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Blong Xiong Cites City Problems at League Annual Meeting

By Murray Farber 226-5455

If you didn't know Fresno has lots of problems, First District City Councilman Blong Xiong has a long list for you. In fact, he shared it with the League of Women Voters at its annual meeting on April 25. And some of the almost 40 members attending targeted even more areas during the Q&A.

While there are some hopes that allocations from Sacramento will help the city, Xiong placed a big asterisk over this remedy since a statewide referendum on May 19 will determine a series of approaches to meet California's budget crisis. He noted that if the referendum fails, creative solutions – including increased parking fees – might be required.

Meanwhile Xiong said, "The city is trimming costs to be more efficient. But there is only so much we can do; we need the state budget to help us. However we can't wait until the referendum; we have to work on our own budget."

Turning to the current water crisis, he cited the valley's needs for irrigation in order to continue providing produce for the nation and for international markets. On another topic, he praised Mayor Ashley Swearingen for her serious effort to stimulate local development. Xiong commented that attracting major developers is important for providing jobs; there are still small businesses that form the backbone of the community. He also warned that the city is the backbone of the valley and local efforts trickle down to the towns, some of which have 40 percent unemployment. "We have to be stabilizing force. Imagine if Fresno hit 40 percent."

Responding to a question about the shortfall in finances for the Metropolitan Museum, he said, "We are trying to find a big donor. The arts are important and cannot be measured just in dollars. However, we still need accountability."



Continuing on the city's role in recreation, Xiong said Donald Trump had asked "for the kitchen sink" in negotiating to build the Running Horse golf course. "I liked him but not at the risk of a financial burden. It was simple for me to say, 'No.'"

Asked to compare relations between the Council and the current and former mayors, Xiong said, "Mayor Autry wasn't necessarily there but we had a good relationship. Mayor Swearingen is more engaged with a better feel for day-to-day operations. The previous mayor was into the bigger picture with the governor."

In other areas, he said:

*The city needs more strategies for dealing with the homeless.

*City residents will get water meters in 2013.

*Changing the city charter to increase the number of districts faces a battle especially because of the cost in tough economic times.

Editor's note: Mayor Ashley Swearingen, the scheduled speaker, had to withdraw in order to go to Washington, D.C. Councilman Xiong graciously agreed to address the League, noting that he had often relied on League expertise.

League of Women Voters Fresno

IS ON THE WEB

<http://Fresno.ca.lwvnet.org>

Calendar

Tuesday, May 12

Mini-Grant Expo
Kremen Center, 3-5 p.m.

May 15 -17, Friday through Sunday

State Convention
Long Beach Marriott

May 19, Election Day

Wednesday, May 20

Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m. League Office

President's Message

Two weeks ago I received one of the first copies of the County's incredibly handsome Voluntary Preschool Master Plan. This is a 68-page glossy, four-color volume delineating two, five and seven-year goals during which the county hopes to accomplish the major components of the preschool program. A few days later, I received a copy of the State Preschool Yearbook published annually by the National Institute for Early Education Research.



This gives me the opportunity to compare Fresno's preschool status with that of California and the other 49 states. California is not one of the top ten states serving four-year olds. You might be surprised to learn that among these top ten, Georgia, South Carolina, Oklahoma and Maryland surpass us in the percent of youngsters being served by state-funded pre-schools. On the other hand, twelve states have no state-funded programs for pre-school age children.

The good news is that last year enrollment increased by more than 108,000 children. Almost one million four-year-olds attended state-funded programs. The bad news is that in most states, the level of funding per child reported from all sources appears to be too low for programs to meet ten benchmarks that have been set for high quality. These benchmarks include the following:

- TEACHER HAS A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
- TEACHER HAS SPECIALIZED TRAINING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
- TEACHER'S ASSISTANT HAS A CERTIFICATE IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT
- STAFF RECEIVES AT LEAST 15 HOURS OF IN-SERVICE TRAINING ANNUALLY
- PROGRAMS FOLLOW EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS
- CLASS SIZE IS 20 OR LOWER
- RATIO OF ADULTS TO STUDENTS IS 1-10 OR BETTER
- SCREENING AND REFERRAL PROCESS IS IN PLACE FOR CHILDREN WHO APPEAR TO HAVE DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS
- AT LEAST ONE MEAL IS SERVED PER DAY
- SITE VISITS TO MONITOR ADHERENCE TO STATE STANDARDS

California state-funded preschools meet only four of these ten benchmarks, and California ranks 20th in spending out of the 50 states. It spends \$3607 annually per child in state pre-schools, compared with over \$10,000 for each pre-school child by New Jersey.

