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The *Fresno* **VOTER**

Castro sees bright future for FSU; expansion of arts, ag, engineering

by Murray Farber

As you read this issue of The Voter, Joseph Castro, president of Fresno State University, is readying proposals for the enhancing of the university’s agricultural, engineering and arts programs. That’s what he told League members in a talk at the annual meeting as he stressed “The future of Fresno State University is bright.”



Pres. Joseph Castro

President of FSU since August, 2013, his formal investiture date is May 10, climaxing more than 20 years of service to the University of California system. He has been in a leadership role at Berkeley, Davis, Merced, Santa Barbara and most recently as vice chancellor at the University of California, San Francisco. As a native of Hanford, he is the first in his family to attend college.

His current goal is to see students thrive. “My goal is to make the university as strong as possible and take it to the next level of achievement,” he said. Castro explained that FSU now faces a challenge to recover after cuts in funding and the national recession. “We need to focus on faculty, students and staff and the next budget will be designed to assist them.”

However, he stressed the need to update the infrastructure of the campus. He called the electrical system 20 years beyond its life expectancy. He said 80 percent of the buildings are older than 45 years. “We had electrical outages during the holiday breaks. Lights went off at 5 o’clock. Our folks told us we would not see repairs for several days. Now we have funding to replace the electrical system over the next two years.”

“The central plant needs to be redone; there’s a strong need for investment. We need strong technology throughout the campus to enhance the quality of education.”

In particular, he cited the new Discovery program which will provide Tablets for 1,000 students and 40 faculty. Castro pointed out that many students do not have computers at home, live in outlying towns and “don’t have the tools to succeed.”

(continued on page 6)



Tuesday, May 27
Regular Board Meeting
5 p.m., League Office

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

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



President's Message



March was a hectic month for the League, but April began in a most wonderful way with the First Ladies exhibit at Fresno City Hall that the League co-sponsored with the Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE).

The event was extraordinary on several levels. First of all, the portraits are of such high quality, and they look amazing on the excellent display space that City Hall features. They are placed in order from Martha to Michelle and provide a fascinating journey through Presidential history.

FCOE was very generous with time and financial support and was totally dedicated to making the opening reception a worthy tribute to our nation's First Ladies.

Almost 200 guests learned details about some of the First Ladies from Dr. Diane Blair, our Board member and featured speaker at the reception. I must admit that one of my favorites is Eleanor Roosevelt, particularly after learning that, in addition to being a First Lady, a newspaper columnist, an author and a diplomat, she was a leader in the early years of the League of Women Voters. She helped establish the League's policy agenda and served as the Vice President of Legislative Affairs.

She worked to strengthen women's role in politics and to mobilize women voters. She said, "I've always found the best workers in a political party frequently are graduates of the LWV." In another quote she said, "The League...trains good citizens who have a sense of responsibility about what goes on in their locality, their state and in their nation".

I was so inspired by the First Ladies, the events of the reception and the association with FCOE. I believe Eleanor's words provide an apt description of who we are and what we do. Although the exhibit ended on April 30, FCOE is looking for a permanent exhibit space for this wonderful collection.

Nyla

Member News

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Transportation

by Stephenie Frederick



In March the Fresno County of Governments (COG) released the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and its affiliated Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for a 55-day public comment period. The COG issues an RTP-EIR every four years; 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 2014 RTP is a huge document, with seven lengthy chapters and fourteen appendices. It contains detailed descriptions of existing transportation services and infrastructure as well as an extensive review of all federal, state, and local agencies whose jurisdictions are relevant to land-use planning, air quality, and transportation decisions.

Chapter Four introduces a new element into the RTP documentation: a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) whose vision of Fresno County's future growth 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.**

The RTP also contains a very long list of all of the transportation projects that the cities within Fresno County, as well as the county itself, plan to

build over the next 25 years. As different kinds of funding come in, the COG staff calls for the agencies to choose projects off the RTP list and put them forward to receive funding.

A major question is what relation the components of the RTP bear to one another. Are the goals and objectives listed in the policy chapter drawn from the SCS? Are the projects on the project list prioritized according to the performance indicators developed to evaluate several SCS scenarios? By what criteria are transportation needs assessed?

Another question is whether progress toward achieving goals and objectives has occurred since the last RTP.

