



The Voter

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF STANISLAUS COUNTY

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Serving the Citizens of Stanislaus County, California

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President's Message: Marsha Waggoner

Accepting the privilege of President of the LWV of Stanislaus County is not taken lightly. I humbly accept this new role of responsibility. I am a team person and will rely on those other officers and members to work with me as we continue to engage the citizens of our community in the activity of engagement in those issues that affect our quality of life. This next year will be an active one and it will take each member being willing to add her/his support to the various League opportunities. All support, no matter how insignificant it might seem, will be appreciated. ■

Marsha

Outgoing President's Message: Marie Bairey

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to serve as president of LWV Stanislaus County during this unusual, but successful year for League. The sudden and untimely passing of President Mary Giventer required a mid-year transfer of leadership. In that process I observed two things:

One was how much Mary did for League. She worked quietly and without fanfare – often taking on more than traditional presidential responsibilities and always getting the job done. Her decisions and public responses were always well-thought out and clearly stated.

And second was the Board's commitment to League. With other board vacancies due to illnesses and relocations, members stepped forward to carry on the work of League – staffing voter education events for the 2018 election, presenting timely speakers to members and the public at Lunch and Learn, coordinating an event to welcome our many new members, serving on committees, writing articles for our newsletter and more.

I am excited about the 2019-2020 Board which includes LWVSC veterans as well as four members who recently- joined. We have a lot to look forward to next year – the presidential election, the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote and the establishment of the League of Women Voters. ■

Marie

Annual Meeting

The 71st Annual Meeting of LWV Stanislaus County was held in May at the home of Marsha Waggoner. Our speaker for the evening was Tyler Richardson, Chief Business Services Officer for Opportunity Stanislaus/Volt Institute which is a collaboration among the County Office of Education and local businesses to provide vocational training that meets the staffing needs of local industries. VOLT Institute, located in downtown Modesto, was established 2 years ago and currently trains industrial maintenance mechanics. They expect to offer more training options in the future.

Our business meeting followed with election of officers and budget approval. A highlight of the evening was the introduction of the Mary Giventer Memorial Essay Contest. In response to the generous memorial contributions from friends and family, a committee comprised of Seena Rhine, Colleen Norby and Michael Fuller met to develop a proposal that would honor Mary. With support from Larry Giventer and suggestions from the Board, it was decided to offer an opportunity for government and political science juniors and seniors at CSUS to participate in an essay contest for a \$1,000 award. The topic would be related to LWV values and positions. We hope to have all the arrangements made for the Fall 2019 semester.

For those who were unable to attend the meeting, copies of the Annual Report are available. Contact Marie at baireymar@gmail.com. ■

2019-2020 Board & Officers

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NOMINATING

George Britton

Stella Beratlis

Voter's Choice Act (SB 450 approved 2016)

Local attorney Lisa Battista explained to attendees at the April Lunch and Learn what the Voter's Choice Act is and why it is important. In 2018, Ms. Battista trained and deployed some 50 polling place observers. From what she learned through that experience, she became an advocate for immediate implementation of the Voter's Choice Act in Stanislaus County.

The extraordinary voter turnout for 2018 election brought with it an unusually high number of provisional ballots; almost 1/3 of Stanislaus County ballots cast were provisional. A voter votes provisionally if his/her name is not on the roster - often because the voter is not at the correct polling place, may have moved or their Vote-by-Mail ballot is lost or forgotten. Since ballots are specific to the area in which the polling place is located (because of the "down ballot" races such as school board members, council members or supervisors who are elected by district), a provisional voter may not be voting for candidates from his neighborhood. If voters opt to vote provisionally, their ballot goes to the Election's Department with the other ballots to be processed. It takes time and staff to process and resolve the issues for 11,000 ballots.

Why does the use of provisional ballots matter? Ms. Battista suggested that one reason is the potential impact on "down ballot" races. Is it possible that results of some close races would be different if all voters used the appropriate ballot to vote for the candidates in their neighborhood?

