



THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF STANISLAUS COUNTY

August 2009

Serving the Citizens of Stanislaus County, California

VOL. 59 NO. 11

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, August 12

6:00 p.m.
Board Meeting
League Office
720 13th Street
Modesto

Wednesday, August 19

6:00-7:30 p.m.
Local Action
Round Table Discussion
Modesto's Measure M
Ballot Proposals
All Members
Encouraged to Attend
to Learn the Pros/Cons of
These Proposed City
Annexation Measures
League Office

Tuesday, August 25

12:00 Noon
Lunch and Learn
Appetiz Restaurant
Roseburg Square
Speakers: Steve Madison
and Bill Zoslocki on
The Building Industry
in the Current Economy

Saturday, September 26

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Regional Training Workshop
for Local Leagues
Details to Follow

This calendar
is current at time of
printing. Check LWVSC
Website for updates
www.lwvstanislaus.org

Redistricting: What's Going On? When Can I Apply?

Concerning the independent redistricting commission called for by Proposition 11 of November 2008, the regulations for the process of selecting the Applicant Review Panel and the Commission itself are being drafted. The application period for the Commission will open January 1, 2010. The best way for you to keep current on what's going on and when the application form will be up on the Web is to sign up for news bulletins from the State Auditor. Here's what to do.

E-mail the State Auditor and tell them you want to be put on the list of Interested Persons for notice of the Prop. 11 redistricting implementation process. You need to give them your name, the email address at which you want to receive news, your mailing address, and your phone number. Within a couple of days you should get an acknowledgment that they received your e-mail. And keep an eye on the LWVC Web site for news of the League's work on this important reform.

Follow the League on Legislation

Do you know what bills the LWVC is supporting and opposing in this legislative session? Committees are busy hearing bills that have moved into their second house. Proposed constitutional amendments, which are not bound by the same deadlines as bills proposing statutes, are also being considered in their first or second house.

Reform of the state budgeting process is a major LWVC legislative priority for 2009. We are supporting several proposed constitutional amendments that would reduce the two-thirds vote requirement for revenue or finance measures to a simple majority or 55 percent vote.

Many bills on the League's agenda have to do with the rights of voters and the smooth conduct of elections. Others cover important topics in League program areas, from children and family issues to water. A high-priority bill, SB 810 (Leno), which would establish a single payer system of health care coverage in California, fell victim to the state's budget woes and has been held over until 2010. Another bill of note, AB 999 (Skinner), would shift policies at Division of Juvenile Justice facilities by giving credit for performance in educational, rehabilitation, and other programs when parole dates are considered — a shift from the current system of extending parole dates as punitive sanctions for misconduct.

Check out the Calls to Action, Bill Status Report at www.ca.lwv.org/lwvonly/ and let your representatives know what you think!

From LWVC

Sue Chaffee, State and National Director

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Lunch and Learn
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Laurie Carley
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

To those members who may have missed the e-mail sent out to members, the LWVSC took **Local Action** to the Modesto City Council this July with **great success!**

An item on the July 14, 2009 Modesto City Council's Agenda was to consider approving language for a ballot measure that would implement the recommendation from the 2007-08 Charter Review Committee. The agenda item was to present a Charter Amendment to the voters that would eliminate run-off elections effective with the November 2011 municipal election.

Learning of this in the Monday Bee, our Local Action Committee, represented by President Ellen Meyer and Secretary Marie Bairey, sent e-mails to the mayor and city council members stating our past support for changing the run-off and recommendations for Instant Runoff alternative process. We also informed them that, per the Charter Review Report, it was suggested a committee be formed to review how municipal elections should be changed. (Marie Bairey was on the City of Modesto Charter Review Committee.)

Marie and I were present at the city council meeting, and we were pleased to hear that this item was taken off of the agenda and that a committee would be formed to review how our city will handle elections!

This month we were **honored** to be asked to host a Membership Training Workshop for local Leagues in California to attend. These training events cover topics of concern for LWV and also information about LWV. The scheduled date is September 26, 2009 from 10AM -4PM.

Susan Novak is heading this event and more details will be coming in the next Voter and through e-mails. This is a **wonderful opportunity** for new and old members to learn and meet members from other Leagues - and we do not have to drive elsewhere as we have in the past!!! We will need some volunteers to assist set up and I encourage you to call me or Susan Novak.

