



LWV/LA County

VOTER JUNE 2005

PRESIDENT' S MESSAGE

If one ever needs to recharge one's League batteries, attend the League of Women Voters of California Convention! This is the place to hear exciting motivational speakers, celebrate the accomplishments of Leagues throughout the state, meet League Leaders from State Board and from Local Leagues, attend stimulating workshops and strategizing caucuses, debate program choices for the next biennium and adopt an optimistic but achievable budget for the next year.

Speakers for this convention represented the LWVC Action Priorities for 2005-06. During the Friday morning Plenary session **John Mott Smith**, from the Secretary of State's Office and recently appointed Manager for Voter Outreach, outlined his goals and how he anticipates working with the League to achieve greater success in educating citizens on the *WHY* of voting. Redistricting was the focus of the Friday luncheon speaker **Kathay Feng**, founder of CaIVEC, the Voter Empowerment Circle coalition and newly installed Executive Director of California Common Cause. **Senator Sheila**

Kuehl's explanation of her bill SB 840, the California Health Insurance Reliability Act was the highlight of Saturday's Plenary. Senator Kuehl graciously answered many questions pertaining to her Single Payer Insurance program for health care which would rely on private physician health care delivery. The banquet speaker, **Secretary of State Bruce McPherson**, outlined some of the challenges he and his department face in the next year as they work to implement the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requirements.

Convention delegates and visitors heard reports from **President Jackie Jacobberger** who summarized the successes and difficulties of the past two years. LWVC is now on strong financial footing and has passed an audit of its books. Jackie also featured the active participation of the League in three major elections with many ballot measures within thirteen months. She proudly introduced our new Executive Director, Jill Kaiser Newcom, who has expertise in working with non-profits and managing development campaigns.

Jill Kaiser Newcom, Executive Director since October, reported with pleasure to "my true employers, the California Members of LWV". She is not yet completely familiar with all the League working terms, particularly what we mean by "Program", but she is learning. She and the Board have outlined an aggressive Development plan and are optimistic that the League will be able to fund the hiring of an Advocacy/Administrative aide and a part-time bookkeeper. She compared her feelings of pride in her anticipated accomplishments with the League to the thrill of reaching the top of a 20,000 foot peak in the Andes, which she and her husband have scaled.

Many delegates report their favorite presentation at convention is the Advocacy Report given by **Trudy Schafer**, our Program Director/Advocate. Trudy summarized Legislative action that the LWVC is pursuing in the (over)

areas of Redistricting, the state budget process, and health care. We are still looking at the possibility of a Special Election in the fall, probably on November 8. Trudy reminded us that the Governor has until June 13 to declare the Special Election for November 8 because it must be announced 140 days ahead. Ballot measures would have until June 30 to qualify signatures. Two measures that have qualified are the Costa Redistricting Initiative which the League opposes and the "Live Within Our Means Act" which LWVC also opposes. LWVC is working to promote a Legislative Redistricting measure that would be placed on the ballot also. (See Redistricting letter in this VOTER.)

Program adoption is always the hottest item at state convention and 2005 was no exception. In addition to the three issues for Education and Action that emerged from the Program Planning Process as the Board Recommended Program, five more items were proposed. After caucuses and strategy sessions and impassioned debate the current positions in Government, Social Policy, and Natural Resources were readopted and the recommended Issues for Education and Action on Redistricting and State and Local Finances, as well as the non-

recommended item Education and Advocacy on Health Care were adopted.

The Budget for 2005-06, which is often seriously challenged and debated, was passed as presented with no discussion to the surprise of President Jackie Jacobberger.

Delegates from LA County enjoyed the Gala Reception on Friday evening, the Banquet on Saturday evening, and the Presidents Breakfast on Sunday morning. Delegates came home energized to revitalize their Leagues and brought home exciting and useful publications, jewelry, hats, pins bookmarks and Tabling Kits to enhance their League work.

