



League of Women Voters Eden Area

V O T E R

Vol. 50 No. 2 *Political Responsibility Through Informed and Active Participation* March/April 2007

LWVEA 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner

Friday, April 13, 2007

5:30 p.m. Reception

6:30 p.m. Dinner and Program

Hayward City Hall Rotunda • 777 B Street



*Speakers: Supervisor Nate Miley, Supervisor Gail Steele
Mayor Michael Sweeny, City of Hayward, Mayor Tony Santos, City of San Leandro*

Keynote Speaker: Sara Diefendorf - Vice President, U. S. League of Women Voters

Special Guests: Abigail Scot Duniway • Alice Paul • Eleanor Roosevelt



**Honoring our Past....
Looking to the Future**

President's Report

It is a special time for all of us. As your President, I have the honor of presiding over and participating in a fantastic celebration – the Golden Anniversary of our League Chapter. I invite you to participate in our 50th “birthday party” and to share it with others in the communities we serve. I hope all of you as League members will join us. Everyone was sent an invitation a few weeks ago. If you received the invitation and thought it wasn't quite in the budget this month, we have a solution. One of our committee members, Suzanne Barba, wrote a grant to PG&E to help offset some of the costs for this celebration. I am pleased to announce that with some help from our friend and League member, Tom Guarino, PG&E Government Relations, East Bay, this grant was approved.

This grant allows us to offer some non-cost tickets to our members. We want everyone to come. Our League is what it is today because of all of us, and we should celebrate together. These tickets are going fast so please call 510-538-9678 or email lwvea@aol.com immediately and let us know you want to come. And, yes, we do ask something in return...Keep doing what you are doing and be an active volunteer in the League this year. As always, we have a wide variety of tasks that can benefit from your talent and dedication such as phone calling, monitoring a meeting, helping with candidate forums etc.

I want to meet and talk with as many past presidents and members as I can about their experiences with the League. That is what our celebration is about—to honor all of us who have participated in one of the most dynamic organizations around. I encourage you to introduce yourselves at our party. Make yourself known, and give me the wonderful opportunity to meet and talk with each of you.

As always, there are folks to thank when putting together a celebration. There are our Platinum Sponsors: Kaiser Foundation, Miraglia (Cheryl and Michael) Catering, and the Law office of Glenn Youngling. And there are our Silver and Gold sponsors, who have made many contributions in money and other support. All of these folks will receive named recognition in our Anniversary Program. But I wanted to take this space to say, “We could not have done it without you.”

Nancy Van Huffel

Board Briefs— January/February 2007

- Discussion of January Program Planning Meeting; Survey information was sent out to every member and the Committee identified discussion priority items as a result.
- Planned for the showing of Inconvenient Truth at the San Leandro Library on 2/22. Discussed various co-sponsors, dissemination of flyers, newspaper articles, refreshments, and speakers.
- San Leandro Measure B: LWVEA supported this and the Board stated we would encourage a member to serve on the oversight committee, which is now being formed.
- Homeowner Elections: A contract was written and accepted for homeowner elections at Palomares Hills. Another proposal was submitted to a second homeowner group.
- Appointment of an Immigration Study Committee - Trish Taylor volunteered to Chair
- Approval by Board of updated budget for 50th party.
- Affidavit update - locations and assignments were discussed.

HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN LEGISLATION PROS AND CONS

The affordability and access to health care services was selected as one of the top priorities by LWVEA. We originally planned to hold a luncheon forum in March to discuss the topic, but felt we would not have as large an audience as we would by publishing the pertinent information about the various plans in our VOTER.

We noticed that our sister League in Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville published a very comprehensive “pros and cons” about the various health insurance plans and are publishing that report in this issue of our VOTER.

Our thanks to Ursula Rolfe, a retired physician and member of the LWVBAE board member with Health Care Portfolio

The dismal state of our health care system has led to a flurry of plans to improve access to affordable health insurance:

- On the national scene, President Bush advocates leaner health insurance policies with high deductibles as a way to limit excessive spending on health care. His plan proposes a change in tax structure that would discourage employer-provided health insurance and encourage individuals to purchase policies with high deductibles, thus reducing “excessive” consumption of health care services. Also nationally, Representative John Conyers has reintroduced a bill, HR676 (“Improved and Expanded Medicare for All”) into Congress. This is a single-payer health insurance bill and, as of January 24, 2007, already has 42 co-sponsors.

