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# The *Fresno* **VOTER**



**Friday, July 18**  
**Board Retreat and Meeting**  
**9 a.m. - 1 p.m.**  
**Farber home**  
**707 West Fairmont, Fresno**  
**All invited—help us brainstorm solutions—RSVP 226-5455**

**Tuesday, August 26**  
**Ice Cream Social and Auction!**  
**Scholarship Winners!**  
**Home of the Williamsons**  
**See flyer inside**

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**Two mental health Lunch & Learns planned for September and October—dates and other information to be announced**



## **Friant Ranch litigation continues**

by Radley Reep

**W**hile our lawsuit to block the Friant Ranch project failed initially, recently we won on appeal on the issue of air quality, effectively stopping the project until the County re-does its Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The League, Sierra Club and Revive the San Joaquin have petitioned the Fifth District Court of Appeal for a rehearing on two matters: whether the Friant Ranch project was consistent with the General Plan and whether information in the EIR on a water balance for the wastewater treatment plant was sufficient. Costs related to filing this petition totaled \$3,000, split 50/50 by the League and the Sierra Club.

Once the Fifth District has completed its review of the Friant Ranch lawsuit, the Fifth District will direct the lower court to order the County to set aside approval of the Friant Ranch project and correct the deficiencies in the EIR. How those deficiencies are corrected is left to the discretion of the County. Once the EIR is amended, the County should recirculate the document for public review .

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) does not require formal hearings at any stage of the environmental review process. That said, there will be a public hearing sometime in the future to enable the Board of Supervisors to reapprove the project and recertify the EIR. At that time, the public will be given an opportunity to comment. The County should also hold a public hearing at the time it sets aside project approval and decertifies the EIR.

*(continued on page 4)*

# President's Message



**E**very two years, LWV delegates from state and local Leagues from all over the country descend upon the convention city, this year Dallas and in 2016, in Washington, D.C. Six hundred forty-six League members from forty-seven states and the District of Columbia were in attendance. Stephenie Frederick and I were the LWVF delegates to the national convention this year.

The LWVUS recommended program was **approved**, including (1) concurrence with the Human Trafficking position of the LWV New Jersey; (2) adoption of a comprehensive 3-part study and review of key, specific structures of American democracy (see details on our website).

All non-recommended programs items were **defeated**. Included were (1) study of alternatives to the primary election process (LWV Fresno had supported this); (2) concurrence of LWV Kansas position on living wage; (3) proposal to adopt a study on economic inequality.

Resolutions that passed were: (1) LWVUS should support a price on carbon emissions ; (2) advocate for legislation restoring voting rights in federal elections to citizens with felony convictions who have completed their sentences.

Our Training Tracks presentations covered such issues as coalition building, voter registration, fund-raising, building effective boards and increasing use of social media, the latter of special interest to LWVF.

A particularly interesting workshop addressed “How to Recruit Younger Members” conducted by the LWVUS Young People’s Task Force. Our League is very interested in this topic and we will make good use of the publication distributed at the workshop.

We also received a toolkit from a workshop on Climate Change, a Program Planning priority our League submitted to LWVUS.

The slate of officers recommended by LWVUS Nominating Committee included LWV Florida President Dierdre McNab, who resigned the nomination, and instead challenged for President from the floor. Her bid failed and Elizabeth MacNamara was elected to another term.

## Member News

PLEASE NOTE THESE CHANGES

**Moved to Bay Area**  
**Marilyn Cope**

### **Deceased**

**With deep regret we note the death of Bobbye Temple on June 16. Bobbye was a member a number of times over the years and most recently had re-joined last October. She was a retired journalist, historian and professor.**



to our generous donors for the Carrie Chapman Catt Fund, the Board Leadership Circle, and the Presidents Circle. ***You made our Reserve Fund a reality!***

**We always accept contributions for the Reserve Fund, memorial and celebratory gifts. Please remember LWVF in your estate planning.**

**Please send dues/ donations to  
Terri Figgs  
Treasurer, LWVF  
1345 Bulldog Lane**

**The July edition of The VOTER is being sent to you by e-mail only as a cost-saving measure. A few copies will be mailed to those not having e-mail.**

**Regular printing and mailing will be resumed for the August issue. Thank you for your understanding.**

**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. 7 Editor: Francine Farber**

# Education

by Kay Bertken



**Fresno Unified held its last school board meeting of the year, celebrating another increase in graduation rates and the signing of the new contract with the Fresno Teachers Association.** Though the exact graduation rate will not be known until after summer school and will not be reported until August, the Superintendent has already announced the biggest increase in five years.