The Orange County Leagues are to be commended for making arrangements for the convention hotel, meals, events, decorations and favors (fresh oranges for a quick snack or pick-me-up after a grueling caucus session) along with plenty of volunteers to facilitate a smooth operation. Women's Films were provided in the Hospitality Room for members and volunteers to enjoy.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY LEAGUES BRING HOME AWARDS:

It was a pleasure to celebrate the excellence of Leagues throughout

the state and within LA County both during the awards presentations and the Roll Call of Leagues. A variety of awards were captured by Leagues in Los Angeles County. Chris Carson and the Glendale-Burbank League received VOTER awards for President's Message and general Layout and Design. Beach Cities League garnered a general Layout and Design award also. Sharon Mullenix and the Pasadena Area League were lauded for a President's Message and an outstanding Article on Water Privatization. Sharon also participated in Membership Workshop sharing some of Pasadena's successful approaches to members. General Excellence in website and VOTER went to Los Angeles. In addition, Los Angeles received best LEW Web site and Pasadena won the Best non-LEW Web site. Under Smart Voter awards, our own Frances Talbott-White, "Queen (Goddess??) of SoCal Smart Voter," was honored with a special award. LaRue Brewer, East San Gabriel Valley, received an award from Common Knowledge for broad distribution of Easy Voter Guides. Sally Seven Claremont Area was recognized for having Easy Voter Guides distributed in the Claremont Courier.

Margo

To check out these outstanding VOTERs and Websites go to the LWVC site www.lwvc.org, select Local Leagues, then the individual league to get to their website. On the site click on VOTER and select a month to view. Pasadena's article was in the April 2005 issue. Individual League accomplishments touted in the Roll Call of Leagues can be found on the State WEB site under 2005 Convention "Strutting Our Stuff" at www.LWVC.org

Jails and Prisons and *The Revolving Door*

An informational panel on our current correctional system was presented by LWV LA at a League Day on March 13, held at the LA County Hall of Administration. As an Issue for Education---it certainly was! The gallery was filled to capacity, the speakers were fascinating, and the audience was as diverse as you can get. The topic galvanized some who had no idea of the situation faced by those who are or have been incarcerated.

Sheriff Lee Baca discussed the demographics of the inmates in LA County jails. Most have "fallen off their path, usually with drugs." Most can't read or write, they get too far out of sync with their peers and get involved with crime. Though unemployment is said to be around 6%, in the African American communities, it is more like 20%. These problems should be addressed long before they get to jail. The Sheriff's Department provides the largest drug recovery program in the country, as well as domestic violence programs, conflict resolution programs, and help for Veterans who are homeless because of drugs. He supports Prop 36 but thinks it needs more teeth. When a judge is in charge, the results are better. Drug courts work even better yet. The jail provides literacy programs, GED education, and spiritual support. Some inmates, eg. murderers and sex offenders, cannot be rehabilitated, but most of the rest can straighten out their lives and need our help.

Judge Terry Smerling provided a simplified clarification of the criminal justice process and furnished us

with his insights into potential solutions to the many problems plaguing jails and prisons. The Judge clearly summarized the process from arrest, through arraignment, to trial and sentencing. He defined felony, misdemeanor, and those crimes which can be labeled either, commonly called "wobblers." A misdemeanor is a crime with a potential punishment of less than a year and incarceration in jail. A felony has a potential punishment of over a year, and incarceration is generally in a prison. Thefts, some assaults, methamphetamine and PCP possessions can be either. Most cases are settled by plea bargain. A felony sentence may be indeterminate (which is some number of years to life) and the parole board determines release. The vast majority of sentences are determinant sentences in which the judge fixes the exact time and 85% of the sentence is to be served; offender then can be paroled under supervision. Parole board has no say in these cases.

Smerling went on to explain that the "Strike" law was established to get criminals off the street. It applies when the first strike is a serious or violent felony. If a second offense occurs, the offender is not eligible for probation; on the third offense the sentence is doubled and is a minimum of 25 years to life. Judges are now allowed to strike "strikes" when sentencing. This is handled very unevenly across the state. Parole violators can be sent to prison and require special treatment from Parole officers. However a case worker may handle over 1000 offenders due to the Parole Department's extremely overwhelming workload.