Fresno County's plan was initiated under the leadership of the LWVF when we convened Community Conversations regarding the future of preschool education in Fresno County starting in 2005. The County, the Packard Foundation and the First Five Commission in Fresno picked up the ball and have provided the fiscal backing to write this Master Plan with the leadership of consultant Karen Hill Scott. Our plan involves goals for program quality and monitoring, articulation and coordination with K-12 institutions, parent and community engagement, and workforce and professional development. The major components will be implemented over a seven year period, with emphasis placed first on creating and implementing access for children who reside in school district areas with the lowest state test scores.

The long-range goal is that within 8 years after a complete implementation of the current plan, Fresno County will:

- PROVIDE ALL CHILDREN WITH ACCESS TO EARLY EDUCATION
- CLOSE THE SCHOOL READINESS GAP
- ACHIEVE HIGHER FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION
- IMPROVE K-12 STUDENT PERFORMANCE
- BUILD A PREPARED EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY
- RANK HIGHER AS A FAVORABLE CITY IN WHICH TO LIVE AND WORK IN CALIFORNIA

Fresno citizens will not have to pay taxes to support pre-school. Instead, funds will be cobbled together from a number of sources including federal stimulus money, state funds and local government funding, together with sponsorship money from foundations and the business world.

Access to preschool will, of course, continue to be voluntary, so that parents will be able to choose from government-funded programs, private, non-profit, for-profit and faith-based preschools. And the option will remain for parents not to send their children to preschool, although in the minds of many educators that is the least desirable choice.

Francine

VOTER SERVICES REPORT

By Liz Shields

ASI Elections

Our volunteers assisted with the student elections at Fresno State on April 21 – 23. We had a limited role this year monitoring the laptop computers that students could use to cast their votes at four locations on campus; no verification of IDs, no ballot counting. We will be paid \$500 for our time.

Mini-Grant Expo

We will use the atrium in the Kremen School of Education and Human Development for the exposition of the mini-grant projects on May 12 from 4- 5:30 pm. **The projects are funded by our member, Bette Peterson, from the estate of her late husband, Robert Billings, with money to be used for projects to enhance public education about the U.S. Constitution.** A committee of League members and administrators from Fresno Unified and the Fresno County Office of Education, as well as Judge Hilary Chittick, designed the mini-grant competition which provided \$500 to each project winner. The recipients will bring evidence of their project to the Expo to demonstrate their success. Refreshments will be served.

State-Wide Election

The Elections Department has asked us to assist with the processing of the mail-in-vote ballots starting on Tuesday, May 12 and continuing until Friday, May 22, and with staffing the phone banks on Election Day, May 19. Volunteers will be recruited soon.

Easy Voter Guide

Easy Voter Guides -- 2000 English language and 1000 Spanish language -- have been ordered for public distribution.

NATURAL RESOURCES

By Mary Savala

Sidewalks

Lee Brand, Fresno City Councilman for District 2, has been holding a series of meetings to formulate a text amendment to resolve the so-called ambiguities in the city policy regarding sidewalks for new developments in the City of

Fresno. I have been arguing with Staff, BIA, developers, and Ed Eames from the disability community about the requirements for sidewalks on both sides of the streets in gated communities. Next meeting is May 6 at a gated development at Copper River Ranch. Good news is that public works and planning staff seem to be sticking to their guns about the importance of pedestrian safety and access.

Farmland Trust

Disbursement of League settlement funds to establish a land trust for holding farm land easements in Fresno County remains stalled until the San Joaquin Rangeland Trust submits its proposal for the funding.

SB 375

I will be attending an all day workshop hosted by the Local Government Commission on implementing SB375 in Fresno on May 7. SB375 is a new California law to cut green house gases through land use planning and transportation funding incentives for local government. I hope that a work plan for League's involvement in SB375 implementation will be coming out of that education event. Workshop is still open to others should anyone like to attend. Call me for details.



STUDENT UNIT

By Diane M. Blair

ASI Elections

The Student unit assisted with the promotion of the campus elections. Our primary focus was educating voters about the new on-line voting system. They also worked with the ASI Elections Commissioner to pass out informational brochures throughout the elections process.

They were also available to help the League staff the on-campus booths during the elections process. The Elections Commissioner had indicated they could work the polling places and still vote in the election.

The *Collegian*, the student newspaper, hosted a debate on April 18 that was also available for viewing through its web site. We were hoping some members of the group would be present at the debate, but it is not clear if the taping of the debate was open to the student body.

