



THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF STANISLAUS COUNTY

August 2013

Serving the Citizens of Stanislaus County, California

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President's Message

Summer is usually the calm before the storm for the League. Many of us are out of town for good portions of the time, and when home we are focused on our families, our yards and keeping cool. In general, that is true this year as well. However, we have spent some time this summer preparing for a busy fall season. There will be elections in Districts 2, 4 and 5 on the Modesto City Council, two seats on the Ceres City Council and 1 seat on the Waterford City Council. In addition, there are races for 20 school boards within the county. If that is not enough, there are openings on MID and TID boards, as well as several other special district boards and municipal advisory councils. While we will not be doing forums for all these races, there will certainly be plenty of forums to keep us busy. Ellen and Marsha are already looking into possible venues. Please be ready to help when they look for volunteers in September.

On July 13, I had the privilege of representing our League at a workshop for prospective candidates for public office. The workshop was sponsored by the Modesto Bee, the Modesto Chamber of Commerce, both the Republican and Democratic parties in Stanislaus County and the League of Women Voters. The prospective candidates were given basic information on filing and reporting requirements, financial management of campaigns and preparing for interviews and forums. For my part, I gave them some information on how we conduct our forums and the use of Smart Voter. A couple of things really impressed me at the workshop. First, and foremost, I was pleasantly surprised by the attendance. Thirty-seven people registered for the workshop; I truly was expecting only a handful. Some were already committed to running for a particular office in this coming election. Others were either still undecided as to whether or not to run, or just thinking of doing so at some point in the future. The attendees represented a great cross-section of our community. There were people of all races and ethnicities, a good number of women and, what I was especially happy to see, quite a few young people. The second thing that impressed me was that all the speakers, which included local politicians very active in both parties, emphasized civility, respect, integrity and thoughtful discussion. I left the workshop optimistic about the future of government leadership in Stanislaus County.

We have also been active this summer in planning a community wide program on Implementation of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) in California. The program is scheduled for Thursday, September 12 at 6:30 PM in Sierra Hall Room 132 on the Modesto Junior College West Campus. Our speaker will be Emily Bazar, Senior Writer for the California Health Care Foundation, which is part of the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. Emily is based in Sacramento and her mission is to stay up to date on health policy issues in California and communicate them to the public. She writes a column on health care questions, Ask Emily, which appears periodically in the *Modesto Bee*. I am very excited about the way this program has developed. It started as an idea for a Lunch and Learn. Then Joan Goldsmith saw one of Emily's articles and contacted her. The feedback that we got from Emily was very positive but she indicated that she wanted to speak to a larger group. This quickly outgrew Lunch and Learn but Joan and Ruby Hennessey persisted in working on the project and have now put together what may be one of the larger community programs we have done. A tremendous amount of thanks goes to Colleen Norby who helped us reach out to the members of the MJC Civic Engagement Project, although they don't actually meet over the summer, and secured us the venue. The editor of the *Modesto Bee* heard that we were planning this, and the *Modesto Bee* is now an enthusiastic partner. A couple of weeks ago Joan, Ruby and I had a meeting with Emily, who came from Sacramento, her boss, Richard Kipling, who came up from Los Angeles and the editor of the *Modesto Bee* to discuss the program. All of them are incredibly enthusiastic and were impressed with how well the League had put together a plan for the program. What can I say – we have amazing members!

Your job as an amazing member – SAVE THE DATE, September 12, 6:30 PM – and start telling your friends. Enjoy the rest of your summer – and get ready for an active voter education season in the fall!

