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An Interleague Organization

VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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Editor: Mary Ellen Barnes Website: <http://lacilo.ca.lwvnet.org> Email: LWVLACounty@msn.com August 2011

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Calendar 2011-2012

2011

Wed, Sept 7	County Board Meeting • 10:00-1:00
Wed, Oct 5	County Board Meeting • 10:00-1:00
Wed, Nov 2	County Board Meeting • 10:00-1:00
Sat, Oct 22	Fall League Day - Redistricting 9:30-2:00 at Rio Hondo Country Club

2012

Wed, Jan 5	County Board Meeting 10:00-1:00
Sat, Jan 28	Winter League Day – Initiative & Referendum 9:30-2:00 Taix Restaurant
Wed, Feb 2	County Board Meeting 10:00-1:00
Wed, March 1	County Board Meeting 10:00-1:00

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From the President's Desk...

The debacle in Washington makes us realize how important it is for us to have an educated electorate. The pros and cons that Leagues provide on measures and the opportunities to hear candidates speak help voters make choices based on information and their own assessment of that information. This is key to the democratic process. We should all be proud of the League's record in voter education and service. But we can't rest on our laurels. The November election is around the corner. Local issues and local candidates are very important with direct impact on residents lives. Please be sure that your local candidates and issues are posted on Smart Voter.

The LWVUS Education study is another activity coming up this fall. Many of you are already engaged in study research and meetings. Those of you who attended the Summer County League Day – *Popovers in Pasadena* – had the opportunity to attend an excellent workshop dealing with the study materials (thanks Joanne Leavitt and Barbara Inatsugu!). You also heard guest speaker Rick Simpson address education issues. A summary of his remarks is in this *Voter*.

Popovers was a great success with 92 members and guests attending. We were pleased to welcome Patricia Shaw and Denise Latanzi from the Antelope Valley League, which is still in formation. Their experiences in forming a new League were great additions to our discussions. A reflection of their enthusiasm, they have 47 members!

Participants in Popovers were also offered a lively workshop presented by MTAs Lois Ledger and Mary Ellen Barnes. And there was the traditional workshop for presidents and treasurers with me, Tom Carson (State League Treasurer), and Dorothy Stewart (County League Treasurer).

Putting together a County League Day is a bit of work. I must thank Georganne Thomsen (who is a past State Board member) for making all the arrangements with the Pasadena City Club, and Dorothy Stewart for handling reservations.

Our next County activity will be October 22, with a Fall League Day. We'll look at state and county redistricting. The meeting will be at the Rio Hondo Country Club. Watch for a flyer with all the details.

I wish you all great success as you jump into your League program for the coming year.

Nancy

State and County Prepare for Health Care Reform

By Phyllis O'Connor, LWV/LAC Director

The Health Care Reform bill passed in March 2010, known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), includes provisions to secure and expand Medicaid ("Medi-Cal" in California) programs. Beginning in 2014, those with family incomes less than 133% of the federal poverty level (FPL) will have full Medi-Cal with no asset test, and those between 134% and 400% will be eligible for premium subsidies. (133% FPL for an individual is \$14,484/year.)

Section 1115 Waivers

The Federal Medicaid program provides for waivers which authorize states to develop Medicaid programs that differ from the standard federal program. There are different types of Medicaid waivers, including Section 1115 waivers for research and demonstration projects designed to temporarily test expanded eligibility or coverage options.

The State of California has participated in the Medicaid Section 1115 Waiver for many years. Since this waiver was due to expire on October 31, 2010, in June the California's Health and Human Services Agency submitted a Section 1115 Demonstration Project proposal to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) entitled California's Bridge to Health Care Reform. The Waiver was approved in November, 2010. Among its provisions, the Waiver:

- moves Medi-Cal patients who are eligible as seniors or persons with disability (SPD) from fee-for-service into a managed care plan. This is scheduled to phase-in over a 12-month period starting June 1, 2011. Some exemptions apply, such as dual eligible Medicare/Medi-Cal recipients.
- creates opportunities for counties to develop new health programs for uninsured people with family incomes up to 200% of poverty and helps to redesign the delivery of care. Mental health will be an important component of the Waiver.
- phases in coverage for adults ages 19-64 with incomes at or below 133% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and expands the existing Safety Net Care Pool that was established to ensure continued government support for the provision of health care to the uninsured by hospitals, clinics and other providers.

Implementation in Los Angeles County

Currently, the Department of Health Service's "Healthy Way L.A." (HWLA) is the Medicaid Coverage Expansion vehicle in L.A. County. • HWLA presently has 65,000 enrollees. • When fully implemented, DHS anticipates 130,000 enrollees in HWLA. • The County plans to partner with the LA Care Medi-Cal managed care plan to move seniors and persons with disabilities into managed care. To progress towards integration of health, mental health and substance abuse programs, the County's Department of Health Services and Department of Mental Health are identifying patients who are currently using services in both departments and these will be given priority for enrollment in HWLA.

The County's goal is to put the necessary programs, structures, technologies and staffing in place to take immediate advantage of the waiver and the full implementation of the ACA in 2014.