Voter's Choice Act can be a solution. Under VCA every voter receives his/her ballot by mail. There are three ways to return the completed ballot: USPS, drop boxes located in prominent places or Vote Centers, which are temporary elections offices located throughout the county for four to ten days before an election. These Centers have trained county staff and electronic capacity to check voter rolls and produce a voter's appropriate ballot. Problems or confusions are resolved in real time – not weeks later. In the five VCA pilot counties in the 2018 election, the total number of provisional ballots was 400! Feedback from the pilot counties was positive with the caution that it takes time to roll out the new system – 18 months recommended. To date, 11 counties have adopted VCA for the 2020 election. Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin are looking at 2022 implementation.

County Clerk Recorder Donna Linder attended the program. She and Ms. Battista both responded to questions.

Cost: Elections staff is working on exact figures to determine cost effectiveness of VCA. Stanislaus County voting equipment has been decertified by the State, and new machines must be purchased for the 2020 election. Currently state and federal funds are available to assist jurisdictions in upgrading voting equipment. If VCA is adopted for 2022, fewer machines would be needed, but vendors may offer "buy back" of surplus equipment. Costs for public education and outreach, facility rental and staffing are being worked out.

Approval: It is vague whether Supervisors must approve implementation of VCA, but ultimately, they have the responsibility to approve proposed budgets. ■

County Treasurer/Tax Collector Speaks at March 28 Lunch and Learn

Donna Riley was recently elected as Stanislaus County's Treasurer/ Tax Collector. It became apparent during her recent Lunch and Learn presentation that she came to that position with a wealth of knowledge and experience and a passion for her work. Prior to her election she worked for the county for 13 years and is well versed in everything financial. In her position, Ms. Riley oversees three divisions: Revenue Recovery, Treasurer and Tax Collection.

The five collectors in the Revenue Recovery division pursue about \$60 million in debt, most of it for the Superior Court.

As Treasurer, Riley is responsible for around \$255 million in deposits, invested in a variety of ways, outlined for us in a handout she provided. More than half of those investments are made on behalf of schools in the county. The types of investment allowed are limited by the state to assure safety. We were happy to hear that yield on investment is up.

As Tax Collector, her department works closely with the county Auditor and Assessor. The Auditor is responsible to apply the proper tax rates to property, including all the various rates for special districts and assessments such as Mello-Roos. A one percent tax base rate is applied to property, and taxes can be increased annually by 2% or the CPI. We have over \$47.5 billion in property valued in the county. The state determines generally how property taxes are distributed to counties; we get back 13% from the state. The county has a budget of over 1.3 billion dollars and a handout was provided showing budget information for 2018-19/2019-20. This money comes from state and federal grants as well as our property taxes.

It was interesting to learn that there is a property tax postponement program for low income homeowners. It's a state program that allows the county to collect taxes when the home is sold.

A program began recently allowing homeowners to opt in to receive electronic reminders of when property taxes are due. Most late payments occur when the second installment is due.

Part of Ms. Riley's responsibility is to sell property, but she assured us that every attempt is made to work with property owners prior to sale at a tax auction. Plus, after the auction, any money remaining after lien holders are paid is returned to the property owner.

Report submitted by Julie Saugstad, these numbers boggle my mind, so be assured that any errors are strictly mine, not Ms. Riley's! ■

Officers

Marsha Waggoner
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Marie Bairey
Vice President

Laurie Carley
Secretary

Julie Saugstad
Ellen Meyer
Co-Treasurers

Directors

Laurie Carley
Judy Kropp
Voter Service

Mary Ann Reynolds
Colleen Norby
Membership

Michael Fuller
Editor, The Voter

Pat Portwood
Hanna Renning
Lunch & Learn

Alene Griffin
Public Relations

Seena Rhine
Action

Wendy Scott
Finance Drive

Others

Stella Beratlis
Webmaster

George Britton, chair
Stella Beratlis
Nominating Committee



On the Calendar

June 12, 2019 • Board Meeting • Current and newly elected Officers and Directors attend to hand off portfolios and get to know each other. Potluck at 6:00; meeting starts 6:30 at home of Marie Bairey. ■

June 27, 2019 • Lunch & Learn • Noon Where in the World? A Talk by Dr. Janeen Zambo, grade 7-12 social science coordinator for Modesto City Schools, speaking on the importance of geography education in creating informed voters. (Chef's choice: \$15; vegetarian or gluten-free available on request.) ■

Democracy is NOT a spectator sport.



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