The EIR that accompanies the RTP also poses challenges for the reviewer. Since the COG staff does not have the means to carry out an EIR for each individual project, it must adopt a generalist view. The staff has stated that the EIR finds that implementation of the 2014 RTP/SCS could result in significant and unavoidable impacts to agricultural resources, air quality, biotic resources, geology and soils, and climate change, among many others.

League board members are studying the RTP and EIR in preparation for

speaking at public hearings to be held on May 5 and 7.

BUS RAPID TRANSIT

In March the Fresno City Council voted 6-1 to spend \$1.5 million on design and construction of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

On January 30, the city council had refused to allow the project to proceed. In the wake of that vote, city manager Bruce Rudd, together with council members Brandau, Brand, and Olivier, scaled down the concept. The buses will be smaller, and passengers will board from curb level in the traditional way instead of boarding from raised platforms. Bus stations will be portable instead of fixed. This approach frees up \$13 million, which can eventually be used to establish BRT service along a five-mile stretch of Shaw Avenue, from CSU Fresno to West Avenue. Shaw Avenue will be an addition to the base routes – Blackstone Ave to downtown, and downtown east on Ventura-Kings Canyon.

The BRT system is foundational to the city's general plan update and to the county's regional transportation plan. Had the city council put an end to BRT in Fresno, the city and the COG would have had to recast the plans at considerable taxpayer expense.



LWVF and Sierra appeal wastewater treatment plant

by Mary Savala

LWVF and Sierra Club have filed an appeal to the County Board of Supervisors regarding the County Planning Commission's approval of a conditional use permit for a wastewater treatment plant at the proposed Friant Ranch development.

At the time the Friant Ranch development was approved, the public was promised a comprehensive environmental evaluation of the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) when the Conditional Use Permit was considered by the County Planning Commission (PC).

The public was given a voluminous, highly technical staff report 5 days before the hearing. There was no up-dated EIR for the project evaluating new information available from a variety of public agencies. The League had never been notified that the WWTP was under review even though we had made a formal request to be notified.

League believes that a waste water treatment facility serving thousands of people located near a public park and the San Joaquin River must undergo thorough review. The public was promised the subsequent environmental evaluation of additional information and the Board of Supervisors must honor that promise.

At the Voter's publication deadline the hearing date at the Board of Supervisors had not been set.

AG STUDY CONSENSUS



After two successful public panel discussions on March 5 and 19, LWVF held its membership consensus meeting on March 29. Those present came to consensus on all issues except for one. The results were forwarded the LWVUS which will tabulate results from leagues all over the country and then decide whether there is a national consensus. If there is, then an official position will be announced. If there is no consensus, the present ag position will remain in effect.

Voter Services

by Liz Shields



We have signed a three-year contract with the County Elections Office to continue our work with the phone bank and opening ballots before and after elections. The Elections Coordinator is planning a training session for all phone bank workers on May 21, either morning or afternoon, at the Warehouse. (SEE DETAILS PAGE 5)

There are two statewide propositions and one county-wide measure on the June ballot. **Proposition 41** asks voters to approve redirecting funds from an earlier approved ballot measure for CalVet loans to provide housing for homeless and disabled veterans.

Proposition 42 is a constitutional amendment that would require local governments and agencies to comply with the Public Records Act and the Brown Act but with no future reimbursement from the state government as is now the case. In recent years due to budgetary problems the state has allowed some parts of both acts to be disregarded because of the lack of reimbursement funds

Measure A asks whether the Fresno County Vehicle Abatement Program and vehicle registration fees (one dollar per vehicle and an additional two dollars for certain commercial vehicles) be renewed for a ten-year term beginning July 1 for the abatement and removal of abandoned, wrecked, dismantled, or inoperative vehicles

The forums for candidates running for Congressional state and local offices will be held at CMAC on May 6 and 7 and Bill Murphy will be the moderator. The air-time schedules will be publicized when available.

Mental Health *(continued from page 7)*

living with mental illness and at risk of homelessness or inappropriately housed. Residents will live independently and the project will be located in proximity to public transportation and other community amenities. A feasibility study is being conducted at this time.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

By Richard Bertken, M.D.