The failings of the system begin once the person is convicted! The present result of criminal behavior is punitive incarceration. Two million are in prison or jail in this country every day. One out of 17 white males, one out of 3 black males can expect to be incarcerated some time in his lifetime. In the United States we incarcerate 714 per 100,000 of the population; Western Europe imprisons 1/6 or 1/7 of the number we do. Although crime rates increased in other areas along with California, other major states such as NY, didn't expand their prisons as much as we did. Judge Smerling cited a recent Rand study which indicated that those sent to prison are far more likely to re-offend than those receiving appropriate treatment. The Three Strike law in California is draconian, is applied very unevenly throughout the state, and hasn't changed the crime rate.

Drugs are involved in 75% of the crimes; if you add alcohol to the mix it is about 95% of all committed crimes. When felons don't receive treatment, they will return. According to Judge Smerling, what we need is more treatment, more drug courts, and more intensively supervised probation. Prop 36 was good, but lacks funds and teeth for judges to force treatment. In the '70s the mentally ill were put out into the streets and most of those individuals end up in jail. At least 30% of those in jail are mentally ill. The county jail houses the largest mentally ill population in the world.

It was after a court order by Judge Smerling several years ago that our next speaker, **Jody Kent**, Jails Project Coordinator (over)

for the ACLU, was assigned to monitor the LA jails and their inmates. She assists inmates in working through the system, trying to improve conditions. She worked with League of Women Voters on the voter registration project in the county jails and is working to get more educational classes made available. She lamented that the Men's Central Jail is filthy, men are crowded 7 to a cell, some sleeping on the floor. They are locked down 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, crammed into one cell, with one toilet, plumbing leaks, rats, etc. She had several recommendations: 1.. Guarantee a bed to every inmate (not mattresses on the floor); 2. Allow the inmates out of their cells for a period of time every day for classes, mentoring, socializing and recreation. It is the degrading conditions that contribute to violence and anger and that lead to the recidivism and lack of positive attitudes. She said we need to prioritize recreation and rehabilitation rather than punishment.

A survivor of seven years of on-again, off-again incarceration, Curtis Washington, told of the hopelessness and lack of information available in all of the systems. He had grown up in a multiethnic household and felt shunned so fell in with a bad crowd that accepted him. His first arrest was when he was 18 just before the LA riots in 1992. So many people were arrested that people were being crammed into jail. There was no place to sit, stand or sleep. He was very frightened, lost, and sent to Chino for detoxification. He was given no information about programs, resources, and assistance. His subsequent incarcerations showed him that there was certainly no improvement in the system---in

fact, everything had gotten worse. All recreational activities had been taken away. He has heard about the programs but he never came in contact with them, and no one he has ever talked with was ever in contact with them. He is currently working with the homeless and HIV/AIDS folks and he talks regularly with those who are just being released. We must get the information to the inmates. Where are the advocates to help people know what is available, where these things are? What are we doing to educate these people? They are told point blank that they have no rights, cannot ever vote again, etc., so they don't ask when they get out. However, Curtis was delighted to be asked to register to vote at the DMV when he applied for a driver's license after getting off parole.

Joyce Ride has concentrated on the women who are sentenced and what it does to them and their children. A good prison advocate is a good listener. Of the women in jail and prison, 80% are mothers of minor children and are sentenced for nonviolent drug offenses. All rehabilitative programs have been discontinued. Women giving birth to children while in prison are still shackled to the bed. Babies not claimed by another family member are put on a fast track to adoption. Mothers seldom see them again. Some women are fine artists, some have beautiful voices, but there is no opportunity to participate in any rehabilitative activity. After every visit from family or counsel, they have to go through a humiliating cavity search. Ms Ride suggested that we could cut down on the recidivism if we handled the inmates more effectively so that

it would not be The Revolving Door.