Thank you to all members who have renewed their membership, and I look forward to serving with you this year as *Democracy is not a spectator sport!*

Ellen Meyer, President

DIVERSITY POLICY:

League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County 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.

LUNCH AND LEARN

August Special—Two for the Price of One!

That's right. The August Lunch & Learn on Tuesday, August 25 will feature not one, but two speakers... Mr. Steve Madison, Executive Vice President of the Building Industry Association of Central California (BIACC) and Mr. Bill Zoslocki, President of Zoslocki Construction. The faltering economy has had a severe effect upon the building industry, which in turn affects the rest of the economy. State lawmakers in February, passed a housing tax credit valued at \$10,000 for each new home purchase, with the expressed purpose of jump-starting building as a way to help revive the State's economy. Each new home built produces a net fiscal gain for the state coffers of \$16,000 according to a report by California's former director of finance.

The BIACC has been in the news recently with the California Supreme Court's decision in favor of the suit filed by the Association to reject the City of Patterson's bid to keep hundreds of thousands of dollars in developer fees which were established illegally—a nearly thirty-fold increase over previous fees. Another lawsuit against Stanislaus County by the BIACC was decided in favor of the developers when it was ruled that the County plan requiring developers to preserve an equal amount of farmland when building new homes was unconstitutional. And, earlier last month, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors agreed to postpone a controversial overhaul of fees on all development throughout Stanislaus County.

Come see the power point presentation presented by Mr. Madison and Mr Zoslocki which will cover impact fees, agricultural mitigation and traffic congestion.

*“Live as if you were to die tomorrow.
Learn as if you were to live forever.”*

Mahatma Gandhi

Modesto Mayor Highlights Budget Cuts

On Tuesday, June 30, our Lunch & Learn speaker was Modesto's Mayor, Mr. Jim Ridenour, who spoke of the effect the current economic situation is having on all local governments in general, and specifically on Modesto. He reported that the projections for the fiscal budget for the city for 2008-09 expected revenues of \$125 million; but with the downturn in property tax revenues, fees and sales taxes, actual income equaled \$106 million. It was this economic reality that has led the city to reduce discretionary spending by 10%, eliminate some city divisions, downsize departments, shut 44 city parks for five days a week, delay raises for the fire department and lay off nine police officers.

The Mayor stated that he feels the tough times are everywhere and they are not over yet. He warned that the State of California's worsening financial woes will result in the State coming after monies allotted to the cities. The City Manager and the Mayor are monitoring Modesto's budget monthly. They recognize that expenses and income must be closely watched, and that fees should be reduced to prevent inappropriate costs from stifling new business.

Mr Ridenour pointed out that we have undergone economic downturns such as this before, and gave 1998 and 1973 as examples. He closed by encouraging everyone to become involved, to attend government meetings and to stay in touch with their elected officials to help see us through. He encouraged us to use modestogov.com to communicate any problems or questions.

As League members, we know that the League of Women Voters of California is working at the state level to improve the budget process. Our League has the opportunity and obligation to join in with our voices.

*Lee DeLaMare, Lunch and Learn Director
With Many Thanks to Myrtle Osner*

Local Action

Modesto Measure M Ballot Proposals

Modesto City Council is recommending five CPDs (Comprehensive Planning Districts) for Measure M advisory votes for future sewer extensions and annexations. Four of the areas are in north Modesto, and one is in the MJC West area. (For the complete report and maps, go to modestogov.com, click Urban Growth Review and click July 7, 2009 meeting). The Economic Development Committee had recommended planning for the future with four CPD's that would focus on increasing land for potential economic and jobs development. Residents requested the fifth be added because of its proximity to current development.

The Local Action Committee will be studying these proposals in order to take a position. Member input is welcome. If you have thoughts on these annexation proposals, contact Ellen Meyer or Marie Bairey. Watch for Local Action Committee meetings to learn more about these issues.

Local Action Committee

Charitable Giving

With certificates of deposit and money market accounts averaging low rates of return, a League of Women Voters Education Fund charitable gift annuity may help you achieve your personal and financial goals while providing needed support for the League's education and advocacy programs. Contact the League today, at 202-263-1355 or plannedgiving@lwv.org, to create a charitable gift annuity and lock in attractive rates that will secure a lifetime of favorable fixed payments for you and your loved ones. Depending on your age at the time the gift annuity is established, you can receive as much as 9.5% annually, while ensuring the future of the League's work.

