



# *The Voter*

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS<sup>®</sup> OF STANISLAUS COUNTY

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Serving the Citizens of Stanislaus County, California

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## ***President's Message***

### **Reflections on the LWVC Convention**

Seena and I recently had the opportunity to attend the LWV California convention in Sacramento. Like past conventions, it was a busy, stimulating weekend with interesting speakers and opportunities to interact with more than 200 fellow political junkie League members from around the state. Some of the connections with other Central Valley Leagues we hope to build on for some possible joint efforts in the coming year. The business portion of the convention proceeded smoothly. The League is solvent and being fiscally conservative, so there will be no increase in state PMP, the League office is moving to a new location with lower rent, and the League is putting \$80,000/year in a rainy-day fund. A good bit of LWVC funding has gone into creating Voter's Edge, the online voting information site. The good news is that the website was successful in the 2016 election and LWVC has received a \$200,000 two-year grant from the Irvine Foundation to expand its capabilities. Of course, being a convention, there had to be a few more tedious parts — like debating if the word “person” is used in the by-laws, do we need to specify we mean a human person. Some people find these debates fascinating; Seena and I saw them as time for a power nap. So far it sounds much like every other convention.

However, this year there was one overriding theme that ran throughout the conference: Now is the time to really step up for Education and Advocacy. With this theme went one big question: How does a nonpartisan League of Women Voters educate and advocate in a hyper-partisan world? No one could offer a simple answer. Certainly, the League does not and will not endorse political parties or political candidates. Nor do our positions fall perfectly in line with any political party. For example, we had the same position as the California Republican Party on establishing a Citizen's Redistricting Commission, a position which was opposed by the Democratic Party. This past election we took the same position as the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association on Proposition 54 requiring transparency in publishing legislation prior to a vote, again opposed by the Democratic Party. Our positions are not taken lightly; there is extensive study and careful wording at all levels of the League from national to local. Our positions are based on consensus among our members and, most importantly, reflect our values. There is no question that the League has a progressive public policy and, at this point in time, is diametrically opposed to the policies of the current federal administration on virtually every issue. Given the current political climate, how do we effectively advocate for the things we strongly believe in without drifting into the

hyper-partisan realm where far more time is spent yelling at one another than actually discussing issues.

It is a thin line to walk, but our voice is more important than ever. We can set the example of advocating for a position based on facts, study and our values. We can model and encourage civil discourse, focusing on the public policy, not personally denigrating those opposing it. We can even listen to opposing points of view: perhaps when we step away from the shouting, we can find some common ground or at least better understand where we differ. We will need to brainstorm this more fully, but I have been contemplating the idea that the League might sponsor some Civil Discourse forums discussing a few issues of particular interest.

The other area of advocacy where the League is in a position to be most effective is in helping to focus areas of action. There are many groups with progressive agendas — some long established and some more recent pop-up groups — that are part of single-issue or more broad-based movements. These movements have certainly been effective in calling attention to extensive public dissent, and that is important. Visuals are important, but eventually to make any meaningful change, these protests have to actually offer some reasonable solutions. This is a strength of the League. Our policies outline not what we are against but, in broad strokes, what we are for. Our legislative experience positions us to analyze, offer input, and lobby for or against specific bills on both the state and the federal levels. Again, the League does not jump on supporting a bill just because on the surface it sounds good. For example, the League position is that quality, affordable health care is a human right, and the League has long supported that single-payer health care is the best way to provide that. Currently, the California legislature is considering AB 152, a single-payer health care bill. At this point, not all of the funding sources and financial impact of the bill have been finalized. So LWVC's position is that they endorse single payer healthcare in concept, but they will not endorse this particular bill until the details are all in place and they have had time to analyze the bill completely. They are following it closely and are prepared to take a position, but not prematurely. In my opinion, this a wonderful example of the care the League takes in putting its positions into practice. Few of the resistance movement groups have this experience in working with legislators, analyzing and lobbying legislation. The League can set the standard on how to move from protest marches to responsible legislative action.

Finally, the first Area of Focus for Education and Advocacy that was adopted at the convention was Making Democracy Work. This is our specialty. Locally we are excellent at Voter Education, and we are known and respected for it. We need to continue that. We can look for ways for our voter forums to have greater impact and reach more voters. But we also need to challenge ourselves to reach out even further to register under-represented voters and engage historic non-voters and non-habitual voters to actually turn out at the polls. There are a number of changes in California law aimed at making voting more accessible — changes, by the way, in which the League had a great deal of input. We can participate in educating voters on these changes. We can look for ways to grow and diversify our membership.

