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The Fresno VOTER

Study workshops reveal positive, negative views of federal government's role in public education

by Murray Farber

Three school superintendents agree that while the role of the federal government in education is often good, it is not always fair.

The superintendents – Larry Powell of Fresno County Office of Education, Michael Hanson from Fresno Unified and Juan Garza from Kings Canyon Unified – spoke at the LWV's first workshop as part of a nationwide League effort to reach consensus on the federal government's involvement in public education.

Hanson praised the federal government and the Office of Equal Rights for creating Title IX rules that gave equality to women students and prompted the construction of a softball field for the girls' team at Fresno High. Similarly Powell said the feds "did real well" in the area of special education; he contracted polio as a child and his parents had to be his advocates to be sure he was not left out of school activities.

All three agreed that only the federal government has the power to press schools to take on many of the educational system's problems. Hanson commented, "Not one of us wants to be told what to do by the feds, but if not for federal intervention we would not be reporting scores on students who have

disabilities or are learning English as a second language."

Powell questioned some test scoring. He said that "special education students get the blame for low scores. The feds require everyone to get over the same high jump bar or their school gets labeled underperforming. Instead of dinging people, we need to reward kids who are improving even if they are not over the bar."

The three school leaders complained about federal financing for education. Powell said, "The feds require a lot but don't provide the money." He noted that the further away schools are from Washington, D.C., the less you get because nearby states such as Maryland and Virginia are able to lobby more frequently. He challenged California's senators and U.S. representatives: "What are you doing for us?" He went on, "Just give us equity. We're called the Appalachia of the West but we're not getting as much Title I money as Appalachia." Garza added, "The government places too many strings. Give us local control so we can spend the money where the needs are."

The superintendents left no doubt where they would target any added money. They all supported spending more on the

(continued on page 6)

Calendar

Saturday, November 12
 Ed study consensus meeting
 See flyer inside

Tuesday, November 15
 Regular Board Meeting
 5 p.m. League office

Holiday Party
 December 11, 2-4 p.m.
 Home of the Touyas
 See flyer inside

Dates to be announced

January
 Solar Energy Panel

January
 Program Planning Meeting

President's Message



Many members and outsiders complimented our League on the special mailing about our federal education study workshops. We were very proud of our two well-attended workshops.

The rest is up to our members. We need you to attend the special consensus meeting on Saturday, November 12 in our meeting room at Stone Soup. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, the Education Employees Credit Union, the Fresno County Office of Education and the Association of California School Administrators, we will provide a very nice breakfast to start the morning at 9 a.m.

Members of the Education Committee led by Kay Bertken and Jacquie Canfield will lead a summary discussion of the material covered in our two workshops, to catch you up if you weren't able to attend one or both of them during October. We will also plan on taking time to answer your questions and have a discussion on the issues.

Our final task will be to individually respond to the 15 consensus questions provided by LWVUS, tapping into our opinions on finance, equity and access. These questions were sent to our members and appeared in the last several pages of that special mailing. But not to worry: we will have additional copies for everyone at the meeting.

And please stay after completing the form – the exciting part will be when we tally the questionnaires and let you know whether our group has a consensus. We will send the results up to LWVUS. They will be receiving results from all over the country by November 30, and then their special committee will have the job of reviewing the data and deciding whether there is a national consensus that will allow them to prepare a position statement.

Please be sure to attend the consensus meeting on November 12 and be part of this exciting process.

Francine

FRIANT LAWSUIT UPDATE

The lawsuit filed against the County of Fresno and the Friant Ranch Developers by LWVF and others is set for a hearing in April. Meanwhile, the administrative record is being assembled.

Member News

Please make notes in your roster accordingly.

New Members

Cathi Grave Tudman
5467 East Saginaw Way
Fresno, CA 93727
291-7551
cgtudman@att.net

Ruth Reynolds
4559 N. DeWitt
Fresno, Ca 93727
203-841-7106
rreynolds14@snet.net

Members in the news

Alice Powell was honored by the Marjaree Mason Center as one of the Top Ten Professional Women of the Year at the Fresno Convention Center on October 21.

We gratefully accept celebratory and memorial gifts. Your check may be made out to LWVF Ed Fund, and it will be tax deductible.

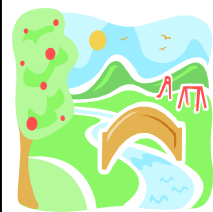


This month we received a generous donation from Lynne Rodriguez.