- In California, Senator Sheila Kuehl, Senator Don Perata and Speaker Fabian Nuñez have each proposed a plan to sharply reduce the number of uninsured (6.5 million) in California. In addition, at his “State of the State” address, Governor Schwarzenegger unveiled his plan for universal health insurance for all Californians, including undocumented residents.



Of these four proposals, only Senator Kuehl’s bill “California Health Insurance Security Act, SB840”, would provide truly universal coverage, which would be continuous, comprehensive and affordable to individuals, families, businesses, and to the state. This plan replaces all the many health insurance companies and their 6,000 plans with a state-administered health insurance plan available to all California residents.

Funding for this plan would be from premiums paid by employers and individuals, and by incorporating federal and state moneys presently expended by Medicare, Medicaid, Healthy Families and other programs.

Patient benefits in the Kuehl bill are comprehensive, and include outpatient and in-hospital care, dental, mental health, vision care, prescription drugs, durable medical equipment such as hearing aids and prostheses, as well as other legitimate medical needs. There would be no exclusion for “preexisting conditions” and no deductibles, and patients would have free choice of physician and hospital, or would be able to enroll in integrated health programs providing both features, such as Kaiser Permanente.

The Kuehl bill would offer large savings over present costs by replacing the huge expenses of administering and marketing the 6,000 different health plans presently available in California with one comprehensive plan and one single payer. Price negotiations for pharmaceuticals and durable medical equipment would net additional savings.

Businesses would benefit by reduced health insurance costs compared with present ever-inflating health insurance policies, thus increasing their competitiveness especially on the international market. As this article goes to press, this bill is scheduled to be reintroduced in the California State Senate on February 27.

The other California proposals, Perata’s, Nuñez’s and Governor Schwarzenegger’s (“P, N, G”) have several features in common. Although none of them provides affordable, comprehensive insurance to all, each proposal contains some improvements over the present situation. Unfortunately, some features – such as the mandate that all individuals not covered by their

employers or by state programs purchase insurance – would make matters worse because of the underinsurance which would result from policies with large deductibles and large co-payments, which also confer inadequate benefits.

For example, a policy which would be affordable to those with limited income might carry with it an annual \$5,000 deductible and \$10,000 in “out-of-pocket” expenses. Such policies could cause even moderate-income people to forgo seeking needed medical care and could also delay the purchase of prescribed medication.

Nevertheless, all three P, N, G plans do offer some improvements over present conditions. All three plans would significantly **decrease the number of uninsured**. The Perata and Nuñez bills strive to cover all employees and their dependents. The Governor’s plan claims that coverage would be universal; however, the plan relies on counties to insure undocumented adults, without providing additional funds to do so. In addition, individuals and families with incomes above 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), who are required to purchase insurance, may not be able to find affordable policies on the open market, since insurance companies are free to determine premiums.

All three plans would make all children in families earning less than 300% of the FPL eligible for MediCal or the Healthy Families program. The Governor’s proposal states explicitly that this applies to undocumented as well as documented children.

The governor’s plan would make adults earning less than 100% of the FPL eligible for MediCal. All three plans would establish a state trust fund which would offer insurance plans, negotiated with private insurance companies, to some low-income Californians. Participating plans would be required to offer policies with designated benefits and limited administrative expenses.

The three P, N, G plans have an **employer mandate** in which employers must provide health insurance to their employees or pay into a state fund. The extent of this requirement varies considerably between plans. The Nuñez plan requires employers with two or more employees

to purchase insurance for employees and dependents, whereas the Governor’s plan applies only to employers with ten or more employees (20% of businesses). Perata’s employer mandate requires that employers pay an as-yet-to-be-determined percent of payroll for health insurance for employees and their dependents, or pay an equivalent amount into a state trust fund.



All three plans place some **new limits on insurance companies**. Perata’s and the Governor’s plans require

insurers to offer “guaranteed issue”, which would not allow exclusions for “pre-existing conditions.” Nuñez limits such exclusions to specified serious

medical conditions. The Governor’s plan also requires use of modified community ratings, which prohibit increased premiums for high risk individuals, but allow different premiums based on regional factors, age and sex.

