



League of Women Voters Eden Area

V O T E R

Vol. 49 No. 3

Political Responsibility Through Informed and Active Participation

March 2006

TO MAIL (BALLOTS) OR NOT TO MAIL— THAT IS THE QUESTION

Whether you realize it or not, there has been a crisis brewing about whether Alameda County will be allowed to use mailed ballots if electronic voting machines are not certified in time for the June election. There is also a need for a better method of sampling ballots to check vote count accuracy.

AB 707 was introduced by Assemblywoman Loni Hancock in response to these problems, but it has met resistance in the Legislature. The following is a recent letter by LWVC President Jacqueline Jacobberger to Senator Debra Bowen, Chair of the Committee on Elections.

"Dear Senator Bowen:

The League of Women Voters of California supports AB 707 (Hancock), which would allow any California county to conduct the June 6, 2006 primary election entirely by mailed ballots. It also clarifies that, for all elections, the one percent manual tally shall include absent voters' ballots, provisional ballots, and ballots cast at satellite locations, and that the initial precincts counted shall be chosen by a random number generator or similar allowed method.

The League supports measures which will protect every citizen's right to vote and believes there should be local options in implementing the state Elections Code. At present, there are limited choices of voting systems available to California counties that satisfy both the Help America Vote Act and the state requirement for an accessible voter verified paper audit trail for direct recording electronic (DRE) machines. Those systems that meet requirements may be difficult to obtain and put into place for the June primary. We believe that the option of conducting the June primary by mail is a prudent way to address this situation.

We believe that counties that choose this option must make every effort to educate voters about this method of conducting elections and to facilitate voting by those who need to cast provisional ballots."

REMINDER

**Attorney General
Bill Lockyer
Keynote luncheon speaker
on
*Transparency in
Government and a Citizen's
Right to Know***

**Also three panels of
distinguished speakers
discussing the Brown Act and
the California Public Records
Act**

Friday, March 17

9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**San Lorenzo Village Community Hall
377 Paseo Grande**

**Luncheon \$20 in advance (by 3/10)
and \$25 after 3/10**

**RSVP to
Suzanne Barba 538-9678 or
lwvea@aol.com**

Questions: lwvsun@comcast.net



PRESIDENT'S REPORT - The Ballot Initiative Process and the Educated Voter

Over the last few years in California, we have seen a strong swing toward governance by ballot initiative rather than by elected representation and strong leadership. As citizens lose faith in their elected representatives, and as issues become more and more complex, special interest groups and others are turning to ballot initiatives to assure that their issue is addressed and that elected officials are locked into the "will of the voters."

This often leads to extremely complex ballot measures and even to competing measures on the same ballot. It has become extremely difficult for voters to work their way through the nuances of initiatives, particularly those on government financing (e.g., Proposition 1A or Proposition 65 on the last ballot.)

It is highly unlikely that we will see a lessening of the ballot initiative process in the near future: most experts predict it will only increase. This puts a terribly high premium on the educated voter, and it redefines what "educated" means. It is no longer sufficient to understand a single ballot initiative and whether we are for it or against it. We must now understand the implications of it when compared to existing law as well as other initiatives on the same ballot: what are the outcomes if one, the other, or both pass or fail? And we must often analyze the financial implications at local, regional, and State levels. It is a daunting task for even the dedicated voter let alone those of us who vote because we want to honor the process and exercise our rights, but only study the voter pamphlet the night before the election.

Therein lies the new challenge for the League of Women Voters across America, and particularly in California: How do we assist voters to understand complex ballot initiatives so that the choices they make on election day are informed, thoughtful ones, and not made in a hurry, out of frustration, in reaction to something else, or based on partial information? If the voter of today is replacing our represented form of government, how do we assist that voter in learning enough about these complex issues and to understand their inter-relationships in order to make good choices in governance?

Choices previously made by elected representatives devoting their full attention to the legislative process, staffed by analysts, equipped with detailed analysis of the impacts and implications, and having had time to discuss and debate the issues?

Voter education is already a critical factor in whether good choices are made at the ballot box, or whose "voice" actually prevails in an election. Governance by ballot initiative is a volatile process driven by self-interest – some positive and some negative. Whether one supports the current evolution of the ballot initiative process or not, we must recognize that it is here to stay and rise to the challenge of voter education in protection of our communities and in support of good governance.

