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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



BOARD MEETING CHANGE
Regular Board meetings will be held on the third Monday of each month.

Monday, August 15
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

Tuesday, August 23
Ice Cream Social & Auction
Scholarship Presentation
Women's Equality Award
Home of Francine Farber



Monday, September 19
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

National Convention Report by Marianne Kast

By the time the 52nd LWVUS Convention in Washington, DC was called to order on June 17, most delegates had already participated in three caucuses, attended an introduction to the current program, "Campaign for Making Democracy Work," strolled the wares market, and renewed or made several new friendships. 784 delegates filled the ballroom at the Marriot Waldman Park at the Convention's opening gavel.

A clear program priority for the League is voter protection and mobilization. Nationwide, LWV tends to be listened to on voting issues, but less so on other issues. Delegates were reminded that as an organization, we strive "to be outstanding in our core election work." This fact will underlie the expenditure of monies and staffing of the LWVUS during the 2016-2018 biennium.

One breakout session I attended reviewed innovative youth registration programs from Leagues that had received grants from LWVUS for voter outreach. A Texas league partners with Spanish-language media giant Univision to produce PSAs and to staff an election day phone bank at the TV station, targeting Spanish-speaking voters. Another league partnered with a local car dealer to buy, then sell back, a minivan, which was "wrapped" with a compelling message encouraging young people who saw the van to register and to vote.

Another session featured former Under-Secretary of the Interior, Lynn Scarlett addressing water as THE central issue in climate change, bringing together leagues that are working on water issues, whether excess storm water, rising water tables, or scarcity.

A fabulous line up of speakers addressed the Convention. Pollster Celinda Lake, President of Lake Research Partners, entertained delegates with her raucous sense of humor, endless data, and vast experience with voters across the nation. She reminded the delegates of the League's historical ability to move the nation at crucial times. Other speakers encouraged the League to press on with its work despite the craziness of this election cycle. At the Saturday evening banquet, Ari Berman, author of Give Us The Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America, narrated the history of the Voting Rights Act and its crumbling since the 2013 Supreme Court decision striking down the requirement for Federal oversight of certain states' voting procedures.

(continued on page 2)

President's Message



A short time ago I attended a Fresno City Council meeting that included on the agenda a discussion of the proposed 2017 Annual Budget. A top funding priority, as expected, was public safety (police and fire). Another top priority was improving streets and roads.

League members along with other groups who work on social justice issues, such as Building Healthy Communities and Leadership Council, asked the Council to seriously consider increasing funding in the budget to implement plans to increase affordable housing, building and maintaining parks in underserved areas of the city, and to address the issue of a disproportionate number of polluting industries being located in West Fresno.

Many people spoke of the challenges they personally face because of unhealthy and unsafe living conditions or their inability to access clean and safe parks for themselves and their children. These are “quality of life” issues that impact a large percentage of the population in Fresno.

Other than a small nod to affordable housing, most of the City Council members were not interested in accommodating the pleas of the public. They stayed with their original priorities, including fixing streets and pot-holes in their districts. In my neighborhood a bumpy, pot-holed street was recently repaired, and whenever I drive on that now very smooth street I am reminded that I would happily maneuver around the bumps and pot-holes so that much more important “quality of life” issues can be given a significantly higher priority in the budgetary process.

With the national dialogue centered on the growing gap between the haves and have-nots, our local government officials should respond to what the League and its friends have long championed and embrace the opportunities they have to make a difference in the lives of those on the lower end of that gap.

Nyla

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

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Member News

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

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**



Convention Report

(continued from page 1)

For me, the most impressive part of the Convention was seeing the engagement of delegates; no issue came before the Convention without passionate appeals both pro and con.

We often say, “all politics is local,” but inching the LWVUS in its preferred direction was the goal of every delegate who spoke

Overall, the LWVUS is struggling with issues like those we are grappling with in Fresno. How do we encourage younger men and women to become active LWV members? How do we get wider recognition for our expertise? Who can we partner with to extend our reach to people who don't traditionally participate in the democratic process? The challenges facing the League are sizeable, but the convention sent every delegate home with new energy and a stack of ideas for moving forward.