In April the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released a database of its total payments to 880,000 doctors for services delivered to outpatients under Medicare Part B in 2012. The data were eye-opening. Over 1000 doctors received payments exceeding three million dollars. The two top physicians received 21 and 18 million respectively, and 12 doctors received more than 10 million dollars. Just 2% of doctors were responsible for 25% of total spending.

This data, including specific billing information, is on-line, but its interpretation is problematic. What distinguishes high remuneration offices is a large staff helping provide ancillary services, such as laboratory tests, imaging, drug administration, and procedures done in-office. Overhead accounts for most of the multi-million dollar payments. By far the most important overhead costs are drugs and medical devices themselves, purchased by the physicians and resold to Medicare for average retail cost plus 4-6%.

The biopharmaceutical industry has created hundreds of uniquely useful products that require administration by injection or infusion. These drugs, when used chronically (as is typical), range in cost from \$3,000 to \$120,000 yearly. Physicians are routinely given discounts for these agents by the drug company. The discounts often increase as the physician increases use of the product. In addition, physicians are paid for providing supervision of infusions of drugs that may also be given more cheaply at home by self-injection.

Therefore, while the astronomical Medicare payments to a small fraction of doctors could be compatible with efficient and high quality care, there is a serious problem: the utilization of expensive drugs and infusion services is determined by these physicians, who are incentivized by

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- ◆ Starts Tuesday, May 27 as needed until Monday, June 9
- ◆ Hours are 9 a.m. -12 p.m. and 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.
- ◆ Election Department Warehouse
- ◆ 4525 E. Hamilton (south of Butler between Cedar and Maple)

PHONE BANK

- ◆ Training is **required** this election for familiarity with the updated procedures (equipment is essentially the same).
- ◆ Training times: Wednesday, May 21, 9 a.m. – 11 a.m .
- ◆ Wednesday, May 21, 3 p.m. – 5 p.m.
- ◆ Election Department Warehouse, 4525 E. Hamilton.
- ◆ Work shifts: May 29 – June 2, 9 a.m.- 12 p.m., 1 p.m.–5 p.m. 2221 Kern Street (County Elections Office)
- ◆ June 3 shifts from 6:30 a.m. – 8 p.m .
- ◆ Election Warehouse, 4525 E. Hamilton

CONTACT: Liz Shields at elizs44@yahoo.com or phone 559-298-5183 with your preferences

greater profits to begin or continue expensive treatments when cheaper—or even no—treatments may be equally effective. There are vast differences in Medicare payments to full-time physicians in the same specialties that are largely explained by higher utilization of expensive medications and procedures.

The release of this data gives encouragement to the movement to change from fee-for-service payments to bundled (a set payment for an episode of care, to be shared by the medical care team) or capitation (a set payment for a whole practice or an entire population) methods. These systems remove incentives to increase health care costs and encourage teamwork and innovative practices, but also require careful monitoring of quality of service and health outcomes.

Bright Future for FSU

(continued from page 1)

In addition, through the Tablets students get access to more journal articles and save money since they don't have to purchase expensive textbooks.

As part of the changes, "We have announcements coming to strengthen arts and humanities, engineering and math. Our ag programs should be among the best in the country."

"We have an academic challenge," he noted. "How do we take steps for more students to graduate in a timely way?" Currently, half of the students graduate in six years and the other half require more time or don't graduate. "The graduation rate should be 20 points higher. "But many stop to work although they may come back later; they are hard-working and we need more scholarships for them. We need better advising and better scheduling so that students don't have to wait a year for necessary classes."

Meanwhile the freshman class has received a seven and a half percent increase in applications while the California system overall increased 2%. FSU had to reject 4,000 eligible freshmen. He called on the State to invest

in higher education. "It's smart from a business standpoint. Our success is central to the Valley; we do research on water and other problems, such as air quality and poverty. The Valley is looking to us for leadership"

Responding to a question about the university's athletics, he endorsed signing the football coach to a five-year contract that will reach \$1.6 million. Castro explained that the football team appeared in three ESPN televised games that earned \$500,000 each and supports non-revenue sports and "is a key to connecting with young people." He added "We would like to invest more in athletics from donors but not from the academic pot."

