

Kern Voter

A PUBLICATION OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF KERN COUNTY

June/August 2009

President's Message

The League of Women Voters of Kern County was represented at the Bakersfield Women's Business Conference in April. Pat Stager, her sister Becky, and I spoke with over 200 women about the League and encouraged them to join or attend a meeting. It surprised us that many women had not heard of the League. They were very interested to learn more about us.

Democracy, Voting and Civic Engagement

This was the theme of the state bi-annual convention last month. Over 170 Leaguers from throughout the state convened at the Long Beach Marriot for a weekend. I attended along with Lois Watson and Michelle Turner. Through the League's grassroots efforts, delegates directed the State League to study or advocate the issues they deemed most important for the next two years.

The agenda was packed with workshops, speakers, plenary sessions, caucuses and networking. There were over twelve workshops with expert speakers and topics on better communication with members; health care updates on the current bills the League is following at the Congressional level; initiatives and referendum: marketing tips; and resources available to attract and retain members.

Guest speakers were John Cruz, Appointments Secretary to Governor Schwarzenegger, who represents the Governor at public forums and State Senator Jenny Oropeza who inspired us with her speech about obstacles and positive mentors in her life. The keynote speaker was Robert Hertzberg, co-chair, California Forward Leadership Council, who served as the State Assembly Member representing the 40th District. He spoke about the importance of working together with the California Forward Organization to reform government. Robert was enthusiastic and humorous.

During the plenary sessions, delegates accepted the following 2009-2011 Recommended Program for the State Board:

- Issues for Education and Advocacy
- Redistricting Implementation – Proposition 11
- Government Reform (State and Local Finance, Initiative Referendum, Process, State Constitution, Campaign Financing, Voting Rights)

Delegates asked for a floor vote on items which had not been recommended prior to the convention. These failed by a slim margin and included:

A state prison study and the following issue for education and advocacy:

- State and Local Finances
- Water
- Health Care

Passionate pro and con arguments were expressed on each of these non-recommended items, but the majority of the delegates felt that our resources and impact could best be served by focusing on government reform which will have a positive impact on all the above issues.

Our local board will meet in June to develop an action plan on the issues of emphasis and action plans adopted by the members at the May annual meeting. This yearly retreat is an opportunity for the board to refine our goals, train new board members, and develop strategic plans that will best utilize our resources. Do you have direction for the board? I want to hear from you; email me at dddw@prodigy.net or call me at 661/301-7437.

Women's Equality Day is commemorated nationally on August 26. We will hold our annual celebration of the day women were allowed to vote on Saturday, August 29 at Hodel's. The focus of our program will be women running for office. What is it like for women to campaign? Why are there fewer women in office and on boards in Kern County than there are men? Join us for breakfast at Hodel's on August 29 from 9 to 11 am and hear from a panel of women about their campaign experiences.

Thank you for being a League member. Invite a friend to join us. Have a great summer!—Diane Williams

Calendar

June 10—Wednesday, 11:30 am. Uduak Ntuk, a presenter for The Alliance for Climate Protection, will discuss climate change at the Guild House. Luncheon cost is \$16.

June 20—Saturday, 11 am-3 pm. Board Retreat at Marie Callender's on California Avenue.

No meetings in July. Enjoy summer.

August 29—Saturday, 9 am. Women's Equality Day celebration featuring Fran Florez and Dee Whitley. discussing "Experiences on the Campaign Trail?" Join us for breakfast at Hodel's Restaurant, 5917 Knudsen. Cost for breakfast is \$15. Call League Line for reservations.

Reminder: General meetings are on the third Wednesday of the month. If you need transportation to a meeting, please leave that message on the League Line.

Reservations are required for dinner and luncheon meetings and special events. Please call the League Line, 634-3773, by Monday noon prior to the Wednesday event. No charge for attendance at program only. Thank you.

June meeting focuses on climate change

Uduak Ntuk, a presenter for The Alliance for Climate Protection, will discuss climate change at the 11:30 am general meeting of the LWVK in the Music Room of the Guild House on Wednesday, June 10th. He was trained by former Vice President Al Gore to inform the public about global warming.

Ntuk has a degree in chemical engineering from Cal State Long Beach and is completing a master's degree in petroleum engineering from the University of Southern California. His

presentation will focus on an updated version of the slide show from Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Cost of the luncheon is \$16. Call the League Line, 634-3773, by noon Monday, June 8 to make a reservation.—Barbara Lovell

Women's Equality Day celebration

Women in Politics will be the topic when the League celebrates Women's Equality Day on Saturday, August 29 with a breakfast at Hodel's Restaurant, 5917 Knudsen.