Nancy Van Huffel, President

BOARD BRIEFS February 1, 2006

- Appointed four new Board members— Brian Foster, Vickie Hitzfeld, Maria Palmeri and Sal Tedesco.
- Recruited volunteers to interview Assemblyman Johan Klehs for LWVC.
- Discussed doing voter registration at the AAUW, Iris Alliance and LWVEA Healthy Minds and Bodies Health Fair 2-25. Agreed we would also hand out materials in support of Senator Sheila Kuehl's bill on Health Care for All.
- Received report on Death Penalty Debate Luncheon Forum on Feb. 21. So far Attorney Steve Dimick will speak against the Death Penalty. This topic will be brought up at the LWVUS convention.
- Approved up to \$200 for food and copying of materials for the upcoming LWVC Energy Study, March 2.
- Received report on Unincorporated Area Position Update. It will go back to the committee for further review.
- Received report we have 1253 members and of those, 30 are new members.
- Next regular Board meeting is Wednesday, March 1 at 12 noon. All meetings are open to the public.

LWVEA New Board Member Bios



At our last Board Meeting, we appointed four new members to our Board of Directors. Below is a short bio on each of the members. We appreciate their willingness to devote time to the Board.

We also want to extend our sincere gratitude to Trish Taylor who resigned from the Board recently. She was a strong contributor to the Board and volunteered many hours towards programs like Student Voter Education Program and voter registration.

Brian Foster

Mr. Foster works as a consultant responsible for operational and financial studies and audits of states, cities, counties, and special districts. He served previously as the City Treasurer, Tax Collector, and Financial Services Manager of El Cerrito, California, and has worked for the City of Oakland in both Finance and Information Technology.

Mr. Foster has lived in Castro Valley for almost ten years, and during that time has participated in a number of local events, including the Fall Festival, Rowell Ranch Parade, and various committees. He was also very active in Measure Q—the failed initiative to incorporate Castro Valley. Mr. Foster served the maximum eight year term on the Board of Directors for Bay Area Community Services (BACS), which operates senior and mental health programs in many areas of Alameda County, including Meals-on-Wheels in Oakland. Presently, Mr. Foster is on the Alameda County Measure B Citizens' Oversight Committee, which reports on the use of taxpayer funds for capital projects at the Chabot-Las Positas Community College District.

Vicki Hitzfeld

Born in Texas but lived in Washington Manor/San Leandro since about 5 years old. Retired after 25 years with Kaiser Permanente. Recently appointed Notary Public

and in process of starting own "virtual administrative assistant" business. Hobbies: gardening, designing party favors (possible future business), and paper crafts.

Maria Fatima Palmeri

Mrs. Palmeri has lived in the Cherryland area, unincorporated area of Alameda County for the last thirty years. She has been actively involved in local community issues as a member of the Cherryland Community Association Board and also a member of the Cherryland Citizens Advisory Committee for the Redevelopment Agency and the San Lorenzo Library Committee.

Ms. Palmeri has worked for the Alameda County for the last 15 years. The knowledge she has acquired in the Planning and Zoning Department has given her an understanding of how land use decisions affect her local community. She hopes that through her involvement and activism it will make a better community for all its residents.

Sal Tedesco

Grew up in San Francisco's North Beach. Korean War veteran and graduate of UC Berkeley in Pol. Sci. Assistant City Manager and subsequently City Manager of Santa Cruz, CA from 1956 to 1962. Served as a staff rep for the Peace Corps in Africa from 1962 to 1965. Returned to California while with HUD and assigned to the San Francisco Regional Office as a senior urban grants manager to cities and counties and as a chief underwriter for multi-family housing in northern California; 1969 to 1985.

Have lived in Castro Valley for 37 years with wife, Sylvia and two sons, John and Greg (both graduates of local schools). Have served both as a member and as chairman of the Castro Valley Municipal Advisory Council, chaired the CV Downtown Specific Plan Development Committee, served on past study groups investigating the feasibility of incorporation. Have been active in the CV Chamber of Commerce as a member of the Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee. Also served on the County Grand Jury for two years and on the County Advisory Commission on Aging. For several years on boards of Eden Housing.

