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The *Fresno* **VOTER**



May 14-17
LWVC Convention
San Diego
See President's Message
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Tuesday, May 26
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

Tuesday, June 23
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

Friday, July 10
Annual Retreat
Details to Follow

Soria speaks to League at 74th Annual Meeting

by Stephenie Frederick

Esmeralda Soria, recently elected Fresno city council member of District 1, informed about 40 LWVF members at the annual meeting on April 11 that she was jumping into her new role without hesitation.



Esmeralda Soria

A graduate of UC Berkeley and Stanford Law School, Soria has returned to the Central Valley with valuable political experience at state and national levels. In addition to other roles, she was project director for the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, as well as a policy adviser to state assembly member Henry T. Perea. She grew up in the Central Valley, raised by immigrant farm-workers who urged her to educate herself and then give back to society. Now she has returned to the local arena, where the real work of implementing state and national policies takes place.

Soria told the audience that good advocacy is important at all levels, but in reality all politics is local. If there is no local leader to carry out state and national policies at the local level, nothing happens. Her campaign for city council was not easy; the election was contested, but she won because of a strong grassroots campaign and the help of young people of whom she is very proud.

Two of her initial actions at city hall focused on revamping facilities to meet the needs of parents and children. Similarly, Soria recommended seven local women in honor of Women's History Month and highlighted their achievements before the city council.

The most pressing issue, she believes, is to involve young people in political matters. Voter turn-out rates are dismal; elected officials must give voters a

(continued on page 4)

President's Message



The LWVC will hold its biennial convention this year in San Diego from May 14-17. It is very important that our local league is represented to have input and to learn what other local leagues are doing and what our state league is addressing. We are sending two voting delegates—myself and Bill Jordan—who will attend all of the plenary sessions and also will attend the workshops and caucuses that hold particular significance to our league. A third member, Jacquie Canfield, will attend as a nominee for the position of treasurer on the state board.

Workshops and caucuses will provide opportunities to be informed on various important issues including: a four-hour session on the future of *Voter Service*, including a discussion of the changing landscape of voter information and share strategies and tools that will help us reach our goals; a two-part workshop on *Communication* during which participants will learn and practice new techniques and approaches to presentations and outreach; and *Democracy in Dialogue: Leading Our Communities* (and students) through Civic/Civil Engagement.

Caucuses include: *Making Democracy Work For More Voters in California*. It will address how to end gerrymandering, elect more women and represent more voters; *California Water Update*: This will feature updates on a variety of water issues of pressing importance, such as the Water Bond, last year's groundwater legislation, and efforts to alter CEQA processes for surface storage projects; *Advocacy for California Climate Legislation* will include a review of bills now in the legislature and strategize on how to advocate for passage; *Raising the Minimum Wage/Living Wage* is a State League issue for emphasis. LWVUS decided that state and local leagues could use the LWVUS position on Basic Human Needs to address minimum wage issues providing that these leagues research what is an appropriate wage for a particular area.; *California Immigrants & Access to Healthcare*. LWVC has endorsed SB4 that could make Calif. the first state to eliminate the Affordable Care Act's discrimination against undocumented immigrants. We will discuss how to support SB4.

We are looking forward to learning all we can, using our votes wisely and representing our members well.

Nyla

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

Mailing Address: 1345 Bulldog Lane, Fresno, CA 93710

Volume 74, No. 5 Editor: Francine Farber

Member News

Please note changes in
your roster



This month a generous donation
was received from

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We are now a 501 (c) (3) so all dues and donations are tax deductible and also much appreciated. Make checks out to LWVF and send to

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Read All About It!!!

**The minutes of our
74th annual meeting
are posted on –line
at our web site
Lwvfresno.org**

Health Care

by Richard Bertkken, M.D.



The bottom half of page two of the Saint Patrick's Day Fresno Bee was devoted to an ad praising a local congressman for "Protecting Access to Cancer Treatments and Critical Medicines for Seniors." This was a surprising political ad for a congressman who easily won his seat in 2014 and likely will win again in 2016. This ad tells an important story about the challenges facing health care reform.