Housing

by Patience Milrod



Behavioral Health

by Carolyn Evans



Fresnans are far more likely than other Californians to live below the poverty level: 27.5%, compared with 16.4% statewide. According to the California Housing Partnership, median rent in Fresno County has increased 22% since 2000, while median renter household income (inflation adjusted) has declined 10%. Fresno County would need to add 37,327 affordable rental homes to meet the needs of its lowest-income renters. Not surprisingly, low-income renters in Fresno County have a difficult time paying for housing. The average Fresno County household making half the area median income pays almost 70% of that income for rent.

As reported last month, Building Healthy Communities had requested that the new budget should direct RDA “boomerang” funds into an Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Mayor Swearingen rejected this proposal, instead directing all returning former tax increment money into the City’s reserve fund.

In recently-concluded budget hearings, Council member Esmeralda Soria did secure agreement from her Council colleagues to repurpose about \$1 million in unspent federal grant funds for affordable housing projects. And the Mayor’s office is attempting to leverage state cap and trade funds for similar purposes. But outside funding sources (redevelopment, state housing bonds, federal grants) have dropped by half since 2008. The city spends at least a third of its now-reduced Housing and Urban Development funds on senior meals, graffiti abatement, and other uses that neither preserve nor build affordable housing.

Despite the great and growing need, the City of Fresno does not have a coherent affordable housing strategy to systematically identify successful affordable housing developers; find them local partners and developable land in all areas of the city; educate Council members and the public about how decent housing for our poorest residents materially benefits our wealthiest; require market rate developers to build inclusionary units; and find or create dependable revenue streams to leverage available public and philanthropic dollars.

Patience Milrod is an LWVF member since 1989 who has practiced law and been involved in policy advocacy in Fresno since 1980. Now holding a Masters in Public Affairs from Cornell, she is working on many of the challenges facing low income renters and homeowners in Fresno.

At the July Behavioral Health Board (BHB) meeting, Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) Director Dawan Utecht introduced the Reaching Recovery program that DBH has initiated. Reaching Recovery tools assess the needs of each client to assure that he/she is receiving the appropriate level of care. Levels of Care include (1) Assertive Community Treatment, (2) Intensive Case Management, (3) Enhanced Outpatient, (4) Outpatient, and (5) Psychiatry Only. By assuring that each client is served at the appropriate level, there is a greater opportunity for each individual to reach wellness and recovery.

Each month the BHB hears a report about a specific program. In July it received an outcomes report from IMPACT, the Co-Occurring Disorders Full Service Partnership contracted with Mental Health Systems (MHS). This partnership provides and coordinates mental health services and substance abuse treatment for seriously mentally ill adults who also have a substance use disorder. Prior to the BHB meeting, board members toured the program, which is housed at MHS’s Fresno location at the former Hacienda Resort. During the past year, IMPACT served 126 clients; 42 of those clients entered inpatient addiction treatment programs with varying success rates. Among clients, there was a 90% reduction in homelessness, 98% reduction in incarceration days, and 96% reduction in inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations.

Under the Mental Health Services Act an annual report to the state is required each year. The process has begun with focus groups and on-line surveys. Thus far, over 700 surveys have been received by DBH from the community. The next step in the Community Program Planning Process is Stakeholder Meetings, where community members help determine how best to utilize funds that are available through the Act. The meeting schedule is available on the DBH-MHSA web site. All members of the League are encouraged to attend.

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



Recently Starbucks announced an increase in pay for its US workers. They will receive a 5 to 15% uptick in pay. Starbucks is generating the funding for this largesse by cutting its health care benefits. This cut is tough to discern from listening to Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz describe the changes in his health insurance plans. He touts his cheaper, higher co-pay plans because they will save his workers with families up to \$2600 dollars yearly. He neglects to mention that these savings would only be realized if the family did not use the health care system.

Schultz goes on to compare shopping for his insurance plans with comparison shopping for airlines and airfares. “The new health care options allow partners to only pay for the coverage they want and will actually use.” This reminds me of Progressive Insurance’s “name your price” tool, looking like a bar code reader wielded by the omnipresent Flo selling vehicle insurance. But just like car crashes, people cannot predict injuries or serious illnesses so as to determine what level of health insurance they will need. There are major qualitative and cost differences between a front end panel repair and, for example, a surgical repair of a punctured lung. Most importantly, health care security, highly valued by all members of our diverse population, is undeniably a matter of social justice.

