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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



Tuesday, March 24
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

Tuesday, April 28
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office



ANNUAL MEETING
LUNCHEON & SPEAKER
See Flyer and
Reservation Form
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Program Planning Selects Annual Priorities

by **Mary Perich**

Program priorities for the year were discussed and decided at the January 31 meeting which was attended by 26 members and organized by Program Planning Vice President Patty Campbell.

Local priorities selected are water, land use and transportation. Mental health and education will also continue to be in the forefront as these areas are monitored and reported on monthly by assigned directors. Focus on our priorities positions could include advocacy, Lunch & Learn events, and other activities to educate ourselves and the public.

Leading up to these decisions, directors and members explained the local positions and how they are being used. Consideration was given to determining whether changes were needed in local positions; it was decided that the current language in each of the positions should stand. Reporting on government and voter services were Liz Shields; Education, Kay Bertken; Natural Resources, Mary Savala; Transportation, Stephenie Frederick; Land Use, Radley Reep, and Water/Energy, Diane Merrill. Francine Farber submitted a written report on Mental Health.

Two suggested state studies will come up for a vote at the State Convention in San Diego. The studies to be considered are: 1) minimum wage (raising & maintaining a livable wage) and 2) death with dignity (death with end of life positions). The delegates will vote on each of these studies at the convention.

Our members decided that Higher Education is the only state study on which LWV Fresno will focus.

President's Message



We recently celebrated the January 9, 1859 birthday of Carrie Chapman Catt, an important date for all League members. Another date we celebrate is February 14, 1920, the date that Ms. Catt founded the League of Women Voters 95 years ago to “finish the fight.” Of course she was referring to the fight for women’s suffrage but other issues were involved as well. Included was the issue of the influence of the political machines and their seemingly endless supplies of money. Money in Politics: sounds familiar doesn’t it?

We have not been able to “finish the fight” on this issue as Ms. Catt had hoped. At a recent Federal Elections Commission hearing attended by LWVUS President MacNamara, one of the speakers, Sen. Bill Bradley, called big-money special interests “ants in the kitchen,” something you constantly battle but can never get rid of permanently.

Ms. Catt would be as devastated as we all were with the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision that unleashed the floodgates for money in politics. The 2014 election was the costliest midterm election in history with the Super Pacs spending more than \$600 million; many more millions entered political campaigns as dark money.

Even though the number of “ants in the kitchen” increased exponentially, the League will continue the fight. The LWVUS continues to lobby for reform, to pressure the FEC to enforce powers it already has to set more disclosure rules, and ultimately to join forces with other groups to pass a Constitutional Amendment to overturn *Citizens United*.

Local leagues are frequently asked to join the National League in its lobbying efforts and we pass the requests on to our members and hopefully many respond. At the LWVUS convention last summer a review of the Campaign Finance position and a study of the process to amend the Constitution were adopted. With a united front we may be able to drastically reduce the number of “ants in the kitchen.”

Nyla

Member News

Please note changes in your roster

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ANNUAL MEETING
PAGE 7
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Mailing Address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 74, No. 3 Editor: Francine Farber



Brian Marshall, the new transportation director of Fresno Area Express (FAX), faces difficult challenges.

First, he must master the dynamics of the current system's personnel, bus routes, ridership, and funding. He has ridden the routes, studied the funding, and conversed with drivers, clients and elected officials.

Second, Marshall intends to energize FAX and create a culture of first-rate service. Cap and trade funding will provide the dollars needed to add more drivers and buses to the several FAX routes that are overcrowded.

Third, bus rapid transit (BRT) will soon be implemented, first along Blackstone and Ventura-Kings Canyon Avenues, and later along Shaw. He must remold FAX's routes and schedules to create meaningful connections with the BRT buses.

Fourth, high-speed rail will be coming to Fresno; connections must be established with the HSR station, which will be located at the present site of the Greyhound station on H Street.

Fifth, Marshall must deal with a nation-wide problem that is intensified in Fresno: lack of mechanics who can repair and maintain modern engines that are built around complex electronics. To gain mechanics, FAX may find it necessary to mentor high-school students and help them learn the skills needed to ensure a long career at the transit agency.

Finally, ingenuity of the highest order is needed to provide public transportation in a sprawling city like Fresno that was designed only for cars. Local circulators, fixed-route taxis, viable carpooling, jitneys, app-based informal transport like Uber – all kinds of innovative forms of transportation could be used to supplement traditional transit and fill in the gaps, making it possible for many more people, whether they're transit dependent or choice riders, to travel by "public" transportation.

Partnerships offer potential as well; for example, FAX could offer transit service to Fresno City College, making a proposed new parking structure unnecessary; part of the parking-structure funds would support the transit routes, and the college would save millions of dollars.