The back story is all about how much Medicare B reimburses physicians for drugs given by intravenous infusion or other modes of injection. Beginning in the mid-90's, infusion centers sprung up by the thousands, fueled by profits from selling drugs at "wholesale" prices that did not reflect deeply discounted prices offered to physicians. These discounts, often graded according to volume of use, were drug-makers' way to encourage use (and overuse) of their products. More than a decade went by before CMS (Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services) caught on and the Department of Justice won major suits against several offending pharmaceutical firms. Payments were scaled back to the CMS's best estimates of actual sale prices plus a generous 6% for physicians' overhead—procurement and inventory expenses. At the same time, payments for the actual professional services of infusion were increased. Still, many of the smallest infusion centers could not remain profitable because of a low volume of patients.

The sequester of 2014 cut government expenditures across the board, lowering the drug reimbursement to actual sale price plus 4%; the President's proposed budget would cut this to 3%. The cuts would result in further consolidation of infusion centers and possibly reduced drug utilization. Whether this would hurt patients more than help the ailing Medicare budget is

a complex issue. Are some expensive infusions actually providing meaningful benefit to patients? Should physicians sell drugs for profit instead of receiving higher pay for their complex professional services? And should Medicare, currently enjoined from bargaining for drugs, use its purchasing power to get better prices for drugs? The Veterans Health Care system pays 30-50% less for branded drugs through competitive bidding.

The Bee ad was placed by The Alliance for Patient Access, a 501.C4 non-profit self-identified as a national network of physicians but closely aligned with pharmaceutical interests. Two of the co-endorsers of the ad are consortia of pharmaceutical and medical device companies. These advocacy organizations with feel-good names are just a few of a staggering number of health care agencies lobbying Congress and the public, often using "dark money," to mold our beleaguered health care system to suit their needs.

Student Unit

by Diane Blair

On April 21 the Student Unit moderated a Town Hall event in support of the California League's study on public higher education. Students participated in small group discussions related to their experiences with funding their education, registering for courses, on-line education, college preparedness, and cultural diversity on campus. In addition to the Town Hall event, the Student Unit also developed an on-line survey addressing these same issues that will be distributed university-wide



Diane Blair (far right) with Student Unit members as they hosted a campus "Meet and Greet" for candidates for FSU student government



Soria at Annual Meeting

(continued from page 1)

First, imagine you have just learned that your teenager has severe mental health issues and needs to be placed in a psychiatric facility. Next, imagine you are then told that the nearest appropriate facility for someone his or her age is 150 to 250 miles away. Devastating, right? Well, for many years Fresno County parents have had to deal with both a stressful diagnosis and the equally stressful geographic problem.

But no more. On April 6 the Central Star Youth Psychiatric Facility had its grand opening ceremonies at Kings Canyon and Cedar Avenues on the campus that is occupied by a number of facilities under contract from the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health.

The remodeled 7100 square foot locked facility will be able to house 16 youth ages 12-17 who are in acute psychiatric crisis. There are nine double rooms, each with a tiled bathroom, a kitchen to prepare meals plus a room with a refrigerator and microwave, a shaded outdoor courtyard with a basketball hoop, a computer room with 5 computers and a printer, and a large common room with various seating and table groupings. The chairs are throw-proof, meaning that an average adult would have difficulty even moving them away from the table. One wall boasts a 9 or 10 foot square chalk board for spontaneous messages. The sleeping rooms have names in English Spanish and Hmong. A few colorful murals enliven walls in the high-ceilinged common room.

Clients will be moved through five phases:

Admission: While under previous circumstances a teenager might be sent to a distant facility while strapped down in an ambulance, and far away from his family, now the process available locally should be less stressful.

Engagement: Staff members will find a way to work with each client, not necessarily an easy task with any teenager, and build on their strengths.

Learning: Clients will be helped to understand the triggers that set off serious episodes, and learn coping strategies and tools to deal with life's stressors.

reason to go to the polls. Soria has engaged two students as interns in her office. She is creating a youth commission that will encourage youthful district representatives to recommend policies to elected officials.