INTERVIEW WITH SENATOR SHEILA KUEHL OF SB 840 – HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Interviewer: Why do we need health insurance for every Californian?



Kuehl: Right now about 20% of all Californians don't have any health insurance at all, and another 30% are very seriously underinsured. They don't have any pharmaceutical coverage, or they have \$5,000 deductibles so they can't even access their insurance. And what happens is a lot of them are forced to

use emergency rooms for their primary health care, and it's un-reimbursed care, so hospitals aren't being paid, doctors aren't being paid, or people just stay home and get very sick. And then by the time they go they're so sick they cost a lot of money. They have to be hospitalized. If everyone had health insurance you get preventive care, you get primary care and actually it saves a lot of money.

I: We're talking about Senate Bill 840 which you authored.

K: It's really important to understand that we would have nothing to do with employing the doctors or the hospitals. That all stays private just like it is now. But instead of being stuck in a system where you can choose one out of six doctors, you can choose any doctor in California, you can choose any hospital in California. It's actually a much better choice for patients.

I: You're talking about efficiencies and savings but who actually pays for it? Does it come out of my paycheck, out of my employer's paycheck, does it come out of income taxes?

K: It would not come out of income taxes or any taxes that we pay now for other purposes that go into the state coffers. We asked the Lewin Group to do an analysis about what is being paid now and what would be paid under a single payer system. You pay it into a system that only goes for health care and the one I'm looking at you would pay a percentage, maybe 4% of your salary that would be it. You would be totally covered, including dental, vision, pharmaceuticals, durable goods, everything. Your employer would also pay maybe 7%. But it would be very predictable.

It wouldn't be going up by double digits every year the way it is now.

I: No income taxes, but does any of this come out of the state budget which is already bending to the breaking point already?

K: What comes out of the state budget is what is already coming out of the state budget, only with more predictable increases or no increases. And that is payment for a portion of the indigent population. We pay for poor people's health care. And we pay actually quite a bit. It's the second largest item in the California State budget. It has grown by 15 or 20% every year because the Feds. mandate that we pay for certain things. So I think this makes it much more predictable. We'll still be paying for it but we won't be paying as much.

I: But it is a single payer system, which means no more private insurance companies. What do the insurance companies think about that?

K: Well, they are not thrilled, because as you know they have been making quite a bit of profit off of these insurance plans. The hospitals are not doing so well, but the insurance plans are very, very healthy.

I: But what about doctors? I understand that maybe the CMA is not thrilled with it.

K: The California Medical Association has been very interesting in their response to this. They have been cautious. They have not embraced it. They have a lot of questions. But they are engaged with us in question and answers. We want to make it work for doctors. Doctors are the backbone of the health care system.

I: What about businesses? I understand that the California Chamber isn't entirely on board.

K: I think the California Chamber has two major concerns. One of them is that they are particularly dominated by big businesses and many of those big businesses are not paying health care right now. And they don't want to. Under this plan they would have to pay some percentage of their pay roll for health care. So the second thing is that there are a lot of pharmaceutical companies that are on the Board of the California Chamber, not the local, but the State Chamber.

They're concerned because part of the plan of saving money is that California is going to negotiate, not force, but negotiate. But I say to the pharmaceutical company "I'd like to buy 35 million people worth of Damitol" and they say, "well that's a very big market" and I say "yes, that is exactly right. What price will you give me?" I think the Chamber is concerned because their pharmaceutical companies want them to be concerned.

I: Would this make California's health care system like Canada's or Great Britain's?

K: This would not make it like Canada's or Great Britain's. Part of the problem with Canada's system is that it actually does come out of their tax income. It's not like you're paying a premium and that entire premium goes into paying for health care. So, they vote in Canada how much is going to be spent on health care. And in Great Britain to a great extent, the doctors can work for the government. So the government is. it's like government controlled health care. This plan is nothing but an insurance plan. It's just a way that every body has insurance by paying a premium.

I: How does this differ from pay for play, which has been on the ballot recently?

K: It's very different from pay or play, because what that said was if you are an employer, you have to buy insurance, period. There were no efficiencies; it was the same old insurance companies making 20% increases in their premiums every year.

I: Is this a radical idea for America?