At the Annual Meeting members re-elected the following officers and directors for new two-year terms:

Mary Savala, Vice President for Natural Resources

Secretary, Mary Perich

Treasurer, Terri Figgs

Director for Education, Kay Bertken

Director for Transportation, Stephenie Frederick

Members also voted to change the By-Law relating to quorum requirements. Ten percent of the membership as of January 15 shall constitute a quorum at the Annual Meeting of the LWVF and at all other meetings requiring a quorum for purposes of voting.

PG&E to build transmission line

by Diane Merrill

PG&E, in partnership with two other energy companies, recently won approval from the California Independent System Operator to build a 70 mile transmission line from southwestern Fresno County through parts of Kings County to Madera County, just north of the City of Fresno. It's been over 30 years since a large transmission line has been built in the area.

PG&E will be hosting four open

Houses to get public input on where the proposed line should be built.

PG&E says it wants to propose a route that is as unobtrusive as possible for property owners and businesses. In late 2015 PG&E plans to submit the proposed pathway to the California Public Utilities Commission for approval, for anticipated construction in 2018-2019.

PG&E cites population growth, reliability, support for agriculture, and maximization of electricity from the



Helms Pumped Storage facility as reasonable for the additional transmission line. Mary Perich and I plan to attend several open houses We will be gathering information about the potential routes, and other details of the project. The siting of the transmission line will likely have a significant impact on land use planning and preservation of agricultural land, both issues of interest to LWVF.

Education

by Kay Bertken



Mental Health

by Francine Farber



As the teachers' union and district continue into the "fact finding" phase of arbitration in their contract negotiations, the Fresno Unified Board of Education has been occupied with other budget considerations for the 2014-2015 school year.

The Board has been hearing recommendations for program augmentations and improvements. A Linked Learning approach would align instruction in English, science and career technical education around a real world issue. **Enhanced counseling and tutoring options plus credit recovery programs and academic support courses for students experiencing difficulties are also on the menu of recommendations.** The proposals involve the addition of teaching and counseling positions.

District staff propose a centralized resource center located at the J.E. Young site that would serve all alternative programs. These programs would include independent study-type credit recovery programs located at each of the comprehensive high schools as well as the current J.E. Young site. **The plan involves working to keep the vast majority of students on track in their regular high school and reserving an off-site experience for those who fail to graduate within four years.**

An increase in the budget for special education would provide more psychologists and therapists to attend to the increased numbers of students in the autism programs, as well as to increase access to college preparatory course requirements and increase graduation rates for special education students.

Simultaneously, the District has been gathering input for the Local Control Funding Formula Accountability Plan. The plan draft will be presented and a hearing on its final form will be held in May, with the final budget to be adopted on June 4.

These proposals reflect a huge change in the financial picture of education in the state as a whole, but especially in Fresno. It is encouraging to see proposals to improve and enhance our children's school experience rather than to cut services.

At a meeting to summarize community input for its three-year plan, the Department of Behavioral Health noted the most common needs that were identified throughout the County by hundreds of constituents. They were

- ◆ **Cultural competence:** creating more services for underserved communities in their native languages
- ◆ **Outreach and Engagement:** outreach to underserved communities through improved marketing; employing a public information officer
- ◆ **Improved access to services:** mobile-based services, improvements for disabled individuals
- ◆ **Supportive Housing:** affordable supportive housing in rural areas for specific populations

Many other needs were identified and can be accessed on the DBH's web site.

The Mental Health Board hosted a community forum at its April meeting. Individuals talked about unmet needs with regard to mental health services and community-sponsored housing. In each case the chair asked DBH staff members to meet with the individuals privately to assist in resolution of the problems.

DBH Director Dawan Utecht reported that the department's SB 82 grant was approved in part for \$794,795 to develop an 8 bed adult crisis facility and an 8 bed youth crisis stabilization unit.

Unfortunately, the funds for the long-awaited adolescent psychiatric residential center were not approved by the state; however, Utecht said she is going forward with the center using funds that would otherwise have been used to send youth to far-distant facilities. Last year, there were about 200 such cases. She also noted that other counties and private insurers might use this facility if beds were not used by Fresno County clients, thereby increasing funds available.

The Kings View Foundation, which is a local healthcare provider, is designing a new project, Butterfly Gardens, which will provide permanent supportive housing. It will be a 20-40 bed unit of affordable housing with access to people living

(continued on page 4)

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