



THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF STANISLAUS COUNTY

September 2007

Serving the Citizens of Stanislaus County, California

VOL. 58 NO. 3

Calendar of Events

September 5

Wednesday 7 p.m.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Consensus Meeting on District Elections League Office

September 12

Wednesday 6:30 p.m.

Board Meeting League Office

September 25

Tuesday 12 noon

Lunch and Learn Appetez Restaurant

ON-THE-WEB

Municipal Elections Study Report

<http://www.lwvstanislaus.org/files/municipalelectionstudy.pdf>

LWV California Regional Workshop
<http://www.lwvstanislaus.org>

Previous issues of the Voter are available at:
<http://www.lwvstanislaus.org/voter.html>

LWV California "Stands on Issues"
<http://www.ca.lwv.org/lwvc/issues>

Consensus for Municipal Election Systems Study September 5

A general membership meeting will take place on **Wednesday September 5 at 7 pm** at the League Office for the purpose of discussing the study results of the Local Municipal Election Systems Study and coming to consensus. At its August 8th meeting, the Board approved the revised scope and consensus questions for the study. The next step is to present the issues, findings and recommendations to the League members for consensus. All members are encouraged to attend.

Originally the study committee focused on the impact election systems have on voter turn-out, but after some research it was determined that a broader view should be taken. In the process several systems were analyzed. There are advantages and disadvantages to all election systems. Each community must choose the system that best meets the needs and demands of its residents.

Study Scope: The study will determine elements of an effective municipal election system.

Consensus Questions:

- Does the system promote broad representation?
- Does the system promote accountability of council members?
- Does the system promote voter participation?
- Does the system assure majority support for single-winner offices?
- Does the system promote council members responsiveness?
- Does the system promote lower costs to candidates?

These questions will be the framework for the discussion of election systems at the consensus meeting.

The results of the consensus meeting and any recommendations for Local Program will be presented to the Board in September. If the Board approves a local position on municipal election systems, it will be announced to the members and the community; then, the Board can immediately begin to take action. The position will be adopted by the members at the 2008 Annual Meeting for inclusion in our Local Program.

**Consensus Meeting:
Wednesday September 5 at 7 pm at the League office.**

- Marie Bairey, Study Chair

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COUNTY OFFICERS**

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Cynthia Morgan

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Patty Lundy

Nominating Committee

Cindy van Empel

Joan Patterson

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OFF-BOARD

Membership

Laurie Carley

Lunch and Learn

Helen Gordon

Web Master

Stella Beratlis

Office Manager

Myrtle Osner

League Office
720 13th Street, Modesto
209-524-1698
www.lwvstanislaus.org

President's Message:

Dear Members and new Readers:

This summer has been far busier for League than I had anticipated! Normally, we slow things down due to vacations, but due to community concerns, we were called to action and then squeezed in vacations when we could! A Call to Membership is being made to attend a Consensus Meeting. The Local Study Committee, led by Marie Bairey, studied Municipal Election Systems. The Committee will present the issues, findings and recommendations of this study to the League members for consensus on September 5 at 7 p.m. The results and any recommendations will go to the Board September 12th for approval. If approved, the Board can begin to take action immediately. The position will be adopted by the members at the 2008 Annual Meeting for inclusion in our Local Program. Your attendance as a member is most important!

Local Action Chair Patty Lundy with her Local Action Committee went into high gear after seeing the Modesto Bee article concerning the Board of Supervisors vote for The Salida Now Plan. This action precluded the vote of citizens who were led to believe that the Salida Now plan would be on the ballot in November. This, of course, does not sit well with our adopted policy to "support citizen's right of direct legislation through the initiative and referendum process." The Local Action Committee, with assistance of other League members, wrote a letter to the Editor of the Modesto Bee that was printed on August 15. The letter is reprinted in this Voter on page 3. This letter was also sent to each county supervisor.

As you can surmise from the previous news I have reported, our League has been very active. There is even more to come- Voter Service Forums, the Holiday Fling, program planning- as well as the traditional League events and new ones that will evolve due to our county-wide status. Also, we hopefully will add new exciting events that will give members the opportunity to participate in and enjoy.

Am I leading up to something? Of course I am! Our League needs our members to be involved in more ways than ever. We sent out a membership survey in last month's Voter for all members to fill out. I was hoping to see one from every one of you. Am I being overly optimistic and naïve? I don't think so! The League is a grassroots organization. The membership survey helps the Board determine what we can do to reach our members more effectively. If you haven't returned your survey yet, please pick it up today or download it from the web, and send it back to me. It's easy!