## **Board contract with teachers union**

The long contract negotiations with the FTA resulted in a retroactive pay increase of 2.7% and an increase of 3.5% for 2014-2015. **The pay rates for the following years, which have been the major basis of impasse in the bargaining process, were not resolved in this contract. Those rates were left to be determined.**

At its previous meeting, the Board discussed and adopted its budget and the LCAP—local control accountability plan. Specific provisions for the groups targeted by the new state funding included a focus on improving the redesignation of English Learners (attesting English proficiency and advancement into regular education status). The District guarantees professional learning to better prepare EL teachers in their role, adding in-classroom supports to provide for early intervention, and expanding tutoring and summer school offerings.

## **Planning for foster youth**

In targeting foster youth, the plan calls for establishing a foster youth round table in 2014-2015 to review data on foster youth and consider future actions, training academic counselors on foster youth needs and setting clear expectations for academic counselor-student meetings, as well as building partnerships between

the counselors and new foster youth social workers. Increases in the number of high school academic counselors from a ratio of 800 students per counselor in 2005-06 to 365 to 1 in 2014-15 plus the introduction of counselors in middle school will support all of the “at risk” groups targeted by the new state funding.

**The district budget also funds the expansion of restorative justice techniques to additional schools to try to cut student suspensions and expulsion numbers.** Additionally, it provides for better relationships with parents by providing bilingual classified staff at all the schools, training for home-school liaison workers and increasing staffing at the parent university.

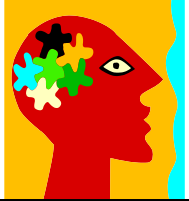
In the world beyond Fresno Unified, Governor Brown has signed the State budget, which includes \$264 million for early learning, the biggest investment in our youngest children in many years. The budget provides \$50 million in local block grants for preschool quality improvements; \$25 million for preschool and transitional kindergarten training; and \$10 million in one-time funds to provide loans for preschool expansion. **The largest investment is for increased numbers of day care and preschool slots for low income children plus an increase reimbursement rate for state contracted providers.** The budget details include a commitment to fund slots for all of the state’s low income four year olds in future years.

## **Volunteer Opportunity**

Toni Eames, an LWVF member who is a retired counselor, is blind and requires volunteer readers at her home near Sierra and Maroa. Toni notes that “the coffee is always on, my guide dog gives kisses, and my cat may share your lap during the reading session.” Reading material includes animal and social justice related newsletters, magazines and books. **If you are interested, please call Toni at 446-1080.**

## Mental Health

by Francine Farber



The Mental Health Board **should** be comprised of four representatives appointed by each of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. Some supervisors have found it difficult, or have been reluctant, to make these appointments. The good news is that three new members were just added to the MH Board, representing consumers or family members of consumers of mental health services, mental health professionals, or interested citizens. The Board now has 14 of its 20 authorized members.

At its June reporting the Board heard reports about two of its numerous programs. Blue Sky Wellness Center is a peer supported and operated wellness and recovery center focused on empowering consumers on their road to recovery through daily support groups and activities. Open six days a week, it provides a wide variety of groups which help in understanding mental illness and in developing new skills along the road to recovery. Serving transition-aged youth, adults and older adults, over 1000 unduplicated individuals attended last year with a total of over 25,000 visits.

Blue Sky also provides a volunteer program with a required 6 week peer training. Over 40 volunteers come to Blue Sky monthly.

The second program was the Supported Employment and Education Services (SEES). It is a collaborative partnership with the State Department of Rehabilitation, the Department of Behavioral Health and the Mental Health Services Act Workforce Education and Training Plan to provide vocational and educational services to individuals with psychiatric disabilities living in Fresno County. During the year ending in June the program served 448 unduplicated clients.

On June 28 members of the Mental Health Board traveled to Hanford where they attended a meeting of regional mental health board members and workers from county departments of behavioral health to share successes, failures, and good ideas. This is a follow-up to a meeting hosted several months ago in Fresno.

## Friant Ranch litigation *(continued from page 1)*

In another legal action, a petition for writ of mandate was filed on June 23. In comparison to the Friant Ranch lawsuit, this case is relatively simple, consisting of only one cause of action – non-compliance with CEQA. The CEQA violations pertain to the failure to prepare a subsequent EIR and the manner in which the County did or did not conduct an environmental assessment or **did or did not make appropriate CEQA findings**. The cost of filing this petition was a maximum of \$2,000, again split 50/50 with the Sierra Club. Although the Local Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter Board voted to file the petition, the national Sierra Club office in San Francisco did not approve filing the suit in time to sign on to the petition. As a result, an attempt will be made to add the Sierra Club's name to the petition at a later date.