Mary Weaver, of Friends Outside, gave us the vast list of resources available for the incarcerated. One of the biggest problems is letting people know what is available and getting these resource agencies to work together. She outlined the general demographics of this population---most likely substance abusers, illiterate, unemployed, mentally ill, homeless, and diseased (e.g., HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, or tuberculosis). Those who are released face major problems---employment, housing, substance abuse treatment, physical and mental health care, and family connections. They don't get treatment, jail is chaotic, and programs are not available in every location. They can't get jobs when they are released because they have no job skills, poor education, unprofessional appearance, dental problems, no ID, no transportation, etc. Having a felony conviction makes the job search extremely difficult. A few industries that are almost "felony friendly" are construction, telemarketing, and gardening. She indicated that new funding is possible from the federal government specifically for reentry assistance including job fairs, fidelity bonds and tax credits for hiring felons. Friends Outside helps get jobs and hopefully reunites them with their families. If they can keep a job for one year, they are very unlikely to re-offend and be sent back to jail.

Housing is also very difficult. Although some may be able to go back to previous residence or stay with family or friends, they cannot live in (continued on the next page.)

Section 8 housing, and they usually have no money. Some have to go to missions, and try to get on general relief. There are special programs for HIV/AIDS, disabled, and veterans. There are sometimes hotel vouchers for women with children. Jail housing costs \$64/per day/per person; shelters, \$34; supportive housing \$30. For every \$1 spent in treatment, \$7 is saved in societal costs. For any health or mental help, they have to depend upon the county hospitals. We need to maintain seamless service delivery,

encourage cooperation between service providers and community organizations, etc.

Assemblyman Mark Ridley-Thomas spoke of the new legislation he is sponsoring to require all counties in the state to follow the same rules regarding the inmate's right to vote. The law states that only when a person is serving time for a felony (including the parole time) are they temporarily disenfranchised. Once they finish their sentence, their right is automatically restored. It is the process of

restoration of that right that he felt needed to be codified. Many members of the public do not know that those in jails awaiting trial, those convicted of misdemeanors, or those who have completed their felony sentences are allowed to vote. He proposes that the counties be informed when the sentence is completed so that the enfranchisement will be restored in a similar manner throughout the state. Of course registration must be at the new address.

It was to highlight these voting inequities that the LA League started this Issue for Education. Learning more about the complex system became even more intensely involved. There are signs of some reconsideration in the prison system of the "punishment" attitude, but we shall have to watch for any changes. The county jails have been given a larger portion of the budget this year, so there may be some relief in the overcrowding. Hopefully, both prisons and county jails will begin to bring back the rehabilitation attitude that provides the best option for returning these individuals to society. All but 5% of incarcerated folks do *return* to the community. It would seem most beneficial that they *return* capable of positive transition to the society that they left.

