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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



Saturday, February 15
Program Planning
Stone Soup



Tuesday, February 25
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

Wednesday, March 5
Wednesday, March 19
Ag Study Panels
SEE FLYER INSIDE

Tuesday, March 25
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

Saturday, March 29
Ag Study Consensus
9 a.m. Stone Soup

Thursday, April 3
First Ladies Reception
5—8 p.m. City Hall
See flyer inside

**Help Us Set Annual Priorities
Program Planning Meeting
Saturday, February 15
9 a.m.—Stone Soup
Complimentary Breakfast & Snacks**



We need your help to review our accomplishments in the past year and make some decisions based on your input. We will select two or three local priorities and decide on a process to implement them.

We will also select two or three national priorities and send them to LWVUS. The national organization will compile these priorities from across the nation and make a decision as to what the national priorities should be for the year.

JOIN US FOR A MORNING OF IDEAS, COLLABORATION AND FUN

President's Message



I have shared with you my love of all things Christmas, including my giant tree adorned with as many decorations as it can hold. Sadly, there comes a time when it must come down, but I always put the deed off making the excuse that I am waiting until after Epiphany, a Sunday event in many western churches, including mine, when the visit of the three kings (or wise men) to the manger is celebrated. We always sing "We Three Kings of Orient Are" and hear the account of the event. I have never delved into Epiphany very deeply, but I have certainly enjoyed using it as an excuse to enjoy my tree several days longer.

That all changed with this year's message on the topic. I experienced an epiphany on Epiphany! The interpretation was that it represented a breaking down of barriers. The three kings were gentiles visiting a Jewish village to participate in a Jewish event. The thought was extrapolated to other barriers, such as those separating religions, races, different sexual orientations, liberals and conservatives, etc.

I will continue to keep my Christmas tree until after Epiphany, but I will also fervently hope that more and more people will experience epiphanies, "aha" moments, and allow whatever barriers they hold to weaken. I once again use Nelson Mandela's example of listening to all groups and respecting those that are different from us. Maybe by so doing, the world will become just a bit more tolerant.

Nyla

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

Mailing Address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 73, No. 2 Editor: Francine Farber

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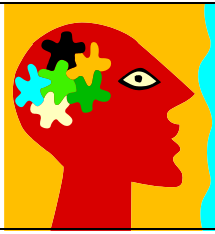
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Francine's birthday

Please send dues/ donations
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1345 Bulldog Lane
Fresno, 93710

Mental Health

by Francine M. Farber



The Department of Behavioral Health has submitted an application to the state for a grant under SB 82 legislation, which is the Mental Health Wellness Act. About \$4 million has been set aside for Fresno County. The Department's proposal calls for the establishment of the Fresno Recovery Center. The center will include six components:

- ◆ **Medical Triage**
- ◆ **Sobering Rest Area (10 spaces)**
- ◆ **Expansion of Exodus Crisis Stabilization Unit (by 8 spaces)**
- ◆ **Creation of Child/Adolescent Crisis Stabilization Unit (8 spaces)**
- ◆ **Inpatient Adolescent Psychiatric Healthcare Facility (PHF) up to 13 beds**
- ◆ **Creation of Crisis Residential Units (12-18 beds)**

It is anticipated that a decision on the proposal will be received in the spring. As we know, currently the nearest inpatient psychiatric facility for adolescents is more than 150 miles away, causing additional trauma to the patients and their families.

Meanwhile, activities are proceeding around the concept of the Fresno Restoration Center. This project is emanating from the work of a large coalition of public and private entities in Fresno led by consultant Doug Noll and patterned to some degree after a facility in San Antonio, Texas. The group, according to Noll, is considering taking over a vacant facility in downtown Fresno but is also considering other options, including space in the Department of Behavioral Health facility on Kings Canyon. Phase I of this project is complete and a public report will be issued soon by Strategic Development Association of Los Angeles regarding mental health status and needs in Fresno. The planning group will then consider whether to proceed with fundraising and other activities. It is estimated that about \$15 million may be needed for the project, which would include transitional housing as well as "one-stop shopping" for mental health support. Some of the project's components appear to duplicate those listed in the proposal for the Recovery Center.