Mary Giventer, Elected President

**LWV of STANISLAUS
COUNTY OFFICERS**

President

Mary Giventer

president@lwvstanislaus.org

Vice President

Seena Rhine

Vp2@lwvstanislaus.org

Secretary

Marie Bairey

secretary@lwvstanislaus.org

Treasurer

Larry Giventer

treasurer@lwvstanislaus.org

DIRECTORS

Action – State and National

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Action - Local

Stella Beratlis

Finance Drive

Ellen Dunbar

Lunch and Learn

Ruby Hennessey

Membership

Laurie Carley

Nominating Committee

Amy Wolfe, chair

Public Relations

Wendy Scott

Voter Editor

Karrie Bullock

newsletter@lwvstanislaus.org

Voter Service

Ellen Meyer

voterservice@lwvstanislaus.org

Board Administrator

Lynn Kelso

OFF-BOARD

Membership

Colleen Norby

Voter Service

Marsha Waggoner

Web Master

Open

Lunch and Learn

Joan Goldsmith

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box E, Modesto 95352

209-524-1698

www.lwvstanislaus.org

Stanislaus Council of Governments, June Lunch and Learn

Carlos Yamzon, Stanislaus Council of Governments (StanCOG) Executive Director, spoke to LWVSC at the June Lunch and Learn. StanCOG is a regional transportation planning agency, and it administers federal and state transportation funds for projects within the jurisdiction.

A 16-member policy board includes the five county supervisors, three representatives from City of Modesto and representatives from the remaining eight cities in the county. The agency's \$46 million allocation includes some \$16 million for mandated "other transit" and the rest for road projects. The Regional Transportation Plan is a 25-year master plan that is a blueprint for all transportation improvement projects in the region. Funds come with guidelines, and the policy board recommends projects. The Whitmore/Hwy 99 interchange and Hwy 132 are among high priority projects.

Recent legislation requires regional planning to reduce the impact of greenhouse gases. It presumes a land use/housing and transportation connection. For example, trips to work or school begin at home. Planning where people live with proximity to transportation reduces congestion and pollution. The Modesto Chamber of Commerce's recent proposal links transportation and jobs. The Central Valley obviously has unique pollution problems. Recognizing that we can't build our way out of congestion, meeting mandates will require regional cooperation, revising priorities and education.

There is currently renewed interest in a county transportation sales tax which, if placed on the ballot and approved, would make Stanislaus County a self-help county and jump-start transportation projects. While Stanislaus County's transportation allocation is approximately \$46 million, San Joaquin County generates \$55 million from local taxes, which in turn leverage other funds for projects such as the widening of Hwy. 99. StanCOG has been directed to begin gathering information and to provide education about needs and priorities as background for a possible tax measure.

Marie Bairey, Secretary

Online Registration a Hit

Although online voter registration was only available for a one-month period prior to the last November election, it proved very popular. Of the 1.2 million voters who registered from September 19 to October 21 more than half did so online. The online option was particularly popular with residents under the age of 25. They constituted about 30% of all online registrants, helping to drive an 8% increase in voter registration in that age group, according to Mindy Romero, project director for the California Civic Engagement Project. Also, voters who registered online turned out to actually vote at an 8% higher rate than those who registered through other methods.

Almost 50% of the voters using the online system registered as Democrats, while 20% registered as Republicans. This is higher than the general electorate in California, which favors Democrats by a margin of 44% to 30% and runs counter to the recent trend of new registrants who decline to pick any party. However, Romero cautions that while she was "a bit surprised" by this finding, it is too early and too small a sample to draw any long term conclusions.

Steve Towns, the author of this article in *Tech Talk*, does conclude: "California's experience also shows that citizens may not be as apathetic about elections as some people fear. In other words, if you give citizens a better process, it appears they'll not only register, they'll also vote."

This is based on an article, Signing Up by Logging On, written by Steve Towns in *Governing*, March 2013.

Thank you to Vanessa Czopek for passing this on to me.

Mary Giventer, President

STATE AND NATIONAL ACTION

NATIONAL: U.S. Supreme Court Strikes Down Heart of Voting Rights Act. Dissenting from the U.S. Supreme Court's majority opinion in the case of *Shelby County, AL v. Holder*, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg stated that the Voting Rights Act "is no ordinary legislation. It is extraordinary because Congress embarked on a mission long delayed and of extraordinary importance: to realize the purpose and promise of the Fifteenth Amendment...For a half century a concerted effort has been made to end racial discrimination in voting." However, on June 25, 2013, by a 5-to-4 vote the United States Supreme Court declared that "the coverage formula in Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, originally passed in 1965 and most recently updated by Congress in 1975, was unconstitutional because it did not reflect current conditions. The section determined which states must receive clearance from the Justice Department or a federal court in Washington before they made ... changes to voting procedures..." (New York Times, June 25, 2013). According to Elisabeth MacNamara, LWV President: "By cutting the heart out of the Voting Rights Act, the Court has weakened our ability to keep our elections free, fair and accessible to every eligible voter while at the same time emboldening those who seek to create barriers to voting. Already, states formerly subject to Section 5 preclearance are rushing to implement voter photo ID laws and discriminatory redistricting plans. The fight to protect the vote now involves not just the state legislatures, but Congress as well." (Leaders' Update, June 27, 2013) Ms. MacNamara urges League members to remind our members in Congress that voting rights are not a partisan issue and for members to help through the media and personal contacts to build a groundswell to restore protections against racial discrimination. (Please Google "Voting Rights Act" to access the excellent New York Times article quoted above.)