Fran Florez, a candidate for the California State Assembly last November, and Dee Whitley, a former member of the Panama Buena Vista School Board will discuss their experiences campaigning for office. How difficult is it to raise campaign funds and support? How does one handle innuendo and attacks from opposing candidates? Both women are members of our local League.

August 26 of each year is designated in the United States as Women's Equality Day. Instituted by Rep. Bella Abzug and first established in 1971, the date commemorates the passage of the 19th Amendment, the Woman Suffrage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave U.S. women full voting rights in 1920.

The meeting begins at 9 am. Cost for breakfast is \$15. Watch for your invitation in the mail and reserve your place by calling the League Line, 634-3773--editor

Successful special election forum

On April 21 the League held a Pro and Con Forum focusing on the six propositions on the May 19 special election ballot. Diane Williams, Janis Jones and Terri Stanton each presented both sides of two of the propositions and responded to questions from the audience.

Publicity announcing the forum was widespread, thanks to communications director Michelle Turner. Approximately 80 people attended, many of them high school students from Liberty and Centennial High Schools. They were obviously very interested in the propositions and asked excellent questions. The forum lasted for approximately one hour, but many individuals stayed to discuss the issues and the League following the presentation. This was a positive event and clearly highlighted the educational aspect of the League.—Terri Stanton

Progress report on current health care legislation

As a board member, health care is one of my responsibilities. Over the past two years, the LWV of California has supported Senator Sheila Kuehl's Universal Health Care legislation. Senator Kuehl's bill passed both the state assembly and senate but was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger. At unit meetings, our local League reviewed the Massachusetts' landmark law which requires all residents to have health insurance by July 2007. We also compared the Democratic and Republican health care planks prior to the November 2008 election.

Now both parties have decided to make health care a major priority. Issues appear to be divided by societal categories: retirees enrolled in Medicare; children whose parents cannot provide

sufficient health care coverage for them; adults who have lost their jobs and therefore cannot afford insurance; companies which have reduced or eliminated coverage for employees; and people of all ages who have dropped coverage due to rising costs or reduction in their salaries.

California's financial crisis challenges local agencies and hospitals. Many social service and health care services are faced with a reduction in staff and in funding.

Ironically, President Obama may have the opportunity to hammer out a plan of action that provides a solution to this serious crisis. Health care coverage is the greatest inflationary factor for individuals, families and employers. The President is bringing together health insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, the AMA, nurses and both Democratic and Republican members of Congress to grapple with ways to reform health care nationwide.

In the coming months it is my intention to provide a chance for members of our local League and the general public to dialogue and keep current on the progress made in Washington, D.C. and Sacramento. This will be accomplished through unit meetings with qualified speakers who will keep us informed on this complex issue. Also, look for articles in future issue of the Voter.

Senator Mark Leno has picked up the reins of Senator Kuehl who was termed out. His SB 810 establishes the State Healthcare System to be administered by the newly created State Healthcare Agency under the control of a Healthcare Commissioner appointed by the Governor. The bill makes all residents eligible for specified health care benefits under the system which would negotiate, on a single-payer basis, or set fees for health care services provided through the system and pay claims for them. The bill would extend the application of insurance fraud laws to providers of services and products. Currently, this legislation is in the Senate Committee on Appropriations. That committee took action to place it in the suspense file. In the present economic climate, it would have been foolish to try to appropriate funds for the bill and send it on to the Assembly for passage and then have the Governor veto it. My discussions with various legislative leaders suggest that it will probably come back for positive action next year. Of course, it will depend on financial conditions both nationally and in California and the outcome of President Obama's push for health care reform.

This issue is one of the most important problems that must be resolved for the welfare of our country and its citizens!—Del Gardner

STAY INFORMED

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League of Women Voters' websites:**

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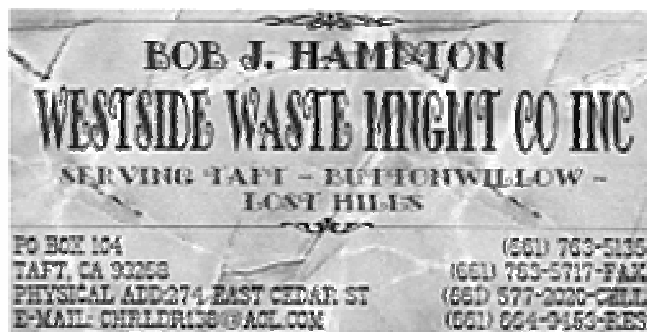
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