All three P, N, G plans also would limit the percentage of premiums that may be used for administrative and other non-medical expenses. The Governor’s plan specifies that the maximum deductible will be \$5000 and “out of pocket” limited to \$7500 per individual and \$10,000 per family. Nuñez’ AB13 would require all insurance companies to offer 3 plans with benefits designated by the California Cooperative Health Insurance Purchasing Program, an agency established under the bill, which would enable informed comparison shopping for consumers. Insurance companies would be able to offer additional packages with different benefit levels.

Among the **deleterious aspects** of the P, N, G plans the most egregious is the **individual mandate**, which forces an uninsured Californian to purchase health insurance without regard to affordability or coverage offered. The Governor’s plan places no limits on premiums that insurance plans may charge, and allows inadequate “bare bones” coverage. Thus individuals and families earning more than 250% of FPL, forced to purchase a “cheap” policy, would be saddled with huge deductibles and a dearth of benefits, or be criminalized by breaking the law.

The Governor's plan also encourages the purchase of "Health Savings Accounts" which are available only when accompanied by a high-deductible insurance policy. High-deductible insurance policies enable insurance companies to shift significant costs of health care to consumers, who will then refrain from getting needed medical care, and defer purchase of prescribed medication, even if they have a Health Savings Account. Among other steps backward is the likelihood that employers will choose to pay the much less costly required state contribution in lieu of purchasing insurance for their employees. This would force many workers to purchase individual policies on the open market, most likely resulting in higher costs and fewer benefits.

Governor Schwarzenegger's plan is so far the most specific about financing, raising many additional concerns: his funding proposal would "redirect" \$2 billion from county funds, thus endangering the safety net, and would collect \$3.5 billion in new "fees" from hospitals (4% of total gross revenue) and from health providers (2% of total gross revenue).

Designating these charges as "fees" enables the Governor to claim that he is not proposing any new taxes, thereby enabling a bill to be passed by a simple majority rather than by the two-thirds vote needed for new taxes.

Since many hospitals and health providers are already struggling to stay afloat and can ill afford such additional expense, these providers would most likely adjust their charges to meet the new expense, thus passing these expenses on to consumers. The Governor's proposal also decreases "regulatory barriers" that specify qualifications for health providers, and would reduce "excessive reporting requirements," possibly reversing hard-won consumer protections.

CONCLUSION

Following a two-year study of the effects of no insurance, the Institute of Medicine formulated elements needed for an optimal health care system for the USA:

Insurance must be UNIVERSAL, CONTINUOUS, COMPREHENSIVE and AFFORDABLE to the INDIVIDUAL, the FAMILY and to SOCIETY.

Of the four California health insurance proposals discussed above, only SB840 (Kuehl bill) fulfills all these criteria. The remaining three proposals, SB48 (Perata), AB13 (Nunez), and the Governor's plan fail these criteria in several respects.

Universality: None of these three proposals offers universal coverage to all Californians.

Continuity: None of these three proposals is continuous, since insurance status will change with jobs, income bracket and family size. Additionally, the insurance plans offered, as well as the premiums charged, can be changed.

Comprehensiveness: Although the three proposals contain requirements for comprehensive coverage, including prescription drugs for at least some low-income individuals, the proposals allow insurance companies to offer different policies with a wide range in the level of benefits.

Affordability for Individuals and Families: Children in low-income families would have increased access to health insurance. Documented low-income employed adults would be eligible for subsidized insurance policies offered by a state insurance pool. The Governor's plan would offer a subsidized plan to all documented adults and families with incomes below 250% of FPL.

However, even subsidized plans may not be affordable to all eligible families, while individuals who are mandated by law to purchase insurance in the open market may be unable to find affordable high-deductible policy.

Affordability for Business and Society: At present employers pay an average of 10% of payroll for those employees for whom they purchase health coverage. Such employers are at a competitive disadvantage, especially in the international market.

Although all three plans attempt to promote cost control by limiting administrative and other non-medical expenses and profits, none appreciably limits total growth in social health care spending. With hundreds of insurance companies offering more than 6000 insurance plans, administrative and marketing expenses are bound to be excessive, even if no profits were allowed.