I always come away from League conventions excited and energized, but perhaps this year more than most. We have a lot of work ahead of us. I heard more than once over that weekend, "Our country makes social progress on the unpaid labor of women." I would include the volunteer efforts of men as well. There are sure to be disappointments and frustrations, but it is wonderful

to belong to an organization that has spent nearly 100 years Making Democracy Work and continues to do so!

Mary Giventer

***April 2017 Lunch and Learn***

**Facts about Immigration Law**

Solange Goncalves Altman, Attorney Coordinator for Immigration Services with El Concilio, was the April Lunch and Learn speaker. Solange started on a humorous note when she declared that her talk, “Facts and Myths about Immigration Laws,” would provide real facts rather than “alternative facts” about a very complicated subject.

Our current immigration laws are broken and need to be fixed. It is estimated that in 2011 there were 11.5 million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S.; 200,000 of those immigrants live in San Joaquin Valley counties, with 39,000 in Stanislaus County and 55,000 in San Joaquin County.

Solange explained why people don’t just get in line and wait for their turn to immigrate. People immigrate primarily in three ways with quotas for each category: business, family and humanitarian visas. There were 140,000 visas for foreign workers for the entire U.S. In 2012 around 87,000 visas were given to refugees/asylum seekers. Another 10,000 people were granted visas because they were crime victims. There are 480,000 family-sponsored visas available each year. No one country can receive more than 7 percent (or 47,250 visas) in a year. In 2012, 1.3 million family members from Mexico applied for visas, which meant that 1.253 million were out of luck. Some individuals from Mexico have been waiting in line for 21 years! Faced with years of waiting, parents desperate to provide for their families take a chance on getting into the U.S. illegally, hoping to find work and send money back home to provide for and support their children.

Many people think that undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes, but most of them do. According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy undocumented immigrants pay \$12 billion to state and local tax coffers. A third are homeowners and pay property taxes. Half pay income taxes, and 75 percent pay into Social Security. The chief actuary for Social Security estimates that over the past 10 years, unauthorized immigrants have paid more than \$100 billion in Social Security taxes, about \$13 billion per year. As long as they remain undocumented, they will never have the right to receive Social Security benefits.

Massive deportations have been suggested by some as a simple means of solving the problem of illegal immigration, but in reality it is not that simple. In 2013, there were more than 357,000 Immigration Court cases. The average time it took to hear a case in 2013 was more than 18 months; it is much longer now. To deport 11.5 million people would require a significant increase in Immigration Courts and judges. Immigrants would have to be held in detention until deportation. The cost to forcibly remove 10 million immigrants is estimated to be \$21 billion a year.

A common misconception is that immigrants come to the U.S. illegally and have a baby so they can become legal residents through their baby, who is a citizen. In 1997 the undocumented Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) was passed. It made it more difficult for someone who entered illegally to obtain visas or green cards through their 21-year-old U.S. citizen child. The only way someone who entered illegally can get legal status is to have a spouse or parent who is a citizen or has a green card. Undocumented immigrants can apply for a waiver to the 10-year bar. The 10-year bar is a penalty for those who came illegally and stayed more than a year after April 1, 1997. When undocumented people leave the country, which they must do to apply for legal entry, they cannot return to the U.S. for 10 years unless they are granted a waiver. As a result many people choose to remain here illegally rather than run the risk of not being able to return for 10 years.

On June 15, 2012, President Obama created a new policy calling for deferred action for certain undocumented young people who came to the U.S. as children under the age of 16 and were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012. This program (DACA) allows them to apply for deferred action for two years, subject to renewal. They are also eligible for work authorization. They must meet several guidelines including going to school or having completed high school or receiving an honorable discharge from the military, continuously residing in the U.S. since June 2007, having good moral character and no history of criminal behavior. Deferred action does not provide lawful status. It is not a path to a green card or citizenship. DACA is currently still in effect.

The Bridge Act was introduced in December 2016. It would make DACA law instead of an executive order and provide temporary protection from deportation for three years from the law's enactment as well as work authorization for these young adults. It is stalled at this time and remains a bill rather than law.

