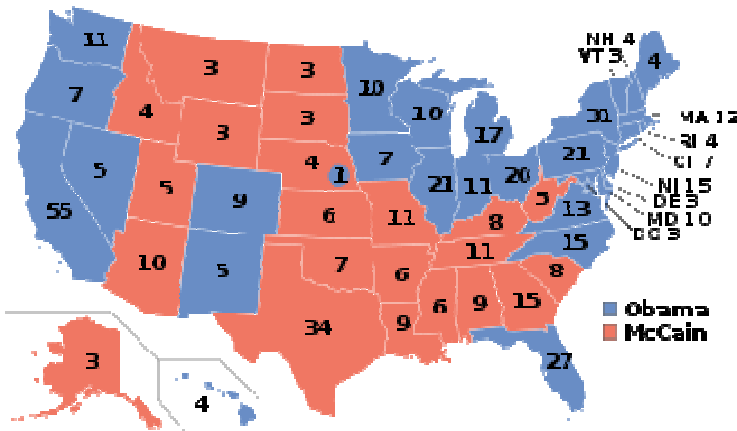
LWVUS President Mary G. Wilson has sent a letter to members of the U.S. Senate pledging the support of the 150,000 members of the League in working to achieve “...*comprehensive, system-wide reform...*” of the national health care system.

Wilson wrote: “*First, health care reform must guarantee quality, affordable health care to all U.S. residents.*” She reminded the Senators that “... *legislation must include a benefits package that includes the prevention of disease, health promotion and education, primary care, acute care, long-term care, and mental health care. In addition any health care package must include prescription drug coverage and allow for pre-existing conditions.*”

The current health care crisis has been “...*caused by a combination of skyrocketing costs and an insurance system that leaves 47 million of us without any coverage.*” The same system spends “...*\$1 out of every six we earn on health care*”. Health care costs have risen much faster than wages and inflation and are projected to cost \$4.2 trillion by 2016. “*Cost containment measures must take place in the context of overall health care reform. We must reduce or eliminate the cost-shifting that currently exists in health care financing and work to streamline the system.*”

## NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE COMPACT UNDER STUDY

LVW Fresno held a study and consensus session at the League Office on March 21 regarding the National Popular Vote Compact. **The study committee was led by past president Jacquie Canfield and included Jessica Adams, President of our Student Unit, Ann Kaufher and Kathy Webb.**



Electoral College map showing the results of the 2008 election.

Although the League of Women Voters of the United States has taken a stand in favor of electing the president by popular vote, it has not made a decision on whether the NPVC is the method it favors by which to do this. The NPVC continues the Electoral College, but the electors' votes would support whichever candidate gets the majority of votes nationwide. Each state would have the opportunity to decide whether it wants to be part of the NPVC, and it will only become effective when states with a total of 270 electoral votes have agreed to support it.

Approximately 25 members and non-members attended the two-hour session. Background on the League's position on selecting the president, information on the National Popular Vote Compact, and different supporting and opposing viewpoints on the issues were presented to the group. In addition, the actual wording of the compact agreement was provided to the group. After an involved discussion, the group discussed the seven consensus questions. The results, along with those from other local leagues, will be tabulated and a report prepared for the National League of Women Voters at its June 2009 Board meeting.

As soon as the results are released to the public, we will report them to our members locally.

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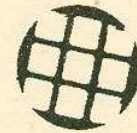
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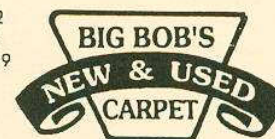
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# ***Democracy is not a spectator sport***

## **JOIN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS!**

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**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, Sue Sheragy, at 243-9305**. 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

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