We are also working to increase our membership throughout Stanislaus County. Our League is a great opportunity for those wanting to be involved in the political process in a non-partisan format and for personal and professional enrichment. So please help us grow.

Sincerely,

Ellen Meyer, President

DIVERSITY POLICY:

League of Women Voters of Modesto in both its values and practices affirms its belief and commitment to diversity and pluralism, which means that there shall be no barriers to participation in any activity on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin or disability.

LEAGUE SPEAKS OUT ON SALIDA NOW

(editorial appeared in the Modesto Bee on
August 15, 2007)

The Board of Supervisors web page has the current Board's adopted mission, priorities and values. First on their list of values is "Trustworthiness... acting with honesty, integrity, loyalty and keeping our promises." The issue for the League of Women Voters regarding the actions of the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors is not whether the Salida Now Plan itself is a good one. We have not analyzed it to determine whether the Salida Plan will ensure affordable housing, environmental protection, farmland mitigation, urban design, and financing. The issue now is the deception that would have otherwise allowed the people of this County the opportunity for due process through the initiative process.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County has an adopted policy to "support citizens' right of direct legislation through the initiative and referendum process." As an organization, we have begun to analyze the Salida Now initiative and trusted the Supervisors to present this matter to the voters in November, which would have allowed us time for community discussion and voter education.

The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors circumvented the vote of the people on Tuesday when three of its five members, using an obscure provision of the law, voted to adopt without adequate public and environment review an initiative that the public believed would appear on the November ballot. The League of Women Voters, a guardian of our democracy and watchdog of its elected officials, is in shock and dismay over the audacity of this move. Little more than 29,000 voters signed a petition that would have allowed **the voters to decide in November** whether the development in the Salida area is in its best interest. These signatures were not an approval of the Salida initiative but willingness to allow the voters to voice their opinion through an initiative process. Comments by two of these

(Continued next column)

Supervisors showed contempt for the public. The local League recently expanded its scope from Modesto to the county because we feel that what happens in Salida does affect the west side and vice-versa. Furthermore, in a democracy, the Board should not have 'complete control.'

On July 11, we started getting "hints" from the Modesto Bee that the promise of a November vote, used to gain our signatures on the ballot initiative, might be a ruse to get the matter before the Supervisors so they could vote on it themselves and circumvent the initiative process. By August 2, it was clear that the funding for the Salida Now initiative came almost entirely from developers.

Even if the Supervisors can be believed that the impacts of this massive new development plan will be evaluated some time in the future, the process they propose is a pale shadow of what state laws intend, which is informed decision-making by elected officials who hold the public interest in trust. Perhaps the Supervisors have forgotten that they represent all of the citizens of Stanislaus County, not just a select few citizens and non-resident developers.

Sincerely,
Patricia E. Lundy, Local Action Director
Ellen Meyer, President County

**To read the text of the adopted County Ordinance
and Development Agreement, go to:**

[http://www.co.stanislaus.ca.us/
bos/agenda/2007/20070807/B10.pdf](http://www.co.stanislaus.ca.us/bos/agenda/2007/20070807/B10.pdf)

LOCAL ACTION

WEST PARK CROWS LANDING PROPOSAL: The League needs your eyes and ears to help monitor this new development proposal. Please contact either Patty Lundy, Local Action Director, or Ellen Meyer, President, if you are able to attend one of the meetings being held throughout the county this month!! For more information, go to:

<http://www.jobsforstanislaus.com/page/content/westpark>

Other issues followed by the Local Action Committee:

**SALIDA NOW
STAMP OUT SPRAWL
RIVERBANK WATCH**

- *Patty Lundy, Local Action Director*

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO
HELP WITH CANDIDATE FORUMS AND
VOTER REGISTRATION
THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY!**

As of mid-August, the League is planning two forums at the Chambers at 10th Street Place, Modesto. The dates we have reserved are Monday, September 24, and Monday, October 8th. One forum will be for the Modesto City Council and one will be for the Modesto City Schools Board. Please pencil in those dates on your calendar so that you can attend. Once Moderators are selected, we will announce which race will be held on which date. Watch our website for updated information.

We now have two newly training moderators: Diane Bartlett and Cynthia Morgan. Both attended moderator training in July. We look forward to using them to moderate forums in the future.

We anticipate helping with other candidate forms around Stanislaus County. There are contested races for many school boards in addition to Modesto. Ceres, Patterson, and Turlock are drawing a half dozen candidates for each opening. Seats for the Ceres City Council are also contested.

While it's too soon to list a schedule of forums, it isn't too soon to ask for volunteers!