Ellie Bluestein Wins Lipton Award

This year's recipient of the Werner Lipton Advocacy Award presented at our Annual Meeting was Ellie Bluestein. As soon as her name was mentioned at a recent Board meeting where possible nominees were being discussed, she was decided upon as our recipient by immediate and loud acclamation.



Ellie is a 45-year Fresno resident who has made a life-long commitment to social change. The Lipton Award is just the latest in a long series of awards that have recognized her passion for peace and justice on a local, national and international level. She started the local Women's International League of Peace and Freedom in 1964 in Fresno; she has been involved in working for better health care, education, human relations and civil rights.

She was the first recipient of the Carl and Esther Robinson Award for the Outstanding Advocate for the Common Good; the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. award; the Fresno Free College Foundation Free Speech Award; the Indonesian Chinese American Network for kindness and concern to the Chinese People of Indonesia; the Center for Nonviolence Way of Peace Award; and the Community Recognition Award from the Fresno Human Relations Commission.

Most recently she has spearheaded the successful community effort to add the position of Independent Police Auditor to Fresno government. We were honored to have her with us at the 68th Annual Meeting and to present the Werner Lipton Award to her for her tireless volunteer work in behalf of good government in Fresno. Her name appears on a permanent plaque as the fourth winner of this award, and she was given a certificate as a token of appreciation for her continuing work in behalf of our community

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of Women Voters today*



EDUCATION REPORT

By Kay Bertken 226-2720

The most recent meeting of the America's Promise Dropout Summit planning group with United Way and additional new partners—the cast changes frequently—was March 25. We reviewed a proposed agenda for the September 26 summit and forwarded that proposal to the Organizations class for education doctoral students at CSUF for review. A group of participants agreed to meet and discuss research available on the local dropout issue. A second group will be touring the CSUF Satellite Student Union Site next week to propose a layout for the conference. The next planning meeting is April 28.

Geoffrey Canada is to be the keynote speaker. He is nationally recognized as the President and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone and a passionate advocate for educational reform. The Harlem Zone project targets a 100 block area of Central Harlem with an interlocking "safety net" of services, including social, medical and educational programs. In 2005, Mr. Canada was named one of America's Best Leaders by U S News and World Report.

Polly Victor

We were saddened to note the March 2, 2009 passing of long time League member Polly Victor. Polly earned a degree in Social Work from the University of Chicago and began her career in that city. Between 1955 and 1957 she worked along with her husband, Ralph, as a volunteer in India, where they established a non-profit organization that still helps fund the high school education of orphans and the poor.

Ralph and Polly moved to Fresno in 1971 and Polly continued her career in Social Work for several years. While in her 50s, Polly enrolled at Fresno State to study art. She learned to weld and to use the tools necessary in becoming a sculptress of heavy metal. As she gained recognition for her art, Polly joined Gallery 25 and had a show at the Fresno Art Museum.

Polly was an active member of many local organizations including Peace Fresno, Center for Non-Violence, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She will be remembered as a champion for the protection of the environment and for social justice.

A community Celebration of Polly's Life will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church on May 9 at 3:30 P.M.

Remembrances may be sent to Fresno Center for Non-Violence, 1584 N. Van Ness, Fresno 93728 or to the San Joaquin Parkway Trust, 11605 Old Friant Rd, Fresno 93730

League of Women Voters, Fresno Holds 68th ANNUAL MEETING

The almost 40 members present at the Annual Meeting on April 25 voted unanimously for the new slate of officers and directors nominated by Margaret Johnson and her committee. Francine Farber will continue as president for a new two-year term. Membership Director for 6 years Sue Sheragy has stepped down from the Board, while Secretary Dolores O'Neal has taken over that position. Meanwhile Pat Campbell, a member since 2008, is filling the Secretary spot on the Board. The complete list of Board officers and directors is found on page one.

Two guests at the meeting were Trudy Jarratt, Vice President of LWVC, and Sara Horne, Management Training Associate (MTA) for LWVF, both from San Luis Obispo. Ms. Jarratt reviewed the upcoming changes in the state League's administrative structure that will be voted on at Convention in May. She also revealed that state League is hoping to advance its program through narrowing its focus on voter services and government. This will also be discussed at Convention.

Ellie Bluestein received the Werner Lipton Award for her many years of volunteerism and community advocacy.

Our members also voted to endorse the Local Program Priorities and State Program Priorities selected at our Program Planning Meeting in January. They were given the opportunity to cite additional concerns and recommendations in writing. The Board will review these.