Transportation

by Stephenie Frederick



. The Fresno city council may, at this late date, vote to cancel the bus rapid transit (BRT) project it had approved in 2009. A cancellation would have devastating effects on the city's proposed general plan update – and on the RTP, whose adopted sustainable communities scenario relies on the BRT for achievement of air quality standards.

The council has specified January 30 for its vote. If the city council does NOT cancel the BRT, the 2014 RTP process will unroll as follows:

- ◆ **During January and February, all of the RTP documents, including the EIR, will be prepared in final form and compiled**
- ◆ **During March and April, the entire document will be available for public review**
- ◆ **During May, the staff will make final revisions.**
- ◆ **In June, the Fresno Council of Governments Policy Board will approve the RTP**

The 2014 RTP may contain some new, surprising elements. As reported in the last Voter, the Fresno COG Policy Board directed its Policy Advisory Committee and staff to consider four principles proposed by the Fresno Community Equity Coalition. The CEC is focusing on incorporating three of its four proposed principles into the 2014 RTP, which have been endorsed by the LWVF Board:

- 1) **Investment of RTP funds in existing communities (no new towns);**
- 2) **Development of a competitive grant program to help smaller cities and the unincorporated communities conduct smart-growth planning and make strategic infrastructure investments.**
- 3) **Conduct a thorough health-infrastructure needs assessments in communities throughout the county, acquisition of funds to meet those needs, and creation of a method to forecast and track progress.**

Education

by Kay Bertken



Next Board of Education Meetings

February 9

February 23

Comcast Ch 98 5:30 p.m.

The Fresno Unified School Board returned from its holiday recess to hold its first meeting of the new year on January 8. The major substantive items included a report of its scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a national test that the district has been voluntarily participating in along with 20 other district members of the Council of Great City Schools.

Improved Scores

Among those urban districts, FUSD saw relatively substantial score improvements in 4th and 8th grade math and language, the two subjects and grade levels tested. Their improvements were among the best among the districts, but the district's actual scores remain among the lowest; third from the lowest in 4th grade math and reading, and 5th from the bottom in 8th grade math and reading. Gaps between the white subgroup and others were substantial, a consistent outcome on assessments in Fresno. The District has pledged to track and ameliorate what they call this testing "gap" in its waiver from the Federal No Child Left Behind mandates.

College Applications Up

Among the other student data discussed by the Board were the current figures on the number of high school seniors who had made college applications; 3085 had applied to community college, 2056 to a CSU, 534 to a UC, 177 to private colleges, and 231 to another technical or proprietary school. An additional 28 had applied to join the military upon graduation. A long Board discussion focused on the District's ability to track more than just applications and admissions—that data will not be available until late in the year-- but whether students actually attend and progress through these programs. Given the very low graduation rates at California community colleges (only 31% had a certificate or AA degree after 6 years) and the CSU system (a 15% graduation rate after 4 years, just short of 50% after 6 years), the Trustees and administration were concerned about preparing Fresno students to succeed at these institutions. FUSD has made significant progress in cooperative agreements, including

data sharing, with UC Merced, Fresno State and Fresno City.

Common Core Implementation

The final item of note on the agenda was a report on the implementation of the Common Core and Common Core Assessments. **The State has given Fresno Unified 14 million dollars in one-time funding for Common Core implementation, including professional training, materials development and technology.**

After a long study, the District has chosen a computer tablet and will purchase 15,000 of them to use for the computer-based testing and to facilitate more individualized teaching strategies. This April the District will pilot test the Common Core assessments in grades 4, 5 and 6. Next year will be the first year of actual assessments for those grades plus 7,8 and 11. The District plans on delivering the tablets to the classrooms by March so that teachers and students will become familiar with them and can take a practice test on them before the pilot in April.