K: I think it is a fairly conservative idea for America. It saves money, it creates efficiencies. It is very democratic, that is everyone is covered, it doesn't depend on whether you're rich or poor. Everyone gets comprehensive health insurance.

I: And yet in the past all talk of universal health insurance has been a big debate but a really tough sell, isn't that true? Why so and why would it work now?

K: I think there has been scare tactics about universal health care that created an atmosphere about it that really is just not true. I think people think that it is socialized medicine, which really is where doctors work for the government.

We have nothing to do with running the health care system if we create a large insurance system.

This system is really crashing in on itself. We absolutely need something that is a real reform. So I think that's why now. There is growing support.

I: It's been passed by the Senate, it's in the Assembly, where is it now in the Assembly in the whole process and what do you think is going to happen next and what are it's chances?

K: We have long talks coming up with the Governor who has not indicated support for the bill. But there is a race next year for the Governor's seat as well as a number of other seats. Some of the candidates may support the bill. That could actually be a factor in their election. So, since I have two more years after that to serve, my intention is to keep this bill going until we get it. Because we need it.

SPEAK OUT FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM



Wednesday, March 29, 2006
Sacramento Convention Center
9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

- EDUCATE your Legislators
- CAUCUS with Women's Health Advocates from all over California

- PROTECT Women's Health Rights
- LEARN about emerging issues

The League has joined over 50 other organizations as the California Coalition for Reproductive Freedom.

For more information contact Jo Ann Madigan (415) 346-0563 or by email jomadigan@earthlink.net.

ABORTION BAN MAY HEAD TO SUPREME COURT (Excerpt from Article by Chet Brokaw, AP Writer for SAC Bee – 2-26-06)

Gov. Mike Rounds said he is inclined to sign a bill that would ban nearly all abortions in South Dakota, making it a crime for doctors to perform an abortion unless it was necessary to save the woman's life.

The ban, including in cases of rape or incest, was approved Friday by South Dakota lawmakers, setting up a deliberate frontal assault on *Roe v. Wade* at a time when some activists see the U.S. Supreme Court as more willing than ever to overturn the 33-year-old decision.

Planned Parenthood, which operates the only clinic in the state that provides abortions, vowed to sue. But even before the bill has a signature, money to defend it poured in. Lawmakers were told during the debate that an anonymous donor pledged \$1 million to defend the ban, and the Legislature was setting up a special account to accept donations.

Many opponents and supporters of abortion rights believe the U.S. Supreme Court is more likely to overturn its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion now that conservatives John Roberts and Samuel Alito are on the bench. Lawmakers said growing support among South Dakotans for abortion restrictions gave the bill momentum.

The legislation was decried by opponents who said it would particularly impact rape victims and poor women. Currently, a clinic in Sioux Falls is the only place where abortions are provided in South Dakota. The closest alternative is a Planned Parenthood location in Sioux City, Iowa, about 90 miles away.

Under the measure, doctors could get up to five years in prison for performing an illegal abortion. The House passed the bill 50-18 on Friday, and the Senate approved it 23-12 earlier this week. If signed, it would become law July 1.

Rounds said his staff will review the bill for technical defects. He said he vetoed a similar measure two years ago because it would have wiped out all existing restrictions

on abortion while the bill was challenged in court.

"I've indicated I'm pro-life and I do believe abortion is wrong and that we should do everything we can to save lives. If this bill accomplishes that, then I am inclined to sign the bill into law," he said.

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH MEASURE A? *Sal Tedesco, LWVEA OC Representative*

With the countywide approval of Measure by a large majority of the voters, an additional half-cent was added to the local sales tax. The purpose was to bolster the fragile financial condition in which the county found itself in providing medical services to the county's indigent population. Funds received from this levy would be divided between the county hospital system and other community health services on a ratio of 75% to 25%.

A condition was attached to the ballot measure which required the appointment of a citizens' oversight committee to ensure that all funds collected would be used exclusively for the purposes spelled out in the law and that the Oversight committee would report back to the public with its findings annually.

The County Board of Supervisors then proceeded to appoint members to this Committee based on recommendations it received from a variety of public and private local entities including the League of Women Voters. Inadvertently, this process proved to be quite time consuming. The League made two appointments to the committee—Sal Tedesco from the Eden Area League and Ken Ballard from the Fremont/Union City/Newark League. The committee was finally assembled and convened late last year.