May 19 Special California Election The League of Women Voters recommends.....

↓ Prop 1A—Strengthens the budget reserve, creates a new spending limit, extends tax in creases by 1-2 years. **NO**

↔ Prop 1B—Restores funding levels for K-12 schools and community colleges. **NEUTRAL**

↓ Prop 1C—Allows the state to borrow from future lottery profits. **NO**

↓ Prop 1D—Uses special funds for child development to replace general Fund spending on services to children. **NO**

↓ Prop 1E—Uses special funds for mental health to replace General fund spending on mental health services. **NO**

Prop 1F—Stops state elected officials from getting pay raises when the state has a deficit. **NO POSITION**

You are invited to the Mini-Grant Expo

Tuesday, May 12

4-5:30 p.m.

Kremen Education Center Atrium

CSUF Campus, Enter through Maple Avenue

Public parking available in Lot C

Some handicapped spaces available in front of Kremen Building

Meet the 8 teacher -winners of

LWVF Constitution Mini-Grants

See demonstrations of their successful projects

No admission charge Refreshments will be served

Janis Hirohama, LWVC president, noted:

“We oppose these measures because they are not the solution to our long-term financial crisis, with the continuing structural deficit in the state budget and flawed budget process. We make this decision with regret. **We would support real reform to make the state budget process more accountable and give the Legislature and governor effective tools to advance state priorities.** However, these hurriedly drafted propositions, produced at the end of a flawed process that kept both the public and most legislators in the dark, will only make our financial situation worse.”

“Although some claim there is an urgency to pass Proposition 1A to resolve our state's budget problems, we disagree,” Hirohama said. “Most of its provisions will not take place for another two years—two years that we should spend hammering out real solutions to our budget and Fiscal challenges.”

LEGISLATION

by Terri Figgs 431-7274

HEALTH CARE

Governor Schwarzenegger has vetoed Senator Sheila Kuehl's SB 840, the League-supported bill proposing comprehensive single payer health care coverage for Californians.

State Senator Member Mark Leno has reintroduced the bill in the 2009-2010 legislative session. *California OneCare* launched its legislative journey April 15 in Sacramento. SB 810 (formerly SB 840), was heard by the Senate Health Committee at the State Capitol. This is the first step in the process of getting SB 810 through the Senate and then the Assembly. This campaign won't be easy as there are many new Senators and Assembly Members who must be educated about single payer. There are other health care reform bills that are being considered but there is only one true reform bill that will bring full care, for all, for less.

There are two actions that can be taken to help pass this legislation: Action #1: Contact organizations to send SB 810 endorsements on their letterhead. Organizations that supported Senator Sheila Kuehl's SB 840 need to send a new letter of support for SB 810.

**Mail support letter to:
Senator Mark Leno**

State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Or fax support letter to: 916-445-4722

A sample organizational endorsement letter is also posted at www.healthcareforall.org under "act now-organizing".

Action #2: Send an individual letter of support for SB 810 to your State Senator and to Senator Elaine Alquist, chair of the Senate Health Committee. (Also, ask your friends and family to send letters.) For Senator Alquist, fax support letter to: 916-324-0283.

A sample individual endorsement letter is also posted at www.healthcareforall.org under "act now-organizing"



The LWVC opposes the May 19 special election ballot measures 1A, 1C, 1D, and 1E because they are NOT the solution to the long-term financial crisis, the continuing structural deficit in the state budget or the flawed budget process.



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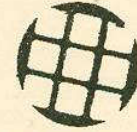
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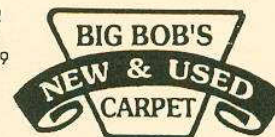
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:	PAGE
President's Message.....	2
Voter Services, Natural Resources, Student Unit	3
Lipton Award, Education Report, Obituary	4
Annual Meeting, May Ballot Measures	5
Legislation, Sponsors.....	6
Our Sponsors.....	7

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NONPARTISANSHIP: The League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

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.

TO PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS: For more information, please leave your name and phone number on the League message phone, 226-8683, or contact our **Membership Chair, Sue Sheragy, at 243-9305**. Prospective members receive one issue of *The Fresno Voter* free.

JOIN US! Members receive newsletters from national, state and local Leagues, may access local, state and national League websites and list-serves, and may participate in League studies of issues.

Yearly Dues Individual - \$60 ~ Family - \$90 (2 members, same address) ~ Student - \$30

Please send your check payable to the League of Women Voters, Fresno, with registration form (below),
 to: LWVF, 1345 Bulldog Lane, Suite 4, Fresno, CA 93710.

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