STATE: Celebrate Supreme Court Decision on Marriage Equality. Together we applaud the June 26 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Hollingsworth v. Perry* that invalidated Proposition 8. The Supreme Court ruled that the proponents of Proposition 8 (the initiative that provided that

only marriage between a man and a woman would be valid in California) lacked legal standing to appeal the decision of the district court striking down Proposition 8 as un-constitutional. As a result, the district court's decision will be left as the final and binding decision. The League supports equal rights for all and believes that same-gender couples should have the same rights and benefits available to heterosexual couples.

STATE: Let the Sun Shine In! Money in Politics: Sunshine in Campaigns Act. We need your help to make sure that Californians will know who is spending money in the political world. LWVC is co-sponsoring SB2 (Lieu) and SB3 (Yee), the Sunshine in Campaigns Act. In addition, League support SB 27 (Correa). The three bills provide a comprehensive approach to improving California's campaign disclosure laws. They are all now awaiting hearings in the Assembly. Legislators will need to hear strong support for these bills in the future, so sign up now to get Action Alerts...

STATE: The League supports SCA 3 (Leno and Steinberg), a proposed constitutional amendment to ensure that the public's right to public records and to be included in local governmental meetings cannot be disregarded in California. The League has a long, respected history supporting open, transparent government practices. The strength of our democracy is predicated on the public being able to access information.

STATE: California Citizens Redistricting Commission Report Highlights Successes. A new report, commissioned by the League of Women Voters of California in partnership with The James Irvine Foundation, finds that California's first citizen-led redistricting commission successfully democratized redistricting in the state. In fact, among the estimated 1/3 of the voters who were familiar with the work of the commission, over 66% of the public approved of the CRC district maps.

Hanna Renning, State and National Action

Board Highlights:

The highlights from the July 10th, 2013 Board meeting:

- Marie Bairey and Ruby Hennessey will represent the Board on the Nominating Committee
- Board approved study of the Modesto sales tax proposal for possible position statement.
- League is co-sponsoring Columnist Emily Bazar for a public presentation on the Affordable Care Act September 12 at 6:30 P.M. at MJC.
- Membership renewals are due. Reminders have been mailed.

Marie Bairey, Secretary

**I WANT TO ADD MY VOICE TO YOURS
BY JOINING THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF STANISLAUS COUNTY!**

- ___ Student Membership \$25
- ___ Individual Membership \$60
- ___ Household Membership \$90

Please contact me with more information.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone (for directory) _____

Call for Photos!

Don't be camera shy...help us visually document the LWVSC in action!
Please email any League photos to The Voter Editor for consideration of use for newsletter.

newsletter@lwwstanislaus.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[\(Check Website for Updates\)](#)

Thursday, July 25	Lunch and Lean: Tom Ciccarelli, Executive Director of Stanislaus Family Justice Center, Appetez Restaurant 12pm
Wednesday, August 21st	Board Meeting 6:00pm Dale Commons, 3900 Dale Road, Modesto
Thursday, August 29	Lunch and Learn: LWVSC President Mary Giventer will report on LWVC Convention.
Thursday, September 12th	Implementation of the Affordable Care Act in California, with speaker Emily Bazar, Senior Writer for the California Health Care Foundation. Modesto Junior College, West Campus, Sierra Hall, Room 132 at 6:30 PM.

**League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County
P.O. Box E
Modesto, CA 95352**

The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan 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.