**None of the monies involved in these two recent litigation activities was “new money.” The funds came from a litigation fund that was established to be used only for that purpose after the League won its lawsuit in the Copper River Ranch case a number of years ago.**

## Voter Services

by Liz Shields



Thanks to the many League members and their friends who helped to unfold ballots and answer the phones for the Elections Department for the June Primary election. In spite of the low voter turnout of 26.2% the number of vote-by-mail ballots enabled us to earn \$3,960 for the League. The check will be sent in early July. The Election Department expects to use two League volunteers for the phone bank at Kern Street for Thursday, Friday and Monday mornings and afternoons preceding the November 4 election and the full complement of volunteers on Election Day at the Warehouse. Again there will be mandatory training for the phone bank volunteers which is fully reimbursed by the Election Department. At the Warehouse they will begin unfolding ballots on October 24.

Both County Supervisorial races will require a runoff in November as will the Superior Judgeship and Fresno City Council District 1.

# Health Care Reform

by Dr. Richard Bertken

This week the Kaiser Family Foundation released data from a phone survey of purchasers of non-group health plans since the rollout of the ACA insurance exchanges. About two-thirds of those buying individual plans obtained ACA-compliant policies. Such plans cannot be canceled nor capped for insurance payments; the patients' annual out-of-pocket costs must be limited.

These provisions, intended by Congress to prevent bankruptcy from health care costs, increased the price of insurance. Congress took measures to make the insurance affordable: it limited the overhead of the insurers, instituted sliding-scale subsidies, and retained a range of plans with varying deductibles and copays. Given the status of the ACA as a leading polarizing political issue, the sales of ACA-compliant policies must be regarded as one early sign of success of the program.

Another is the percentage of ACA-insured who previously were uninsured: 57%. Over 70% of the previously uninsured policy-holders were motivated to get insurance because of awareness of the ACA-sponsored exchanges.

A very serious threat to the fiscal integrity of the ACA insurers is the risk that their new enrollees would be older and sicker, consuming a higher share of health care costs. This survey found no difference in the age distribution between the ACA and non-ACA-compatible plans. However, the ACA-compatible plan holders reported a three-fold higher rate of self-reported "fair or poor" health (17% vs 6%).

A majority of ACA plan holders report that their coverage is "excellent or good." However, 40% report that their monthly premiums are stressing their budget and half are concerned that, in spite of im-

proved protections against large costs, a major illness would threaten their financial survival.

These data are congruent with older data from the Massachusetts version of the ACA. The Urban Institute, supported by a number of health NGO's, studied patient satisfaction as well as health impacts of the universal health care plan in that state six years after its adoption. Uninsured status remained low at 6%, self-reported satisfaction with health plans was high, health status improved modestly, and emergency room visits slowly declined (similar findings were reported for the 26-and-under population nationally whose coverage under their parents' group plans was mandated by the ACA in 2012).

But the problem in Massachusetts remains affordability. Health insurance is widely perceived as too expensive, and cost is a major driver of opposition to the Massachusetts universal health care plan, which doubled in the six years after its adoption, from 13 to 27%. Cost control will be essential to the survival of universal health care.



**A woman is like a tea bag - you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.**

*Fleanor Roosevelt*

# Measure C monies under discussion

by Mary Savala

The City of Fresno’s proposal to amend Measure C to move Advanced Technology Reserves (ATR) and Rail Consolidation Funding to a program for city and county pot hole repair is moving through the committee and agency process. A survey to ascertain voter reaction to the proposal looks to be approved by the Fresno County Council of Governments. League has objected to the amendment on the grounds that the amendment is a categorical change of air quality and congestion mitigation programs to street and road maintenance and that a survey is not good public process.



Recently a new idea was thrown into the discussion giving an alternative proposal to the use of ATR funds. CSUF Department of Engineering is proposing to establish a Fresno County Transportation Institute and using ATR monies to research advance transportation solutions and improving air quality. Examples of research projects include the feasibility of creating a solar-powered automated transit network and travel management tools to increase modal shares of public transportation systems. The proposal has attracted some interest, particularly since it is research under the mantle of an institution of higher education and a local use of local tax money. Members will be informed of future developments.