"If you are not at the table," she tells constituents, "you will be on the menu." Soria meets often with her constituents (and during her campaign held "Soria Sidewalk hours"). Her constituents are most concerned about public safety, property crimes, and the presence of homeless people.

Before her election to the city council, Soria researched the water issues that affect the Central Valley so deeply. After taking office, she pushed through water-rates assistance for low-income residents and persuaded fellow council members to base the size of the proposed surface-water-treatment plant on how much surface water the city would actually receive.

Asked about the city's General Plan, Soria stated that she supports infill development, and noted that sprawl makes work more difficult for the city's first responders. Parks, too, are important. Also crucial is creating an able, educated labor pool to attract businesses to a diversified economy in Fresno. Mentioning that the city would soon update its development code, Soria said she feels encouraged by the city administration's commitment to Fresno's downtown and older neighborhoods.

Stabilizing: Clients will be helped to consolidate the gains made in a relatively short time – most stays are envisioned to be a couple of weeks.

Linkage: When released, clients and their families will be linked to aftercare and other support services to help them maintain their gains and hopefully not require further hospitalization.

The facility will also be available to clients from other counties when beds are available





Voter Services



LWVF supports HS Voter Ed Week

The LWVF was proud to support a resolution before the Fresno County Board of Supervisors on April 21 designating the last two weeks of April as High School Voter Education Weeks.

The County Resolution, sponsored by Supervisor Brian Pacheco and written by Registrar of Voters Brandi Orth, follows State Assembly Bill #1817 (approved by Governor Brown in July, 2014) designating two weeks in April, as well as two weeks in September, as high school voter education weeks. These actions are an attempt to boost California's dismally small youth electorate. A study by the California Civic Engagement Project at UC Davis found that only 8.2 % of 18-24 year olds in California voted in the November, 2014 election. The numbers were no different in Fresno County.

During May, volunteers from the League will join organizers from *Mi Familia VOTA* to register eligible high school voters in many of the County's 35 high schools. By presenting to senior students in high school government classes, we hope to see a positive change in the numbers of young voters.

Editor's Note: *A team of six LWVF members has come forward to fill in the gaps left by Liz' departure from our Board. They are: Adua Butticci, Susan Goldman, Murray Farber, Marianne Kast, Mary Perich and Jane Worsley. If you would like to be included on the team please contact Marianne Kast at fourkasts@gmail.com*

Liz Shields says Goodbye

My heartfelt thanks to the many, many League members who supported Voter Services activities over the past 10 years when I was Vice President for Voter Services. You have all helped to balance our operating budgets by volunteering to unfold ballots and answer the phones for Fresno County Election Department around election time. Last year alone we raised almost \$9,000. You have helped to register high school and college age voters. You have spoken to groups about the propositions and hosted candidate forums as we educate voters on the issues. Thank you for the many hours that you gave so generously to the League.

This non-election year is a good time for me to step away from the position. My husband and I plan to travel more while we are still able and to spend more time with our grandkids (and their parents, of course) who live in Albuquerque.

This year League members will be registering high school seniors in Fresno Unified, Clovis Unified and Fresno County schools. A recent state law has permitted school administrators to appoint one or more students as voter outreach coordinators which will help facilitate registration efforts as well as other voter educational projects in the high schools.



Pictured at the Board of Supervisors meeting are (back row) Board of Supervisors (front row right to left) Jim Yovino, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, LWVF member Marianne Kast, County Clerk Brandi Orth, and two high school students



The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32) directs the California Air Resources Board (ARB) to use multi-year programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout the state. The goal? Reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

An important part of this plan is the state's Cap & Trade program, which began in 2012. Under Cap & Trade, permits to emit greenhouse gases are sold at quarterly auctions and reserve sales. The legislature and governor funnel the proceeds to state agencies and programs.

Cap & Trade funding is organized into three categories: (1) Transportation & Sustainable Communities. (2) Clean Energy and Energy-Efficiency. (3) Natural Resources and Waste Diversion.