The health insurance industry is wedded to the “name your price” concept because it allows more customers to enter the market. Even with ACA-compliant insurance that guarantees coverage for those with pre-existing conditions and limits annual out-of-pocket expenses, people with chronic illness and ongoing medical expenses are allowed (or more succinctly, forced) to opt either for higher premium

costs or higher costs for medications and services. They must choose between four tiers—bronze (40% total co-pay), silver (30%), gold (20%) and platinum (10%). Seniors are charged more for each tier, regardless of health status. Even with caps on annual out-of-pocket expenses (\$13,700 for a family), recurring annual co-pays for ACA plans can—have already—bankrupted many insured low-income families.

Another problem with tiering of health plans is the blunting of participation of all insureds in the funding of health care for everybody. Healthy, youthful people may elect catastrophic or bronze plans at low cost, if they buy into health insurance at all. The result is underfunding of health plans, forcing reductions in available services—already a problem with ACA insurance. Even when tax penalties for non-insurers rise to equal the cost of the cheapest ACA plans (and likely expanding the pool of insured), seniors and people with chronic illness will still be paying more for their health care benefit. They will, in essence, be working for lower wages than their luckily healthy co-workers, at Starbucks and most everywhere else.

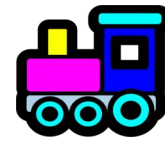
A streetscape in Kiel, Germany. See article page 5





Transportation

by Stephenie Frederick



A city that accommodates auto drivers, bus and train passengers, cyclists, and pedestrians can work for everyone, as two weeks in Kiel, Germany swiftly reveals. Once you partake of Kiel's transportation smorgasbord, you don't want to leave! It is all so low-key, healthful, safe . . . and fun!

First, one is enfolded in a culture of acceptance – all modes are of equal worth for residents and visitors alike.

Along the major thoroughfares, cyclists share the wide sidewalks with pedestrians. Bike lanes (next to the parking lane) are constructed in one color, pedestrian portions (next to the stores) in a contrasting one.

The crosswalks continue the pattern, with one stretch for pedestrians, the other for bicycles. All of the wide streets contain "pedestrian havens" – islands in the middle of the street where pedestrians may safely wait if they run out of crossing time. On some of the specially-signed smaller streets, speeds limits are low, and auto drivers must yield to cyclists and pedestrians at all times.

Bicycle racks exist throughout the city -- in front of apartment housing, stores, schools, and restaurants. People move goods on cargo bikes.

Buses come along every few minutes. They are easy to board, the fares low. Everyone seems to have a monthly pass. Stops are spaced reasonably close together, and almost all offer

shelter from the elements.

At the main train station, all modes are accommodated. Pedestrians crossing the street need cross only one lane of auto traffic at a time.

Could we replicate this in Fresno? Why not? According to the League of American Bicyclists,

- ◆ 40% of all trips are within two miles of the home;
- ◆ 50% of the working population commutes five miles or less to work;
- ◆ More than 82% of trips five miles or less are made by personal motor vehicle;
- ◆ American households devote 18% of every dollar spent on mobility;
- ◆ more than one-third of the poorest families' income goes to transportation.

Our local population could be a fabulous candidate for bicycling and walking. Fresno-Clovis will soon have 17 miles of flatland, off-street trails composed of the Sugar Pine, Clovis Old Town, and new Midtown trails. The City of Fresno plans many additional miles of such trails. If we were to allow small food concessions along the way and encourage growth of an industry of cyclist-friendly hotels and B&Bs . . . Fresno could become a cycling magnet as well as a city of homegrown cyclists and pedestrians.

The one problem is the climate. Fresno's daytime temperatures exceed the desirable range of 60 to 85 degrees during at least three months of the year. Surely there's something we can do to enable Fresno residents and visitors to ride our trails all year long, such as planting lots of trees along our trails and providing water fountains in which people could soak their lightweight UV-resistant jackets to obtain evaporative cooling, and even providing misters from May through September,

And let's not forget to create a reasonable bus-transit system. We will be making a start with the Q Line, scheduled to start service in 2017 along Blackstone and Kings Canyon-Ventura boulevards. Let's support the restructuring of the regular bus routes to support the Q and to offer good connectivity throughout the service area.



Stephenie's daughter uses a cargo bike to move to her new apartment in Kiel, Germany. See other photo, page 4.

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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

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Ice Cream Social



Tuesday, August 23

7—9 p.m.

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- ◆ **Silent Auction**
- ◆ **Women's Equality Day Award to Deborah Ikeda**

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