



The Voter

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF STANISLAUS COUNTY

October 2017

Serving the Citizens of Stanislaus County, California

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President's Message

The November election is fast approaching and our League is making efforts to inform voters in Stanislaus County. We have forums scheduled for the Oakdale Irrigation District, the Modesto City Schools and the Modesto City Council. Candidates for these positions, as well as the candidates for other races in the county, have been invited to participate in Voter's Edge. On Voter's Edge candidates can submit a brief biography, list their three top priorities for the position they seek and link to position papers and endorsements. Any voter can then go to the Voter's Edge site and get information about the candidates on their specific ballot. Our League has also endorsed Measure S. If passed Measure S will extend for 12 years the $\frac{1}{8}$ cent sales tax, which provides nearly 89% of the funding for our public libraries. Many of our members are actively working on that campaign.

While I am proud of our political involvement, I am also frustrated by the general lack of attention to this year's election. You cannot turn on the television or go to social media without being exposed to all kinds of rhetoric on national politics. Yet it is hard to find any discussion of local politics. The issues may not be as sexy as debating whether or not a professional football player should stand for the national anthem, but they have a much more direct effect on our quality of life. Officials elected this fall will be making decisions for the next several years on water regulation, land use, development, education budget priorities, public safety, etc. Votes on Measure S will determine if we continue to have a robust library system providing needed services throughout our county or a mere skeleton of a system open a few hours a week in one or two locations.

When a local council or irrigation district considers a controversial policy, citizens pack the chambers to voice their support and opposition. Modesto City Council's recommendation to change the status of the Wood Colony area in its revised general plan is one prime example. Citizens filled the chambers to overflowing and sat through meetings that lasted until late at night to express their views. Their passion was commendable. I hope many of them will show up at the forum to ask council candidates about their positions on land use and other important issues.

Urging League members to get informed and get involved is preaching to the choir. However, we all need to lead the singing: attend the forums, ask the candidates questions and encourage your friends and neighbors to do so as well. Finally, help get out the vote on November 9. Democracy is not a spectator sport; it is, however, a local sport. ■

Mary

League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County • Officers and Directors, 2017-18

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Calendar of Events

Two More Candidate Forums

Volunteers are needed. To lend a hand contact Marsha Blomquist at blomq@att.net or 209.844.5328.

- Oakdale Irrigation District • Wednesday, **October 11** at 7 PM; Oakdale Council Chambers, 2nd Avenue and D Streets.
- Modesto City Council • Thursday, **October 12** at 6:00 PM; Council Chambers 1010 Tenth Street.

Lunch and Learn

Noon, last Thursday of each month, at Ridgway's on Orangeburg (Century Center, Modesto) Chef's Choice Menu @ \$13; vegetarian lunch also available at same price.

October 26 • "Treatment Before Tragedy" • A presentation about **Laura's Law**, a proposed California state law to provide community-based, assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) to a small population of individuals who meet strict legal criteria and who—as a result of their mental illness—are unable to voluntarily access community mental health services. Speakers will be NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) members Jo Lambert, Linda Mayo and Rhonda Allen.

Monday, **November 27, 2017 • Holiday Fling!**
Speaker: To Be Announced • At Lynn Fenderson's

Doug Chadwick, Modesto pediatrician for 35 years, passed away August 29, 2017. In retirement, Dr. Chadwick volunteered his time and medical skills to local organizations including Children's Crisis Center, Modesto Gospel Mission and Royal Family KIDS Camp. He also volunteered at orphanages in Uganda through Shared Blessings International Christian Ministries. He enjoyed a variety of interests and hobbies and was a long-time supporter of League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County, attending many of our events.

Lunch and Learn



Jim Stokes, site manager for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) located in Turlock, was the speaker for the September lunch meeting. He has worked for with IRC since 2008, including an assignment in the Northern Syria/Turkey region providing technical and management leadership for food security and livelihood programs for Syrian refugees. The IRC is a global organization which responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. It was founded in 1933 to offer emergency aid and long-term assistance to refugees. In the United States, IRC locations across the country specialize in refugees from different areas of the world.

Jim's talk started with a definition of refugees, who are often confused with legal or illegal immigrants. Refugees are forced to flee their country because of persecution as the result of war, violence or a natural disaster. They are invited to enter the United States by the government and have all the proper paperwork. When they enter the US, refugees are given authorization to work, and at the end of a year they become legal permanent residents. After five years, they may apply for citizenship.

Jim shared the following statistics to show the magnitude of the refugee problem:

- More than 64 million people were displaced worldwide in 2016; nearly 21.5 million seek asylum in other countries while the rest move within their own country;
- Half of all refugees are under 18; women and children make up the greatest number of victims in any conflict;
- 54% of refugees now come from three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia;
- 33,972 people are forcibly displaced every day;
- Fewer than 1% of all refugees are eventually resettled;
- 69,933 refugees were resettled by the US in the fiscal year of 2016;
- The US has reduced the number of refugees allowed this year to 45,000, and
- 538 people were resettled in the Turlock/Modesto area; it is expected to increase to 552 for the year.

The basic resettlement process takes place over three months although that may be extended in the area of jobs. The case manager picks up the refugees at the airport, introduces them to their apartment, helps enroll any children in school, assists the adults in finding jobs and getting them into English classes. The goal is for them to become financially self-sufficient and, in the long term, for them to move from entry-level jobs to something more equivalent to the jobs they left in their former life.

Although working-age adult refugees often initially rely on public assistance programs, Jim referred to a study done at the University of Notre Dame indicating that the long-term economic

benefits of admitting refugees outweighs the initial costs. The study found that the average estimated cost of resettling a refugee in the United States is \$15,000, including background checks, housing, English classes and job training. Within eight years of their arrival, adult refugees begin paying more in taxes than they receive in benefits, and in 20 years they will have paid an average of \$21,000 more in taxes than in benefits received from all levels of government since their arrival. Refugees entering as children show even greater fiscal benefits.

Jim shared some of the needs and goals for the local IRC program. They are always looking for volunteers to help with jobs and housing. The office is also seeking more employment and landlord partners. Families can also use any type of working computers, gift cards and welcome kits—food and personal hygiene. He noted that the refugees are often taken advantage of in financial situations and need more education in this area. To volunteer or donate, contact the Turlock office at 667-2378 or the Modesto office at 238-3011.

Jim would like to see more opportunities here for refugees to move into better paying jobs based on their skills. He is planning a pilot program within the next six months. In a previous assignment, Jim developed an Urban Ag program and would like to start one here. He worked with the USDA to secure a grant to work on agriculture speciality foods for different cultures. He noted that people miss the foods they grew up with and will travel many miles when they hear that someone is growing those foods.

In answer to a travel ban question, Jim noted that with the travel ban people must start over with security checks, which are very time consuming. Since they are then at the end of the queue, their persecutors have more time to get to them.

Jim is especially worried about conditions in Syria, which basically has no institutions left. He recommended calling our politicians with our concerns. He said that Congressman Denham's office staff does attend IRC meetings and have been helpful.

For more information on IRC and the work they do, visit the website at www.rescue.org. ■

Ruby Hennessey

New Member

LWVSC would like to acknowledge our most recent member, Amy Burrow. Welcome!

Find Us on Internet

League of Women Voters US • <http://lwv.org>

League of Women Voters of California • <https://lwvc.org>

League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County • <http://www.lwvstanislaus.org>

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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.