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**Please consider helping out either in
Modesto or a surrounding city or
volunteering to help register voters.**

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If you have any ideas about where to hold forums or to register voters, please contact us.

Contact Susan Novak at snovak2@sdbcglobal.net or Cynthia Morgan at cynthialmorgan@charter.net.

- Susan Novak, Voter Service

**July Lunch and Learn
Judy Sly, Editor of the Modesto Bee
Opinion Page**

It was a full house at July's Lunch and Learn with featured speaker Judy Sly. Twenty four League members and citizens of the county came to hear Ms. Sly's presentation. The good attendance was a testament not only to the topic but to Judy's good reputation in our community and at the Modesto Bee. Many of our members use this forum to express opinions and our League greatly appreciates it when our letters are printed.

Every letter that appears in the paper also appears on the Modesto Bee's web site (<http://www.modbee.com>). Overflow letters on a particular subject are posted on line. All letters to the Bee must be signed by the writer. Every name and address is verified to ensure the writer is truly who they say they are. Anonymous letters are not printed to hold people accountable. Many times writers do not sign their name due to fear of reprisal, personally or professionally. Other times, organizations with a specific agenda send out letters to the editor to the Modesto Bee using an illegitimate local address. Judy says that they have learned to spot these kinds of letters and do not print them as well.

Her job as editor of the Opinion page is to provide the opportunity for the readers to express opinions. Many times letters are not opinions, but complaints about neighbors or companies. These writers are referred to the appropriate agencies or organizations that can help them resolve their issues. Some letters printed about companies may be included but only when it reflects a broader community concern (e.g., Wal-Mart Superstores coming into a community). One of her most important jobs is ensuring that the letters are kept civil. Some letters are edited to ensure that the content is kept on topic and not a personal attack. Some are edited due to space limitations.

Judy enjoys her position at the Modesto Bee and finds reading readers' letters to the editor interesting, educational and humorous at times.

- Ellen Meyer, President

New Web Services Available at LWVSTANISLAUS.ORG

The following information is now available on our League's website: 1) our Member Survey, which can easily be printed and returned; and 2) the findings of the Municipal Election Study Committee, which studied district elections over the past several months. Please read the findings in preparation for the September 5 meeting, when we will discuss and reach consensus on this issue.

(To access these documents, please go to www.lwvstanislaus.org and follow the links below the Table of Contents.)

Other web-related ideas: the League is exploring the possibility of launching a blog! Board members are still in the information-gathering phase. If you have any ideas or know of any successful blogs maintained by other nonpartisan organizations, please contact me at webmaster@lwvstanislaus.org.

- Stella Beratlis, Web Master

STATE AND THE NATION

Congress Leaves for Recess, Makes Important Strides (NEW)

Before adjourning for their August recess last week, members of the House and Senate took positive action on a number of important LWVUS legislative priorities. These accomplishments included the passage of SCHIP, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the Open Government Act, and the sweeping bipartisan lobbying and ethics reform by both chambers. The League's advocacy department and Grassroots Lobby Corps will continue working on these and other important issues when Congress returns to in September.

- Ellen Meyer, President

SECRETARY'S **REPORT**

AUGUST BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS:

- Patty Lundy suggested the Board consider establishing a Local Action "blog" on the LWVS website.
- Diane Bartlett and Cynthia Morgan have completed Moderator Training and will be available to assist with the upcoming Forums.
- Forums are being scheduled for two Mondays-September 24 and October 8. The slate of candidates has not yet been determined. Look for announcements in local newspapers and on the web.
- The Board approved the scope of the District Municipal Elections Study and the Consensus questions per League procedures.
- Marie Bairey was appointed as a Board representative to the Nominating Committee.

- Marie Bairey, Secretary

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

Student Membership	\$15	_____
Individual Membership	\$50	_____
Household Membership	\$75	_____

Please contact me with more information:

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone (for directory): _____

Email: _____

MAIL TO:

LWVSC 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.

Tear off and send to:
League of Women Voters of
Stanislaus County
P.O. Box E
Modesto, CA 95352
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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U.S. Postage
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UPCOMING EVENTS

September 25 - Carol McFarland
(Society for Handicap Children & Adults
of Stanislaus County)

October 30 – Gerry Kamilos
(West Park LLC)
Proposed Crows Landing Business Park

At 12 Noon, Appetez Restaurant in
Roseburg Square
\$11.00 for chef's entrée
For vegetarian entree,
call Appetez one day ahead!

October 6
**LWV California
REGIONAL WORKSHOP**
9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Fresno

“League in the 21st
Century”

(Contact Julie Saugstad for more information
about how LWVSC can help pay your
registration fees to attend this event.)