Air Quality Information by Diane Merrill

On a number of days in December and January, air quality in the Valley reached unhealthy levels of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). The microscopic PM-2.5 specks are a serious health problem. They can pass through the lungs into the bloodstream and lodge in body organs, such as the heart. They are known to trigger asthma and heart problems.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Real-Time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) is an easy online tool to get hourly air quality information from local

air quality monitoring stations. This information can be helpful to individuals when making decisions about outdoor activities.

To access the RAAN network:

- ◆ **Go to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's home page <http://www.valleyair.org>**
- ◆ **On the column on the right side of the page, click on RAAN**
- ◆ **Select a monitoring station from the list.**
- ◆ **The Clovis, Central Fresno, and City of Madera sites monitor PM-2.5.**

Health Care Reform

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



The first evidence of Covered California in your doctor's office may be a sign saying, "This office is not accepting Covered California plans." While there are no public data on doctor participation, these signs are appearing in many offices. One might interpret these signs as political or philosophical statements, but there are several strictly business reasons why doctors are rejecting contracts with Covered California plans.

Up front and center are the lower fee schedules offered by these plans, compared with traditional employee group or commercial individual plans. Details of the contracts are not public information, but physician groups are reporting offers that range from standard Medicare rates to 70% of Medicare rates. These rates are attractive only to practices that have idle capacity, or might develop idle capacity if a significant portion of their patient population transitioned from standard commercial insurance to Covered California.

Fresno County's health care smorgasbord has minimal idle capacity. The Central Valley's physician per capita is very low, so there are very few empty appointment slots to be filled with Covered Califor-

nia patients. So far Covered California has not shown a trajectory of enrollment that would capture a large enough population through 2014 to threaten the fiscal integrity of a practice not seeing Covered California patients.

On top of these issues are other complications that are moving physician practices to adopt a wait-and-see position. **Doctors are concerned that the "early adopters" of Covered California will be more complex and sicker than their current panel of patients.** The difficulty of this work is hard to capture in billing. Covered California plans have higher co-insurance costs for physician services and brand-name medications and smaller physician networks, forcing clinicians to make more complex clinical decisions. And the more extensive reporting requirements for Covered California will strain their already tenuous relationship with their electronic health record systems.

The core approach to these problems is to make Covered California so large, by accelerating enrollment, that it reflects the general population and that it forces physicians to accept the exchange plans. Meanwhile, physicians' concerns need to be addressed, including adjusting fees for patient evaluation and management, bringing them closer to current commercial standards and vastly improving the clarity and accuracy of the plans' provisions.

Voting Rights Laws by Liz Shields

A bipartisan group of legislators has introduced legislation that would amend the Voting Rights Act to address the concerns raised when the Supreme Court struck down Section 4(b) as unconstitutional. The majority of the Court at that time said that the formula for deciding which states or parts

of states needed preclearance for any changes in their voting laws or practices was based on 40 year old data and was out of date. The proposed legislation would create a new formula to re-establish preclearance for four jurisdictions—Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas—and any other state shown to have committed five or more voting rights vio-

lations during the past 15 years. Although the bill does not address issues such as voter ID requirements as an infringement on voting rights, civil rights groups including LWVUS have endorsed the bill and are urging their members to take action and contact their representatives to support this bill so that it can be passed speedily.

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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.

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**The League of Women Voters of Fresno
Proudly Presents a National Update Study**

Current Issues in Agriculture

Seminar One

Agriculture's Economic Health

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

11:30 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

Panelists to be announced

Seminar Two

From Animal Management to Food Safety

Wednesday, March 19

11:30 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

Panelists to be announced

See relevant articles on Web site — lwvfresno.org/agriculture study

Location of both Seminars

Community Media Access Collaborative (CMAC)

1555 Van Ness, Fresno (former Metropolitan Museum building)

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A few stairs required to get in front door, or use elevator behind south side of building

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Please bring a sandwich. Beverage and snack will be provided.

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A commemorative exhibit
of portraits of our First Ladies

Courtesy of Joseph W. Levy

Sponsored by the League of Women Voters
of Fresno

In collaboration with
Fresno County Office of Education

April 3—30, 2014

Fresno City Hall

Opening Reception

Thursday, April 3

5:00—8:00 p.m.

Program at 6:00 p.m.