There were two attempts in 2014 to pass immigration reform. The Senate passed SB 744, which would have created a path to citizenship. It was a broad-based proposal developed by a bipartisan group of eight Senators. But John Boehner, Speaker of the House, prevented a companion bill from being brought to a vote in the House of Representatives, so reform failed. In November 2014, President Obama attempted an executive action called Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA). Parents of US citizens and lawful permanent residents who had been living in the U.S. since 2010 with good moral character could apply for DAPA to get a work permit and protection from deportation. The State of Texas sued the President to stop the program. The case went to the Supreme Court, which split 4/4, so the decision of the lower court to prevent the program from going forward was allowed to stand.

Solange closed with suggestions on how people who wish to become involved can help. The cost to apply for legal permanent residency is about \$2,750. Donations can be made to El Concilio; earmark these funds to be used to help people filing for legal status. There is also a need for people who are "detail oriented" to assist with completing applications (speaking Spanish is not a requirement) and for volunteers to assist with citizenship workshops. More information is available at their web site, [www.elconcilio.org](http://www.elconcilio.org).

Ruby Hennessey

**June 2017 Lunch and Learn**

**The Healthy California Act (SB 562)**

Carolyn Bowden, representing the Healthy California Campaign and California Nurses Association, outlined the provisions of California’s SB 562. The goal of the bill is to establish a public not-for-profit health insurance system, provide comprehensive, universal single-payer coverage, control healthcare costs and benefit all Californians. Single-payer healthcare proposals have been in the works for more than 25 years. (SB 562I was shelved by California Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon in mid-June despite 70% support from Californians polled in May 2017.)<sup>1</sup>

Compared to healthcare in other developed countries, using several measures, Americans pay more and get less. Recognizing the need for improved healthcare, the Affordable Care Act of 2010 covered 20 million more Americans, especially low-income families, and increased access to preventive care for 76 million. However, ACA does not address cost control as there is no rate regulation for insurance or ability to negotiate for drugs, and it is not universal.

Ms. Bowden described how universal access to healthcare can work. Currently taxpayers pay for 70% of healthcare costs while at the same time insurance companies spend 20–30% of revenue on non-health related expenditures. Money can be better spent. Healthy CA would reduce costs through lower administrative costs, negotiating directly with healthcare providers, eliminating the insurance middleman and consolidating tax dollars. At the same time, it would cover all Californians, incorporate existing government healthcare programs and offer patients with provider choices. It would reduce benefit expenses and red tape for companies that offer health insurance for their employees.

An economic analysis from the University of Massachusetts in May 2017 found that taxpayers already pay \$225 billion or 70 percent of all healthcare. An additional \$106 billion could provide healthcare for everyone in California. The other \$92 billion would be raised through business and corporate tax which would be in lieu of insurance expenditures. Moving Medicare, Medi-Cal and other public funds into one pool, taxing employers’ gross receipts and adding a sales tax for individuals would offset current out-go for insurance premiums, co-pays, etc., benefitting all.

Since the future of federal support for healthcare is uncertain, Ms. Bowden emphasized the importance of prompt action in order to roll out the program before any federal reductions occur. She urged the audience to contact legislators to support the single-payer proposal.

Marie Bairey

**New Members**

We welcome two new members to the League: **Bryanna Wilson** and **Shelly Scribner**.

<sup>1</sup> LWVUS believes that healthcare is a human right and that access to quality healthcare should be affordable. LWVC did not take a position on SB 562.

### **Notice**

The League recently lost LaVon Keyes at age 97. A long-time member and enthusiastic League supporter, she was an outspoken woman who willingly shared her intelligent insights into our community and the wider world. Those who knew her will miss LaVon, a woman who worked to make this a better place for all.

### **Calendar of Events**

#### **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.*

July 27 • Prof. Don Ahrens (retired from Modesto JC)

Topic: The Scientific Facts about Climate Change

Aug. 31 • Eric Amoureux, Inland Regional Administrator, California Office of Emergency Services

Topic: Climate Change and Security

Sept. 28 • Jim Stokes, Turlock Site Manager, International Rescue Committee

Topic: The work of the IRC with Arriving Immigrants

### **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>

### **Membership**

Have you forgotten to renew your membership? Do you know someone who would like to join the League, a non-partisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy? Membership is just a stamp away. Send all important details (name, address, phone number, email address) to **LWVSC, P.O. Box E, Modesto, CA 95352-3669**. Oh, and don't forget your check. Membership is \$60 for an individual or \$90 for a family.

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

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President Mary Giventer  
Vice President Marie Bairey  
Secretary Laurie Carley  
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Modesto, CA 95352-3669**

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