Special thanks to the committee for their hard work in pulling together a League Day of such interest!

~~~Jean Thomson LWV LA, Committee Chair and Daphne Lake, LWV/LAC Voter Service Chair

A more extensive report from this presentation will be available on the website.



Letter to the Editor of the Los Angeles Times Printed  
Friday, May 20, 2005

Re "A Little Talk Could Save a lot," editorial, May  
13, and "Gov. Relents on Sped-Up Remapping," April  
28:

The legislature and the governor must agree to negotiate and come up with a compromise redistricting reform to be placed on the ballot, preferably in June 2006. This reform should create a nonpartisan or bipartisan commission composed of members from diverse communities to draw lines that will be based on new census figures gathered in 2010.

Mid-decade redistricting is not a good precedent to set. The Legislature's goal in this process is always to protect politicians, and to accomplish this a great deal of "creative" drawing of district lines takes place. However, the plan crafted jointly by the two major parties, went far beyond the bounds of reason and fairness, and has become known as the "Incumbent Protection Plan." California needs and deserves better.

The process needs to be permanently removed from the Legislature and placed in the hands of an independent commission with diverse representation. Several bills currently in the Legislature can do this. The Legislature should hold hearings and pass a workable bill that will go on the ballot next year, to become effective after the next census in 2010.

Margo A. Reeg, President  
League of Women Voters of Los Angeles County

Local Voices letter from Maxwell

Dear Friends,

The protection of our civil liberties is a priority for the League; it is one of the cornerstones of our Democracy Agenda. This month, we have worked to preserve our basic liberties through both education and advocacy. We pushed for support of the SAFE (Security and Freedom Ensured) Act in the U.S. House of Representatives through visits from the Lobby Corps and letters. Our *Local Voices: Citizen Conversations on Civil Liberties and Secure Communities* project continues to move forward – the first forums will take place the first week in June. Civil liberties are vital to our democracy, and we must continue our leadership in protecting them!

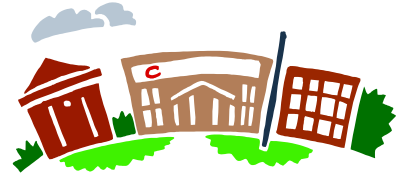
**Kay J. Maxwell**  
President, LWVUS

Invitation Flyer to the Los Angeles June 25, 2005  
9:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. forum follows

The League of Women Voters of Los Angeles County in both its values and practices affirms its commitment to diversity, pluralism and affirmative action.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN  
VOTERS®  
OF  
LOS ANGELES



**Invites you to a Community Dialogue**

*Local Voices: Citizen Conversations on Civil Liberties  
and Secure Communities*

*Los Angeles City College*

**Holmes Hall**

**855 North Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles 90029**

**June 25, 2005**

**9:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.**

*Box lunches will be provided*