## Water bond scheduled for November ballot

by Diane Merrill



Legislative deal-making regarding the water bond scheduled to be included on the November 2014 ballot seems to be centering around SB 848. LWCV recently took a position opposing SB 848 unless it is amended. The League’s objections are detailed in a June letter to the legislature centering around environmental protection, as well as fiscal accountability and selection criteria for funding for large infrastructure projects. On the LWVC website, a press release contains background information on the history, back to 2010, of this water bond process. As of June 23 LWVC is also following five other water bond measures as "bills of interest," but has not taken a position either for or against any of these bills.

# Transmission line policy

by Diane Merrill

The Central Valley Power Connect transmission line is proposed to be built from southwestern Fresno County to southern Madera County. It would be the first major transmission line built in Fresno County in over 30 years.

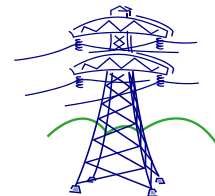
Project partners PG&E, MidAmerican Transmission, and Citizens Energy Corporation are asking for public input to develop alternative routes for the transmission line. LWV Fresno submitted comments referencing the LWV of California position on energy which are summarized below.

*Route the transmission line on or near agricultural lands that have been officially “retired” from agricultural production due to accumulation of selenium or other substances. This will help to direct large-scale solar projects away from productive agricultural land to marginal lands that are more appropriate for solar development.*

*To reduce electro-magnetic field exposure and to promote quality of life and equity with urbanized areas, avoid routing the transmission line in, or in close proximity to, rural communities. At the same time, site the electric infrastructure close enough so rural communities are not bypassed from the energy resources and infrastructure needed to support their communities and job opportunities.*

*Continue and expand efforts to provide increased community involvement particularly in areas where many residents’ primary language is other than English*

We are pleased that Citizens Energy plans to allocate 50 percent of its after-tax income from this project to local charitable initiatives.



*We're not old fashioned; we just like ice cream !!!*

Join us at the **Ice Cream Social**

**Tuesday, August 26, 7 p.m.**



*Ice Cream*

**\*Peterson Scholarship Winners\***

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**\*Silent Auction\*** (call Patty at 472-3018 to contribute an item)

*Ice Cream*

**\*Women's Equality Day Award to Lynne Ashbeck,**

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**Did we mention Ice Cream?**

# Transportation

by Stephenie Frederick



Following fifty-five days of public comment, the Fresno County of Governments (COG) staff submitted the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan to the Transportation Technical and Policy Advisory committees for approval on June 13. The RTP lays out a profile of publicly funded transportation projects proposed for construction in the County of Fresno over the next twenty-five years.

The RTP is now called the RTP-SCS because it includes an additional section called a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). The SCS offers a vision of Fresno County's future growth that ties together air quality, land use, and transportation issues. **This vision, if adhered to, would reach greenhouse-gas emissions goals set by the California Air Quality Board.**

## Several other documents accompanied the RTP-SCS:

Transportation Conformity Analysis, an assertion that transportation projects will not produce new air quality violations, worsen existing violations, or delay timely attainment of the national ambient air quality standards.

Federal Transportation Improvement Program, a four-year program that contains a list of all federally funded transportation-related projects as well as non-federal, regionally significant projects.

**Environmental Impact Report, which finds that implementation of the RTP/SCS could result in a long list of significant and unavoidable impacts to agricultural resources, air quality, biotic resources, geology and soils, and climate change, among many others.**

The TTC and PAC approved the documents without comment. The COG Policy Board was scheduled to approve the plan on June 26.

## Response to League's Comments on RTP-SCS

The COG staff responded in detail to the League's comments on the draft RTP-SCS. Staff noted that integration of measurable perform-

mance is already in process, and will enable the COG to track progress toward air-quality and other goals. At the League's recommendation, the scoring criteria will be included with the project list. For the next RTP-SCS, the COG staff will consider placing the policies section early in the documents, since it presumably guides all other content.

The COG staff made changes to the policy section that incorporated three principles promoted by the Community Equity Coalition, to which LWVF belongs, to seek to address the transportation needs of disadvantaged communities by (1) funding infrastructure planning; (2) conducting a needs assessment; (3) helping member agencies avoid or mitigate impacts of new transportation facilities on environmentally sensitive areas and natural resources. **In connection with (3), the COG Policy Board directed staff to set up a "well-balanced ad hoc committee to identify potential policies and actions to minimize the loss of farmland associated with construction of transportation facilities."**

Finally, the League was puzzled by the seeming lack of connection among all of the sections of the RTP-SCS. In its response, the COG staff laid out a "road map" of the connections that lead from the policies section to the action section to the actual project list. If the connections really exist, and policies really affect the scoring the choice of projects, this process should be made very clear in future editions of the RTP-SCS.





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