Your contribution for the Friant lawsuit should be made out to Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter and note Friant Ranch Lawsuit in the memo line

**All donations should be sent to Jane Worsley, Treasurer, LWVF
1345 Bulldog Lane
Fresno, 93710**






Friends of Lost Lake Park will meet Saturday, November 5 for their next workday at the park. Meet at the entrance kiosk at 9 a.m. For more information see LostLakePark@gmail.com.



Don't Miss It!!!

Education Study Consensus Meeting
Saturday, November 12
9 a.m.—noon
Be a part of the National LWV Study!
Breakfast will be served



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League preparations for the two community forums on education paid off handsomely, with excellent attendance and outstanding speakers. (see article page 1) Now League members need to show up at the consensus meeting on November 12 (see flyer inside).

Achievement Results

At their September 28 meeting, FUSD trustees received a report of recent student achievement measures. Among the positive results, many more students are taking advanced placement classes (up more than 2000 since 2008) and passing AP tests (up 30% since 2008). Discrepancies among Fresno subgroups on the California Standards Tests, while still significant, have declined slightly.

The proportion of students who pass the California High School Exit Exam as 10th grade first time test takers is up from 70% to 75% on the English Language Arts section and from 73% to 77% on the math section. The graduation rate has also increased by 2%.

Mixed Algebra Results

Enrollment in 8th grade algebra has increased from 26% of students in 2008 to 43% in 2011. However, this enrollment increase has been coupled with a decline in the proportion of students who score proficient on the California State Standards exam, an area of concern for the District.

Tracking all indicators of student achievement, the District has determined to focus its academic efforts

this year on two areas of clear concern: K-2 literacy and middle school mathematics.

Focus on Literacy and Math

The first focus is an effort to deal with evidence that Fresno English language learners are already struggling to achieve at grade level by the second grade. In addition, by fifth grade, general student achievement declines markedly on the English language section of the state tests. Evidence exists that failure to achieve grade level reading skills by third grade promotes increased failure through the school years. Analysis of FUSD testing results suggests a weakness in early basic vocabulary and reading skills that are behind these fifth grade results. The focus on middle school mathematics addresses the proficiency declines in eighth grade algebra, and persistently low eighth grade general math achievement.

“Foundations” Approach

In addition to this effort to focus District-wide efforts, the administration is introducing a new “Foundations” approach to improving classroom instruction. It has proposed a system of what it is calling “Tight” vs. “Loose” requirements. The “Tight” includes the requirement that classroom lessons all include an objective, instruction aligned to that objective, closure and assessment plus four questions that guide teachers’ attention to those requirements:

- *What do we want them to learn?*
- *How will we know when they have learned it?*

- *How will we respond when they don’t learn?*
- *How will we respond when they already know it?*

The District is defining as “Loose” or discretionary, just how the teacher chooses to structure and conduct the particular lesson.

Facilities News

On the facilities front, groundbreaking has occurred on a new south-east elementary school. The new Bullard track and pool complex is being used by students and was formally dedicated in October. Academic and program planning for the new south-east middle school is progressing, along with the architectural plans for the new campus. Architectural plans for new Measure Q funded construction at Edison, Hoover, Fresno High and Roosevelt are also being completed.

VOTER SERVICE BRIEFS

by Liz Shields

Three legal challenges have been filed against the district maps adopted by the Citizens Redistricting Commission, including one by George Radanovich and four others. Efforts to collect signatures for a referendum challenging the outcome of the redistricting process have been put on hold.

A proposal to participate in the Youth Registration Project and receive up to \$1,000 in grant money was submitted to the League’s Education Fund. Members of Fresno State Student Unit will help with this project.

Transportation

by Dennis Manning



Last month the gap on Federal transportation spending was between the Republican-led House (\$38b/yr),

and the Senate Democrats (\$55b/yr). The gap has narrowed considerably as the GOP has come to realize that increased infrastructure spending has widespread public and political support. The GOP is searching for funding beyond the gas tax which provides the \$38b base.

Locally by far the biggest issue came when Scott Mozier of the City Public Works Department delivered to the City Council a sober assessment of the disruption that will result from the High Speed Rail project. The report took several of the City Councilman by surprise. A special session of the Council was held on October 13 to deal with City's comments on the High Speed Rail Draft Environmental Impact Report.

The council was most focused on the impacts to some 600 businesses likely to be involved. Council members were also very concerned about potential traffic congestion resulting from such possibilities as closing down the Clinton overpass for a year. The consensus was clear. The HSR Authority should pay all the mitigation expense needed and at the same time Council voiced overall support for highspeed rail, as did the County Board of Supervisors earlier in the week.