To date, the Oversight Committee (OC) has held three formal meetings devoting much of its efforts to organization, orientation and clearly defining its scope of work. It is being assisted in this endeavor by the county's senior staff in Health Care Services and other elements of the county government as deemed necessary. The OC is hoping to assemble and release its first report on Fiscal 2004-2005 activities under Measure A by July of this year.



SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH ASSEMBLYMEMBER JOHAN KLEHS USING LWVC QUESTIONS

LWVC - California continues to face the problem of a gap between revenues and state expenditures. While the current Legislative Analyst's report indicates that state revenues are up at the present time, it is expected that the gap of the past few years will continue. In general, three strategies can be found to deal with this gap: 1) cut state spending; 2) raise revenues through tax or fee increases or by discontinuing certain tax expenditures (i.e., tax credits, exemptions, deductions and other special tax breaks or incentives); and 3) generate revenue by floating state general obligation or revenue bond issues. Which of these would you choose?

KLEHS - He believes in a mix of the three options for helping close the budget gap. He thinks there are many tax loopholes that can be closed, but there doesn't seem to be the political will to do so in Sacramento. He believes that term limits will allow the present legislators to push the budget gap problem to the next group of legislators. He was disappointed that he couldn't get support for his proposed tax on oil company windfall profits.

LWVC - What should the legislature do to ensure that all Californians have access to health care?

KLEHS - He supports SB540, Sheila Kuehl's bill to provide access to health care for all Californians.

LWVC - Would you support a legislative effort to place a proposal on the ballot to vest authority for redistricting in an independent commission? What specific provisions would you like to see in such a proposal?

KLEHS - He doesn't support legislation to vest authority for redistricting to an independent commission. He believes that legislators should retain the right to do their own redistricting. He doubts that there can ever be an unbiased independent commission. He does oppose term limits because it does not value the importance of a legislator's experience and judgment.

LWVC - What are the major issues that you see the legislature must deal with in 2006? What are your personal priorities?

KLEHS - He thinks the major issues to deal with in 2006 are: (1) Balancing the budget, (2) Education, (3) improving the infrastructure. His personal priorities are: (1) accountability in government, (2) transportation, (3) education, and (4) the environment.

HELP WANTED

Do you have an interest in important issues at the local, state or national level—health care, transportation, housing, land use, voter registration, mental health, energy, and many others—then we can help.

Our League has accomplished a lot, but we can do even more with your help. We have tasks that just take a little amount of your time and tasks that take more time and effort.

We will need lots of help for the upcoming elections—registering voters, conducting candidate forums and doing Ballot Initiative Pro and Con presentations for various community groups. For more info call Suzanne at 538-9678.

National League (LWVUS) Announces Advocacy Priorities for 2006

The League recently announced its national advocacy priorities for the upcoming year. The League recommitted to the Democracy Agenda, which includes the priorities of Election Reform, Campaign Finance Reform, Redistricting and Civil Liberties. Lobbying Reform and Ethics, and the Reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act were added. In addition, LWVUS work on DC Rights, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Clean Air issues will continue..

LWVUS Action on Lobby Reform Legislation

The League sent a letter to members of the U.S. House of Representatives urging them to support effective legislation to reform the lobbying process. The LWVUS also joined several other organizations in a letter urging the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee to support strong and effective lobbying reforms.

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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Dues: Regular \$48 Same Household \$24, Student \$20
 Dues and contributions to the League are not tax deductible.

The League of Women Voters, a
 nonpartisan political organization,
 encourages the informed and active
 participation of citizens in government and
 influences public policy through education
 and advocacy.

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

All members and the public are welcome.

MARCH 2006	
17	Sunshine Week Forum time/place TBA
17	EdSource Conference on Education Fremont
29	Reproductive Freedom March Sacramento
APRIL	
5	LWVEA Board Meeting, 11:45 to Noon, SLVHA
6	San Leandro Mayor and Council candidate forum
MAY	
3	LWVEA Board Meeting, 11:45 to Noon, SLVHA
4	Meet Your Elected Officials
JUNE	
3	Annual Meeting
7	LWVEA Board Meeting, 11:45 to Noon, SLVHA

HAVE A QUESTION?

CONTACT A LWVEA BOARD MEMBER

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