Another example of innovative thinking: since funds for capital purchases are more readily available than funds for drivers and operations, FAX could buy vans for organizations that need to transport small numbers of people to special destinations; instead of trying to operate expensive and unproductive transit routes, FAX would merely supply fuel for the lower-cost vans.

Riding FAX Route 28

On February 11 Mary Savala and I rode FAX Route 28, which has the highest ridership of all FAX routes, from beginning (Shaw and Willow) to end (Kings Canyon at Winery). Along many portions of the route, there was standing room only. Route 28 serves Fresno State, Fashion Fair, Fresno City College, Downtown Fresno, Fresno County Behavioral Health, Fresno County Fairgrounds, Fresno Pacific University, and Walmart on Kings Canyon.

Student Unit

by Diane Blair

The Student Unit has agreed to assist Liz Shields with the LWVC Higher Education study. The goal of the study is to facilitate consensus on a position related to higher education that will include the state's CSU and UC systems. The research areas include funding, affordability, preparedness, equity, and barriers and opportunities.

The student members plan to develop a survey in collaboration with Liz to be distributed to students on campus, and they will also host a town hall meeting for students to share their stories and experiences with the League.

In addition to the Higher Education study, the Student Unit will also host a "Meet and Greet the Candidates" in the Free Speech Area to help facilitate awareness and student engagement in the upcoming Associated Students (ASI) elections on campus.

Education

by Kay Bertken



Fresno Unified has been holding meetings with parents, students, community members, district employees and employee unions to develop the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) —a report of district goals, priorities and actions mandated by the new state Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Respondents were asked to prioritize various initiatives the District might take to address student needs. The results will be incorporated in the LCAP and the budget proposals that will go before the Board of Education in March and April, with a public hearing on both at the end of May.

Budget News—Good and Bad

Preliminary budget presentations this month revealed the new LCFF state allocations to FUSD based on its high numbers of students in poverty, English learners, foster and homeless youth. The District had anticipated an increase of \$32 million in its funding. The Governor's January budget actually would result in an additional \$55 million to Fresno. However, the good news of the additional dollars was accompanied by the bad news of the Governor's plan to distribute the State's unfunded pension liability to local school districts. Fresno Unified's share of that liability is an additional \$38 million in obligations. The District is left with \$17 million in new funds that can be programmed in its 2015-2016 budget.

Group Proposes District Split

For the last few years, a community group calling itself "Reform Fresno Unified" has been working on a plan to split Fresno Unified into smaller districts. It currently envisions a new district including the Bullard, Fresno High, Edison and Roosevelt areas with Fresno Unified retaining the Hoover, McLane and Sunnyside areas. At the February 11 Board meeting, Board consultants reviewed the State Education Code and legislative requirements for reorganizing a school district. The requirements are strict, including hearings at the county and state level that would investigate the financial and educational impacts before the proposal could ever be brought before voters. At the hearings, any proposed district split would have to demonstrate adequate enrollments; substantial com-

munity identity and an

Water News

by Diane Merrill



The LWVF continued to support the City of Fresno's proposed water infrastructure project.

The Fresno Bee ran an op ed piece by LWVF describing why the project is needed to provide a reliable and safe water supply and comply with state water quality and groundwater management laws and regulations. We urged the city to pursue additional funding for residential water conservation programs and to help low income families pay for increases in their water bills as the project goes forward.

LWVF joined City Council President Oliver Baines and the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, the Fresno Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, building and trade association and union members, the Fresno Taxpayers Association and others in a press conference supporting the water project.

On February 5, the City Council concluded the Proposition 218 process in which water users may protest the proposed water rate increase to pay for the infrastructure project. The number of protest ballots was less than the number needed to stop the rate increases. The Council met on February 26 to decide whether to go forward with the water project.

Meanwhile, the City has identified \$ 1 million in funding to assist low income households with their water bills. This assistance will be limited to low income households residing in single-family homes. The City also announced that it has qualified for a \$ 195 million low interest loan from the State of California to help pay for the project.

equitable division of property and facilities; it would not promote segregation; would not disrupt educational programs; would not impose significant facilities costs or cause significant negative financial impacts on the district; and was being proposed for "purposes other than [to] significantly increase property values."

The Board consultants criticized the proposal for not addressing all of these issues. The Reform spokesmen felt strongly that the issue should go before Fresno voters.





At its February meeting the Mental Health Board heard a discussion of the Mental Health Services Act which refuted the recent claim by the Little Hoover Commission that there was no available data upon which to judge the programs funded by the Act. Funds come from the so-called “Millionaire’s Tax.” About half of the available funds were used for programs which accomplished:

a 58% reduction in homelessness

a 39% reduction in hospitalizations

a 47% decrease in incarcerations

The Board also heard outcome reports on two housing programs. The Stasis Center is a permanent supportive housing program funded by HUD which provides housing for individuals who were formerly homeless. Twenty-five apartments are available for clients of the Department of Behavioral Health. The program includes on-site training for individuals to learn daily living skills and how to access resources to help with return to work or school. Recreation, reminders for medical appointments and transportation are also available.