In sum: At present, yearly expenditures for health care in California total more than \$170 billion. These expenditures have risen at rates several times that of inflation. Our society and the State of California cannot afford the ever increasing cost of health care, the increased rate of morbidity and mortality of uninsured and underinsured Californians and the financial stress of businesses and families overwhelmed by medical debts, frequently leading to bankruptcy.

The only rational course is to adopt and implement the comprehensive single-payer California Health Insurance Security Act (SB840) that was reintroduced last month.

We have the right plan; we need only the will to overcome the political obstacles.

Ursula Rolfe LWVBAE Board Member with Health Care Portfolio

Interested in health care or childcare issues in Alameda County?

The Alameda County Council of Leagues of Women Voters has had requests for nominations to countywide committees on these topics. Most recently, the Board of Trustees of the Alameda County Medical Center has requested citizen nominees for their finance, strategic planning and operations committees.

In addition, the ACCLWV has established a Health Care committee, which is eager to get more people involved. Call Susan Schroeder at 510-428-1457 if you are interested.

LOCAL IMMIGRATION STUDY READY TO LAUNCH

The LWVUS Board adopted the following scope for the new Immigration Study.

- Underlying values and principles regarding immigration
- Reasons for migration from other countries, including but not limited to:
 - + Effects of global interdependence on migration
 - + Motivation of refugees and asylum seekers
 - + Motivation of other immigrants
- Current federal immigration policy, including but not limited to:
 - + Effectiveness in united families
 - + Effectiveness in meeting needs of businesses
 - + Effectiveness of enforcement
 - + Human rights concerns
- Impact of immigration, including but not limited to:
 - + Economic effects of authorized and unauthorized immigration
 - + Diversity
 - + Inclusion of immigrants in American society



The LWVEA Board approved participating in the LWVUS Immigration Study and is looking for members who would like to join this study committee. The date, time, place and frequency of meetings will be determined by the committee members themselves. Study materials are online at the LWVUS website as well as a suggested reading list.

Members who have already volunteered to work on this committee are Maria Palmeri, Angelina Reyes, Meg Jurich and Cossette Sun.

If you are interested in learning more about this study committee, please contact Chair Patricia Taylor at 886-1711 or taylorfm@sbcglobal.net.

SUNSHINE WEEK

Nancy Van Huffel, President

March 11-13, 2007 has been designated “Sunshine Week” across the nation to continue to encourage local, regional, state, and federal governments to operate with transparency when transacting the public’s business.

This will be the third year that the League of Women Voters of Eden Area, along with many other organizations, are working to actively remind local jurisdictions of the importance of transparency and freedom of information in government.

Sunshine Week seeks to empower citizens by making public decision-making transparent and providing information to the public on matters affecting their lives, property, and business. The League of Women Voters encourages people to play an active role in their government at all levels, and believes strongly that this cannot happen without full sharing of information between government and those they govern.

Recently, our local law enforcement agencies were highlighted in an article in the *Daily Review*. The article reported on an “audit” sponsored by the press to determine how quickly and completely local police departments responded to legitimate requests for information by the public they serve. All local law enforcement agencies received a low “grade” in how they handled the requests for information.

Certainly in law enforcement, as in health service agencies, information must be handled with discretion when it impacts people’s lives and privacy. I’m sure each department has its own individual response to the audit, and that there are continuing reasons why public protection agencies don’t respond as quickly as the public would like – not wanting to interfere with ongoing investigations, legal counsel reviews required before release, limited resources, or, in this complex legislative

and litigious environment, even being unsure of the information they should or should not be providing to the public.

For these reasons, elected officials must show leadership and initiative when it comes to transparent government processes. They can do this by openly supporting transparent decision-making and full disclosure to the public of the processes, procedures, and decisions affecting their constituents.

All local elected officials need to acknowledge open government/sunshine laws at public meetings or through public statements. Elected officials must constantly encourage top management to train all their staff in proper public disclosure and timely response to the public. And, they should conduct their own internal audits to assure that their jurisdiction is complying with the laws.

Obviously, there may be times when it is neither appropriate nor timely to publicly share information: some of those times are now narrowly spelled out in the Ralph M. Brown Act. If the current public disclosure laws and related timeframes are disruptive to government, then the responsible elected officials should move to change those laws. Until then, the public has the right to expect public agencies, particularly law enforcement, to follow the law as it exists.

Get involved. Be informed. Demand transparent government and the conduct of the public’s business in the presence of the public.