Student Unit

by Diane Blair



The Student Unit met with Liz Shields, Vice President for Voter Services, to discuss the Youth Voter Education project and how the student unit members might support the project in the spring semester. This project will focus on outreach to high schools, community colleges and local universities in order to register new voters and to educate them about California's new open primary ballot process.

Liz also talked about her role in Voter Services and the two-pronged approach to that area of the League—non-partisanship with regard to candidates and political parties, and issue

advocacy and voter education. The students discussed the things they would like to do to promote voter services on campus, including voter registration drives, “prop talks” for ballot initiatives in upcoming elections, and teaming up with other student groups on campus to promote more political engagement.

As a result of that discussion, the Student Unit teamed up with Fresno State's newly reactivated Policy Debate Team, The Barking Bulldogs, on October 26 for a public debate on the Dream Act. The Dream Act would create a six-year conditional path to citizenship for undocumented students brought to the United States illegally while they were minors. The Student Unit helped students to register to vote in the Free Speech area throughout the public debate .

General Plan Meetings Scheduled for Public

Fresno's General Plan, adopted in 2002, is under revision to reflect the city's goals and priorities through 2035. Substantial new population growth is expected over the next several decades and the revised plan will manage Fresno's future growth, attract high quality businesses and jobs, protect natural resources, conserve energy and water, promote high quality design of buildings and public spaces, provide land for new parks and schools, and maintain public safety and municipal services—all of which contribute to the quality of life that residents have come to expect.

A series of community workshops is underway on specific elements of the General Plan such as Economic Development, Sustainability, Urban Form, Healthy Communities and Transportation November – December meetings are as follows. Time for all is 6 to 8 p.m.

**Nov. 10, Healthy Communities
Hinton Community Center
2385 S. Fairview Ave.**

**Nov. 21 Transportation
Ted C. Wills Center
770 N. San Pablo Ave.**

**Dec. 7, Plan Alternatives
City Hall Council Chambers
2600 Fresno St.**

FEDERAL STUDY WORKSHOPS

(continued from page 1)

arts. But Garza called for more to meet the needs to help vocational programs. “We also need core English, math and science skills since manuals are very technical.”

Powell several times spoke up for three key areas: pre-school classes to make every child feel confident because “if you start behind, you don’t catch up; I want every kid to feel safe through an anti-bullying program. And we need more stress on the arts. Lots of kids don’t do well in academics but come to school hooked through the arts.”

Hanson’s three major points included support for early childhood education “since too many kids in the valley are not ready for a socialized place of learning.” He also supported a longer school day or longer school year. “We need to build a network of learning to figure out who is doing best and then share good practices. We could be more efficient and save money.”

Like a homerun in the bottom of the ninth inning, a question by former State Assemblyman Juan Arambula climaxed LWVF’s second of two seminars on the federal role in education. He asked, “What would happen if the federal role in education disappeared?”

For two hours, some 40 League members and guests heard critical issues in schools described by a panel comprised of Dave Calhoun, director of research for Fresno Unified; Jannelle Kubinec, director of national, state and special programs for WestEd, an educational

6 research organization; and Dr. Tony Monreal, former California

deputy superintendent of curriculum.

Kubinec, responding to Arambula’s question, said that five to 15 percent of the money received from Washington by California and local school boards “would go away” and the U.S. Department of Education would lose 75 percent of its money.”

Calhoun warned there would be tension as local boards would have the freedom to control curriculum and not provide equal access to all students. Monreal added it would be “revolutionary as well as depressing” and would require strong local leadership to be sure special education students and English as a Second Language Students would not be deprived.

Earlier Calhoun explained the ongoing effort to create Common Core Standards and Assessments across the country. “Every state has its own set of academic standards, meaning public education students in each state are learning to different levels.” Currently 45 states have agreed to adopt the common core of subjects. He expects a national network to be ready to field test the effectiveness of the core by 2013 or 2014. Calhoun said the core would be aligned with college and work expecta-



Jannelle Kubinec



Dr. Tony Monreal



Dave Calhoun

tions, would develop rigorous content, build on the strength of current state standards and prepare “all students to succeed in our global economy and society.”

Kubinec discussed the issues of finance versus equity for students. She asked whether we are reacting to immediate events instead of making long-term plans. “As states receive more money, they are able to create new programs.”

Monreal stressed the need for change in order “to plan high quality education for the children of the future” and not get stuck in nostalgia. He noted 50 percent of California’s students are children of color and more than 70 languages are spoken in the Fresno Unified District.


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