Membership

Reminder: membership dues letters were sent in June. Please submit dues for 2009-2010 year by September 30 if you haven't already done so. Thank you.

Colleen Norby, Membership Director

Board Highlights

July 8, 2009

- Board established the second Wednesday of each month for regular meetings.
- Review of financial records will be delayed until August.
- Data is being entered on our new computer.
- Finance Drive Committee is making plans. Letters will be mailed in early September.
- Local Action will study the Modesto Measure M ballot proposals with possible informational round table in August

Marie Bairey, Secretary.

Welcome Our Newest Members

Sylvia Ochoa

Barbara DeLaMare-Cramer

*We look forward to seeing you
at our events*

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

Student Membership \$15 _____

Individual Membership \$60 _____

Household Membership \$90 _____

Please contact me with more information:

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone (for directory): _____

E-mail: _____

MAIL TO

LWVSC

P.O. Box E

Modesto, CA 9535

LEAGUE MARKS FOIA ANNIVERSARY

Washington, DC – This Independence Day marks 43 years since the landmark Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was signed into law. FOIA established the public's right to access government records. However, recent polling data indicates that most Americans continue to view our government as secretive – something that the League of Women Voters has long been trying to change.

"The key to a healthy, open government is public access and participation. Given the gravity of the issues facing our nation, the need to increase public access – and input - to the governmental decisions and policies that affect all Americans is greater than ever," said Mary G. Wilson, national League President. "The League has acted as a government watchdog for decades – at all levels of government."

On his first full day in office, President Obama called for making the federal government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative, and The White House is soliciting input from citizens and groups to improve policy making. The League has been active in this groundbreaking public-private policy discussion, sharing our expertise and decades of experience.

"FOIA and related state and local laws are only as good as we demand that they be," Wilson stated, and more attention needs to be paid at the state and local levels as well. As a result, Leagues in 11 states conducted Freedom of Information audits this spring, partially funded by a grant from The Herb Block Foundation, as part of the League's latest effort in this area. "While the audits ranged in scope from focusing on local school boards to county and state agencies, some common threads emerged that shed light on ways to improve access and public participation," Wilson noted.

"There needs to be better use of technology," said Wilson. Can citizens access information online? Can they request public records online? These are just some of the questions that government officials need to ask themselves as they conduct business. It seems only natural that agencies would be taking advantage of such technology, but they simply aren't," Wilson added.

"A more alarming trend that we saw was that of a public hesitant to get involved," said Wilson. "Several of the participating Leagues reported that individuals were reluctant to request information as they thought it would be perceived badly – as being meddlesome or even trigger some type of retribution. This is very disturbing and points to the need for education on all fronts."

Wilson also addressed the need for training. "In many instances, Leagues learned that the 'first line' responders – those who interact with public daily were not trained – only those in more supervisory roles were," said Wilson.

The League has worked for decades helping Americans gain better access to their government officials and the policy decisions that affect citizens. For more information, visit www.lwv.org.

LWVUS Press Release, July 1, 2009

Voter Service

The Voter Service Committee has begun planning for election forums prior to the November elections. With the changes in the city council elections this year, we decided to hold separate forums in each of the three Districts that are holding elections this year: District 2 in west Modesto, District 4 which includes La Loma and the Airport districts, and District 5 the area north of Briggsmore, between Carver and Durango. The LWV, Stanislaus will also hold forums in some of the other cities. The forums will be held between mid-September and mid October.

If you have not already signed up to assist with the forums, contact Ellen Dunbar at edunbar1@comcast.net or call 525-9343.

Ellen Dunbar, Voter Service Director

Search the Web and Raise Funds for the League!

Earn money to support the LWV Education Fund (LWVEF) every time you search the web! Simply log onto www.goodsearch.com; designate the League of Women Voters Education Fund - LWV (Washington, DC) as your charity of choice; and start using GoodSearch as your primary search engine. Each time you search, 50 percent of the advertising revenue (about a penny per search), will automatically go to the LWVEF. GoodSearch is powered by Yahoo!, so you'll get the same high quality search results you're used to.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan 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
LWV Modesto
P.O. Box E
Modesto, CA 95352
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Modesto, CA
Permit No. 69

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(Check Website for Updates)

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\$11.00. For special dietary needs call one day ahead

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