OPPORTUNITIES GALORE

VOLUNTEERS

- How about taking a position on the LWVEA Board this coming year?

The board meets on the first Wednesday of the month, usually at 5 p.m. until 6:30 p.m. If you are not interested in being an officer, the Board also has Director positions on issues such as social policy, health care, education, environment, parks and land use and other important subjects that impact us locally and regionally.

- If you like working on the computer, perhaps could help with the Newsletter, membership database, or maintaining our website. Want more information; contact Suzanne at 538-9678 or suzbarba@comcast.net.
- Can you help with checking in on businesses, churches and government agencies to make sure they have the forms necessary for voters to register? We keep these affidavit boxes filled with forms and receive funding from the Registrar of Voters to provide this service. Contact Angelina Reyes at Angelina.reyes@hayward-ca.gov.
- Would you like to be a League Observer at a city council, school board, or county office of education meeting? Observers attend meets personally or watch those that are televised and report back to the Board any issues of concern, i.e., infractions of the Brown Act, unprofessional behavior, lack of access by the public, etc.
- Can you help with our 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner on April 13 at the Hayward City Hall? We will need help decorating for the event, greeters, “gofors” and helpers as needed. If interested contact Eleanor Parker at 925-837-3041 or eliparker@sbcglobal.net.
- Do you like to talk on the telephone? We can always use “Telephone Tree” helpers to remind people about various League events. Call Suzanne at 538-9678.

Si se puede— Dolores Huerta to speak at LWVC Convention 2007

Dolores Huerta, activist and co-founder with César Chávez of the United Farm Workers, will be the keynote speaker at Rally in the Valley, the LWVC Convention 2007, May 18-20 in Bakersfield.

She currently heads the Dolores Huerta Foundation, whose mission is to establish *Communities of Conscience* focusing on community organizing and leadership training in low-income under-represented communities with an emphasis on women and youth.

Dolores funded this nonprofit with a 1991 \$825,000 out-of-court settlement after San Francisco police clubbed her during a peaceful demonstration in 1988 outside a fundraiser for George H. W. Bush. She was passing out literature on the danger of pesticides for farm workers. Dolores’ internal injuries included six broken ribs and a spleen so damaged as to require surgical removal.

Dolores is best known for her activism on behalf of farm workers, especially during the great grape boycott of the late 1960s, which led to contracts between the growers and the UFW and eventually to the UFW’s right to collective bargaining.

But that is only part of her story.

Of particular interest to Leaguers, is Dolores’ dedication to promoting women to leadership roles. Although she had very early made bringing women into the AFW a personal project, she came to the women’s movement late, principally through Gloria Steinem. Dolores soon realized that opponents of the farm workers were the same adversaries of the women’s movement. Dolores was an early member of NOW and one of the founders of the Feminist Majority Foundation. She has spoken at rallies and marched on behalf of the women’s movement.

As an advocate for farm workers rights, Dolores has been arrested twenty-four times for non-violent peaceful union activities.

In 1984, the California state senate bestowed upon her the Outstanding Labor Leader Award. In 1993, Dolores was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. That same year she received the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Roger Baldwin Medal of Liberty Award, the Eugene V. Debs Foundation Outstanding American Award, and the Ellis Island Medal of Freedom Award. She is also the recipient of the Consumers' Union Trumpeter's Award. In 1998, she was one of the three Ms. Magazine's "Women of the Year" and the Ladies Home Journal's "100 Most Important Women of the 20th Century." In 1998, Dolores received the Eleanor Roosevelt Award from President Clinton. On December 8, 2002 she received the Nation/Puffin Award for creative citizenship.



Dolores Huerta, Photo courtesy of Angela Torres

Since Dolores Huerta has long been a beloved icon, as well as a focus of hostility, for Kern County residents, the LWVB, host League for Convention 2007's host League, is honored and delighted to welcome this tiny dynamo. Convention participants will find her passionate, persistent and persuasive.

UPDATE ON MEASURE A OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE 2/07

The First Annual Report (2004/05) of the Measure A (Essential Health Care Services Tax Ordinance) prepared by the Oversight Committee for the County Board of Supervisors and Public is published. I feel that the Report accurately describes the actions and conclusions of the Committee members over the last year of

monthly meetings. We spent most of our time having presentations made by some of the many recipient health-providing organizations. The Alameda County Medical Center (ACMC) made a presentation that we hope to expand upon this next year.