Meet other residents of our community and discuss issues relating to civil liberties and homeland security. Discussion topics will include; individual experiences with these subjects, perceptions of risk and safety and current public policy. Add your voice to a national report that the League will send to Congress and the nation.

The program will also include invited speakers who will discuss security risks in Southern California, the fiscal impact of homeland security, the USA Patriot Act, and current legislation

**Free parking in Snyder Field Staff/Faculty Parking Lot, enter off Vermont Ave.  
LACC is located at the Vermont/Santa Monica stop on the Metro Red Line**

Facilities are wheelchair accessible.

**RSVP's by June 13<sup>th</sup> are required**

**Requests for attendance will be filled on a first come first served basis**

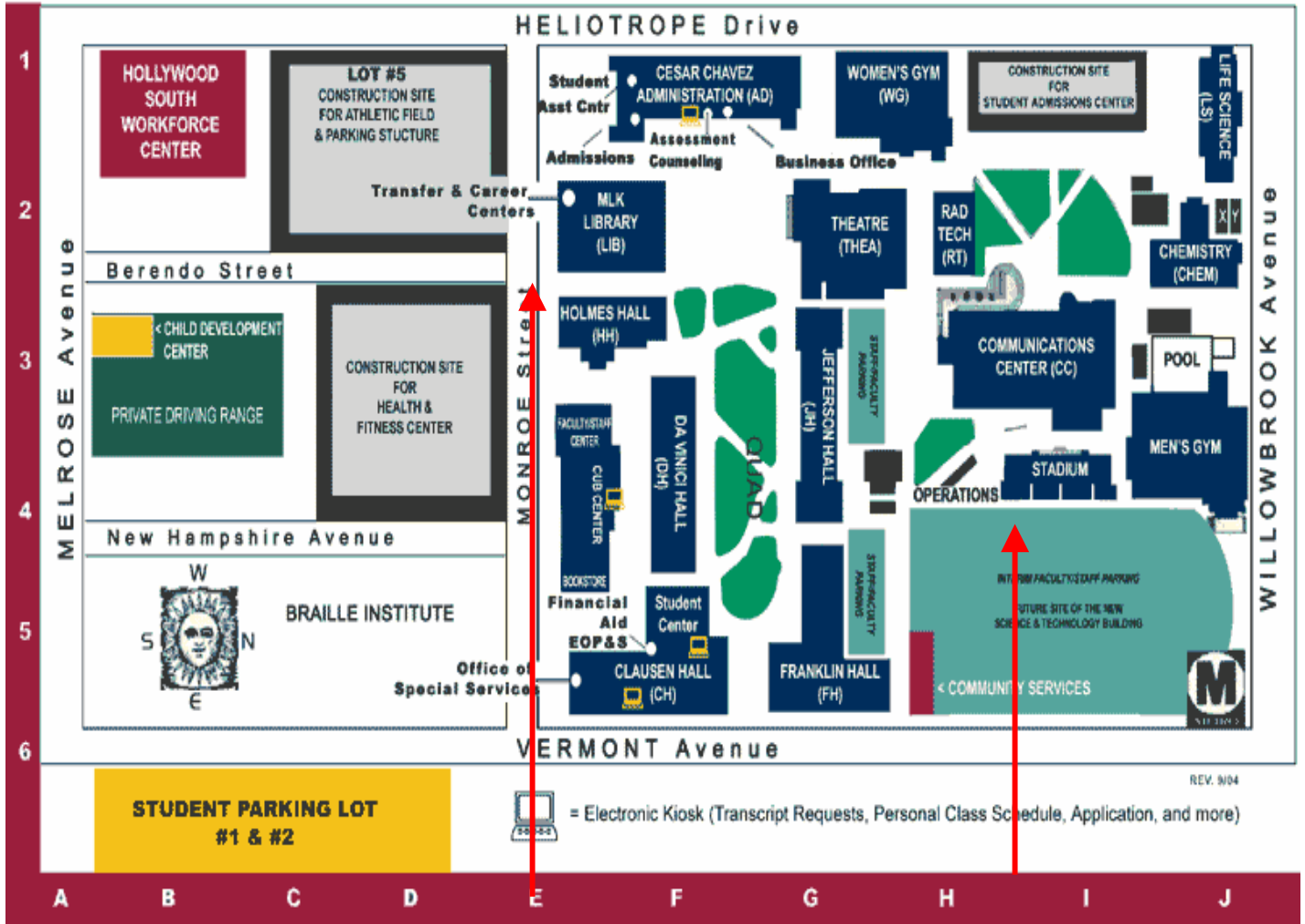
**Call the League of Women Voters office to RSVP or for further information (213) 368 1616.**

*The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging the informed and active participation of citizens in government.*

*This program is being sponsored by the League of Women Voters Education Fund through a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.*



LEAGUE OF WOMEN  
VOTERS®  
OF  
LOS ANGELES



Meeting room in Holmes Hall  
Auditorium  
Enter from the Vermont Ave. side of  
the building

Parking in Snyder Field  
Faculty/Staff Lot



# **\*\*POPOVERS\*\*IN\*\*PASADENA\*\***

**LWV-LACounty\*\*\*SUMMER LEAGUE DAY\*\*\*Saturday, JULY 23**

**Women's City Club  
160 North Oakland  
Pasadena**

**Registration: 9:30 a.m.  
Meeting: 10 a.m.**

**Cost: \$25 if RSVP is postmarked by July 11  
\$30 if RSVP is postmarked after July 11 and received by July 15**

**(Cost includes morning coffee/tea and lunch)**

**Workshops: Trying to Achieve Health Care for All  
Preschool for All Act (Pre-K Initiative)  
Affordable Housing Options and Legislation  
Post LWVC Convention Education Study Update and Pending Action**

*Keynote Address: Zev Yaroslavsky, Supervisor 3<sup>rd</sup> District*

*Los Angeles County Health Care System Update  
(Emphases: King/Drew Medical Center and Measure B)*

**League Members Getting Acquainted and Reacquainted  
Luncheon Opportunities to Expand the Conversations  
(eg. Workshop Topics: Mental Health Services Act, Services Planning Areas,  
Parental Notification Initiative, Voter Service, Natural Resources)**

=====  
**Send reservation and check, payable to LWV/LAC, to:  
LWV/LAC Treasurer, 427 E. Walnut Ave., Burbank 91501**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**League:** \_\_\_\_\_

**For vegetarian lunch, check here:** \_\_\_\_\_

**If allergic to (edible) nuts, check here:** \_\_\_\_\_

**June 2005**  
**League of Women Voters**  
**Los Angeles County**

**Margo Reeg, President**  
**Liz Allen, Editor**  
**allenlww@aol.com**

We're on the Web!! <http://lacilo.ca.lwvnet.org>

### **Calendar Dates to Save**

- June 25<sup>th</sup> Saturday    LWVLA Local Voices Community Dialogue**
- July 23<sup>rd</sup> Saturday    Popovers in Pasadena, LWV/LA County Summer League Day**
- Sept.24<sup>th</sup> Saturday    Meeting at Hollenbeck. Ballot briefing, if Nov. Election scheduled**

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**Local League** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail Address** \_\_\_\_\_