Transportation & Sustainable Communities has five subcategories:

A. Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities. The 2015 program has \$130 million for land use, affordable housing, transportation, and land preservation that support infill and concentrated development. Two projects from the Fresno region – Hotel Fresno and Fancher Creek Town Center—have been invited to submit full applications

Fancher Creek Town Center is a large-scale, transformative, mixed-use project located at the recently completed eastern terminus of Highway 180 in Fresno, California. An integral part of the City of Fresno's general plan, the project embodies the theme of "Live, Work and Play" by providing all the living, working, shopping, and entertainment amenities desired by today's families and businesses.

Fresno City Council approved a 1.8 million dollar loan to restore Hotel Fresno. The new owners will spend \$21 million to restore and transform Hotel Fresno into a 70 unit apartment building, along with a common area, and office and retail on the main floor.

B. High-speed Rail. \$250 million for planning, design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction of HSR's initial operating segment.

C. Transit and Intercity Rail. \$25 million to modernize California's transit and intercity, commuter and urban rail systems.

D. Low-Carbon Transit Operations. \$25 million to reduce emissions and improve mobility, particularly for disadvantaged communities.

E. Air Quality Improvement and Low-Carbon Transportation. \$230 million for advanced technology and clean-transportation incentive programs. Also eligible for funding are pilot programs on car sharing in disadvantaged communities.

Note that the Cap & Trade amounts shown are for the entire state in 2015. It appears that the allocation for Transportation & Sustainable Communities will not contribute much to the battle against climate change, at least not in 2015.

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anniversary gala

April, 2016

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Education News

by Kay Bertken



**NEXT BOARD MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MAY 13**

Last month the Fresno Unified trustees heard an update on Measure Q projects and funding. Because of a 14% decline in the assessed value of property in Fresno since the passage of the bond, Measure Q will not be able to keep its promise that tax rates would not rise and also raise the entire \$280 million imagined. The estimate given to the Board was that \$39 million dollars worth of projects will not be funded. That number is tentative and could change given recent increases in assessments.

New bond for 2016

The report on Q funding shortfalls included an evaluation of construction funding prospects from the State. The governor is opposing the possibility of a school bond on the next ballot, eliminating the possibility of more matching funds or supplemental funding help from the State. Given the continuing facilities needs of Fresno Unified, the Board voted unanimously to pursue another bond measure in 2016 to replace a retiring bond.

LWVF supports career/technical ed

Perhaps in response to the possibility of a new bond, Trustee Ashjian published an opinion piece in the Bee, advocating for increased career technical education (CTE) in FUSD in the form of a special school. The League responded to the opinion piece in a letter to the editor cautioning against the return of tracking. The League does support increased vocational education options for our students, and we have been watching and advocating for increased CTE for several years. We will continue to follow that discussion in the community and support increased options of all kinds for Fresno students.

The Board continues to discuss budget development for the 2015-2016 school year. Staff has proposed increases in early learning funding to expand capacity. Some current sites will transition to full day programs. The Housing Authority has offered some new sites to the District. They will be vetted for compliance with State facilities requirements. The Packard Foundation has given the District a ten year grant for \$500,000 per year to partner with other agencies to serve children 6 weeks to 3rd grade. The focus on the very young would develop and evaluate new approaches for training care givers and provide support to teen parents.

Civic Learning Task Force

We attended the inaugural meeting and will continue to participate in the California Civic Learning Partnership of Fresno County. The group-- representing the legal, business, and education sectors of our community-- met to discuss local implementation of the recommendations of the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning. That Task Force was convened in 2013 by the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and Tom Torlakson, the Superintendent of Public Education, to address a "crisis in our democracy" -- low voter turnout and poor factual understanding of our form of government.

The Task Force Blueprint for Action outlines steps to revive significant civic education for K-12 students, including active participation in community issues as well as formal education in the nature of our democracy. We will report on local initiatives by this group.


We are grateful to our sponsors for their support in "Making Democracy Work."
 League members who wish to be sponsors or to secure sponsorship for us, may contact Francine Farber at 226-5455

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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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