The Shelter Plus Care Program provides rental assistance through vouchers to homeless individuals and families with disabilities. There is no cost to the Department, which provides a match via the delivery of mental health services including helping clients complete paperwork and case management. Services are individualized.

A brochure was distributed about MAP, the Multi-Agency Access Program resulting from the on-going efforts to form a Resource Center. It is an integrated intake process connecting individuals to supportive services who face housing, substance abuse and/or mental illness challenges. The Poverello House is the first MAP intake location. Other MAP sites are in process.

The Inpatient Adolescent Psychiatric Facility is in the works to open in April.

The LWVC committee charged with developing the Higher Education Study has produced draft reports on the five areas of research: funding, affordability, preparedness, equity and barriers and opportunities for success. Study guides, leaders’ guides and policy type statements will be distributed to League members in August.

It is hoped that League chapters will be able to conduct their studies during the fall and submit responses to the consensus questions by early 2016 in order to produce a position statement for Board approval by August 2016. Some of the findings so far have been eye opening.

Due to budgetary constraints in CA’s ‘boom and bust’ state budgets, colleges have put caps on enrollments, increased tuition, and imposed student fees to cover gaps in state funding. Currently only 8% of 18-29 year olds in California attend 4-year colleges, second lowest in the nation. Students wishing to transfer from junior colleges are having a more difficult time finding a place.

Between 2008 and 2014, tuition at UC and CSU universities rose approximately 50%. Estimates for financial aid per student averaged \$9,500 to \$10,500 leaving a shortfall of \$5,000 to \$10,000, depending on living arrangements, to be picked up by loans, parent support or work. Graduating students leave with approximately \$18,000 - \$20,000 in debt.

Lack of preparedness for college is a great impediment to college completion. About half of students entering less selective four-year colleges require remediation, as do 75% of students enrolling in an open access community college.

If you would like to participate in the study planning process please contact me by email (elizs@mail.fresnostate.edu) or phone 559-298-5183.

Health Care

by Richard Bertken, M.D.



The veteran journalist Steven Brill has written an engaging contribution to the literature on the Affordable Care Act. His book, America's Bitter Pill, provides a deeply researched look into the numerous motivators, shapers, and constrainters of the ACA. He explains multiple failures (many politically unavoidable) of the ACA, most notably the initially inept Health-care.gov website, which required fixing by a gallant group of high-profile computer tech volunteers.

The commitment of these techies is a counterpoint to the enormous power of special interest groups, who in Brill's book behave as yet another wing of government, one unconstrained by a pledge to the public good. All our key public servants engaged in the formulation of the ACA understood that they must navigate around these leviathans of health care. Health insurers and pharmaceutical and health device providers, among others, continuously translate fiscal power into political power through campaign financing, now less constrained and transparent and more important than at any other time in American history.

So the founders of the ACA nar-

rowed the focus of the act: get coverage for those un-

able to get it and minimize the risk of medical bankruptcies. Cost control of medical practice and of medications, consolidation and simplification, health technology and best practices research, tort reform, national health records, medical education funding reform, manpower expansion—these all would have to wait.

As a result, the ACA actually has added another system to the existing nine (or so, disregarding state and local variations) that make up U.S. health care, without long-term strategies for major structural economies. We now have a bigger Medicaid program (in 29 states) and a set of health insurance exchanges offering policies that provide real financial protection to the uninsured and uninsurable. But these policies are sufficiently different from traditional commercial health insurance that they expand the complexity of our overall system. The main difference to the consumers is the inadequacy of provider networks in many regions of the nation.

Because the many good things that ACA-compatible plans must do are costly to health insurers, payments offered to providers have been lower than normal, and fewer doctors and health care groups have

signed on. In underserved areas like Fresno County, Covered California patients often experience long delays in finding and scheduling primary and specialist care. The result: no reductions in emergency room usage or hospital admissions.

Brill finds reason to be optimistic that market forces in some metropolitan areas are driving the emergence of large, comprehensive health systems that then merge with insurance plans. This reduces incentives to provide excessive care and increases the bargaining power of health systems in bidding for currently overpriced services, drugs, and medical devices. The remaining issue in this equation is how the quality of care will be assured.

DMV under voting fire

Since the passage of the National Voter Registration Act in 1993, the Department of Motor Vehicles by law must offer Californians the opportunity to register to vote. Shockingly, 20 years later DMV has yet to offer easy voter registration opportunities to Californians, and people who do register at DMV sometimes don't even end up on our voter rolls. Recently the ACLU of California on behalf of the LWVC and others who have encountered problems when attempting to register to vote or update their voter registration at DMV, sent a letter to the Secretary of State, DMV and the Governor demanding that DMV live up to its responsibilities to millions of Californians who want to participate in our democracy.

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