In general, the new money from the half percent increase in sales taxes was spent mostly in preserving and to some extent expanding services. Of the approximately \$100 million in new taxes received, \$75 million was spent under control of ACMC and \$25 million was spent or allocated for later expenditure by the Board of Supervisors to many health care service providing organizations under specific performance contracts. The contracts are created and monitored by Alameda Co. Health Care Services whose director, David Kears, attended almost all of our Committee meetings.

Section 5 – Areas of Concern on page 22 describes the modifications in oversight the Committee hopes to pursue this next year. Briefly, the Committee wants to see more clarity in accounting from recipients of Measure A money as to how funds were spent. We would like information regarding the auditing mechanisms with respect to contract monitoring and compliance. Further, the Committee membership should more closely reflect the diversity of Alameda County's population diversity. In some cases there could be the appearance of conflict of interest with some appointees representing recipients of Measure A funds. The Committee requests of the County Board of Supervisors that changes in future allocations of Measure A funds be more transparent to the public and the affected recipients.

Copies of the Report can be obtained by contacting Jennifer Chan, Measure A Financial Manager, at jennifer.chan@acgov.org or (510) 618-2016 or Internet access is available at:

<http://www.acgov.org/health/meetings.htm>
Kenneth Ballard kenemyblrd@aol.com
Measure A Oversight Committee member One of two League members representing LWV Alameda County Council. The other is LWVEA member Sal Tedesco

GLOBAL WARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE—WHAT CAN WE DO?

Recently the League had an educational forum showing *An Inconvenient Truth*, a film about Global Warming and Climate Change. More than 150 attended. People were genuinely interested in what they could do as individuals to help decrease Global Warming. The League and PG&E provided take-home materials. The following is an article on the same subject which appeared in the *Daily Review*. We hope you find some helpful tips to Go Green.

Going Green: Get eco-friendly in 2007

By Janis Mara - Business Writer, *Daily Review* 1-5-07
(Excerpts)



WITH SWEEPING new California legislation limiting greenhouse gas emissions, hundreds of hybrids hitting the road and a new year dawning, going green is high on many Bay Area residents' New Year's resolution lists. Here are some easy ways to conserve energy in your home, car and business:

"Many people think big issues like protecting the environment are beyond their control, but even small steps can become very significant if enough people are doing the same thing," said Sean Comey of AAA of Northern California.

For example, if every U.S. household replaced its light bulbs with energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs, the cumulative effect would lower our annual carbon dioxide emissions by about 125 billion pounds, according to the Earth Day Network. And it's a case of doing well by doing good. You can save at least \$90 over the life of the bulb by replacing a 100-watt incandescent bulb with a 25-watt fluorescent lamp, said Pacific Gas and Electric spokesman Keely Wachs.

How's this for easy? In an innovative new program, ClimateSmart, PG&E is offering something akin to an indulgence for carbon

emissions. Customers can volunteer to pay extra every month — about \$4.13 for the average residential customer — to neutralize their carbon output, Wachs said. PG&E will take the extra money you kick in and use it to plant trees and buy forests so the trees can't be cut down, Wachs said. To sign up for the program, which officially launches this spring, e-mail ClimateSmart@pge.com.

To learn more call (800) 743-5000 or go to: <http://www.pge.com/climatesmart> Also, you can do an online energy audit on your home at <http://www.pge.com/res/energy—tools—resources/energy—tools.html>. The survey shows you how energy-efficient your home is and suggests ways to conserve.

Another tip: during the winter, you can save as much as 2 to 3 percent of your furnace's energy by lowering the temperature by 1 degree. Aim for 68 degrees.

Also, turning down the thermostat on your hot water heater and buying a thermal blanket for the hot water tank could save 1,050 pounds of carbon emissions a year, according to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute.

Summer is a long way off, but it's the Season of the Energy Hog in California, when energy demand peaks thanks mostly to air conditioners. Since the state relies first on newer and cleaner plants, as demand peaks, it must turn to less efficient power plants that also produce more air emissions. So it's important to conserve.

You can save 3 to 5 percent of your air conditioner's energy for every degree you raise the thermostat between 70 and 85 degrees. And don't do laundry in the afternoon, because it raises the temperature and the demand. Also, unplug "energy vampires" such as your cell phone charger, which uses energy even when the phone is not plugged in.

Don't forget to use the recycle bin. A large amount of what each household throws out can be recycled, at huge carbon savings.

If you're in the market to buy a car, consider getting a hybrid, most of which run off both electricity and gasoline. Driving a hybrid vehicle reduces life cycle greenhouse gases by about 30 percent compared with a conventional vehicle, according to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute.

As hybrid use increases, it could reduce greenhouse gases a projected 5.1 metric tons annually by 2010, according to a November 2006 study by the Institute of Transportation Studies at University of California, Davis.

For those of us who aren't poised to snap up a Toyota Prius or other hybrid, first of all, do routine maintenance. That's a no-brainer, right? "Under-inflated tires are the easiest and cheapest culprit you can address," Comey said. "For each pound of pressure your tires are under-inflated, it can sap as much as 2 percent of your fuel economy." Since this is all about taking the easy way out, when you get your oil changed, make sure the attendants check your tire pressure.

Slow down to save gas. Driving over 65 miles an hour causes a dramatic increase in how much fuel you use,. Also, there is no real need to play Grand Prix the next time the light changes. Your mileage drops to 3 miles a gallon if you stomp on the gas.

Another tip: Remove luggage racks or other carriers on your car if you aren't using them. They increase wind resistance and lower mileage.

Extra weight, even as little as 60 pounds, has a big impact on your vehicle's fuel economy. Don't try to use your car as a storage facility, Turn off the air conditioner in the car when you don't need it. You could save 5 to 10 percent on gas

"Leaving your car at home has the most dramatic effect," Sperling said. "Carpool, hop on BART, ride a bike, telecommute." To minimize the pain, you could take public transportation just one day a week. Or, if you

really want to cut down on expenses, try out the casual carpool. No doubt you've heard about these carpools, in which folks commuting to San Francisco pick up other commuters to qualify for the carpool lane and zoom through the toll booth without paying.

There are casual carpool sites in Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, Oakland, Lafayette, Orinda and other towns around the Bay. To find one near you: <http://www.ridenow.org/carpool>.

Speaking of work, there are a number of ways to conserve there as well. Just as at home, turn off equipment and lights when not in use. Spurn paper and foam cups and use ceramic coffee cups or real glasses instead.

You can really make an impact through choosing which businesses you patronize. For example, if you take a jaunt to the farmers' market — certainly a painless way to spend an afternoon — you could eventually help reduce the amount of carbon dioxide emitted to transport food to your area.

From solar energy firms to bakeries to toy stores, the Bay Area has a plethora of green businesses, so if you'd like to put your money where your heart is, check out <http://www.greenbiz.ca.gov/ShopGreen.html> when choosing a merchant.

And if you need inspiration, keep in mind the Bay Area-based "Compact," whose participants vowed in 2006 to buy nothing new all year except underwear and a few essentials. The group, most of whom have kept their promise, grew to some 3,000 people and became world-famous. If they can do it, so can you especially because now you know the easy way.

NEWLY REVISED LWVUS MISSION STATEMENT *The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages.*

League of Women Voters of Eden Area

P. O. Box 2234 – Castro Valley, CA 94546 • 510/538-9678
 Representing cities of Hayward and San Leandro
 and unincorporated areas of Ashland, Castro Valley,
 Cherryland, Fairview, Hillcrest Knolls and San Lorenzo

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CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS FOR 2007

| DATE/TIME | Event |
|---|---|
| 4/4 @ 5pm | LWVEA Board Meeting-Agenda available 3/31 |
| 4/13 Friday—@ 5:30pm  | LWVEA 50th Anniversary—Dinner and celebration. Come one. Come all. This is your party and we look forward to a venue overflowing with "Leaguers" sharing fond memories, friendship, community spirit, and new energy to keep moving forward. Tickets are going fast. |
| 5/5 Saturday @ 9:30am | LWV Bay Area Education Forum |
| May 18-20 | LWV State Convention—Bakersfield; We need delegates |
| 6/2 Saturday @9:30am | LWVEA Annual Membership Meeting |
| 6/28 Thursday @5:30pm | Meet your Elected Officials |

Visit our website for up to date information: LWVEA.org