Nuclear Energy Report

The Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future has submitted its draft report to the Secretary of Energy, as required by the Commission charter. • The Commission will seek public comment on the draft through October 31, 2011, and will consider those comments in preparing its final report, which is due to the Secretary in January 2012. • Comments may be submitted through the Commission web site at www.brc.gov; at one of several public meetings to be held during the comment period (dates and times to be announced soon); via email to brc@nuclear.energy.gov, or in writing at:

Mr. Timothy A. Frazier
Designated Federal Officer
Blue Ribbon Commission on America's
Nuclear Future
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC • 20585

The draft report is available at
http://brc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/brc_draft_report_29jul2011.pdf.

COUNTY LEAGUE DAY: RICK SIMPSON, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

By Pat Colby, LWV PVP

Rick Simpson, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Speaker of the California Assembly, was the keynote speaker at County League Day, "Popovers in Pasadena," on Saturday, July 30, 2011. Mr. Simpson addressed aspects of the role of the federal government in public education.

Educational policies in Washington D.C. currently lean toward less money, fewer strings, less federal discretionary funding and increased emphasis on charter schools, choice and vouchers. In the House, chairs of education committees would like to fold all categorical federal funding into a single block grant. This, Mr. Simpson says, has been faced by Californians in the past; it is not good policy for kids.

The Common Core Standards (CCS) and related assessment tools are favored by the Obama administration. The Common Core Standards were established through the Governors and Superintendents of Education of individual states with input from teachers and other educational experts. They are guidelines for what students are expected to learn as they progress through each grade, K-12. The CCS are national not federal and have been adopted by 41 states, including California. Our state is also a lead state in one of two federally funded consortiums, called Smarter Balance, which is developing assessment tools, but does not require the use of tests for teacher evaluations. Implementation of the CCS requires considerable preparation: teacher and administrator training, new textbooks, new tests and proper understanding and use of assessment tools in the classroom.

The Federal government has historically acknowledged imbalances in educational opportunity for our nation's children. Often laws or "incentives" are established for the "common good". Such incentives include the school lunch program, Head Start and Pell grants for the college-bound. Yet, Mr. Simpson points out, not all uniform federal actions are necessarily "good." He advises that laws be examined in isolation.

Do they make sense? Are they applicable to the state and the students to be served? If the federal government truly wants to improve education, it should look at poverty vs. education. The Stanford Study, "Getting Down to Facts" clearly illustrates that children in poverty rarely meet national academic performance indexes on tests. State and federal government could do more for poor school children by giving their parents a good paying job.

Early Education works. It has been proven in multiple studies, that a sound pre-school experience represents an investment in our children's future. Early pre-school successes mitigate the need for later remediation in a child's educational life. California has a modestly sized pre-school program; Mr. Simpson advocates for a far larger involvement in this area.

The future of school finance has to be local At the state level there is a hydra-headed educational leadership system that is too convoluted to be effective. Mr. Simpson says the State Superintendent of schools should not be an elected position. Rather, he explains, make the director of the state board (appointed by the governor), the leader. Currently, the legislators control the budget, the governor appoints the State Board of Education which makes educational policy and the elected Superintendent is required to carry out the policy the board sets. Power reverted to the state during a series of Sacramento bailouts that began with property tax reform in the 1970's. As a Times editorial (July 2011) states: "Taxes raised and spent locally would provide a measure of 'home rule' that cities, counties and school districts once had. Governor Jerry Brown, who in the 1970's and 1980's presided over the shift of control from local governments to the Capitol, has proposed a 'realignment' to return much of that power. A return to local control means that cities, counties and school districts would have to be able to raise their own money, make their own choices and accept the consequences."

Continued on page 5

County League Day Summary - continued from page 4

Questions/Answers:

Question: Parent Involvement in schools is critical. What is being done about this component?

Answer: Parents cannot be mandated to participate in their children's education. It's up to the school to make visits attractive to parents.

Question: What was the effect of Serrano v. Priest?

Answer: Serrano vs. Priest was a landmark 1976 California Supreme Court ruling that required more equal funding of school districts regardless of the wealth of the community. With the gross disparity in property values in rich and poor communities, this translated into a gross disparity in the quality of education that the district could afford. To be clear, the case did not actually result in equally funded districts across California. However, it did establish important principles that have framed the continuing struggle for educational equality in the state. The 1976 decision ruled that the existing system of financing schools was unconstitutional because it violated the equal protection clause of the state constitution.

Question: What are the most significant aspects of SB90?

Answer: SB90 is Governor Jerry Brown's balanced FY 2011-12 State Budget Proposal (January 2011) which includes \$12.5 billion in proposed state spending cuts and includes a major, far-reaching realignment and restructuring of government functions. SB90 restores to local government the authority to make decisions that are best made close to the people.

Question: What about equity concerns in the over 1,000 school districts in California?

Answer: Raise funds county-wide for concerned schools. Works better than funding lots of very small districts.

Question: What is significant about Proposition 39?

Answer: In November 2000, California voters decided to reduce the voter approval threshold for school district and community college district general obligation bonds from 2/3 voter approval to 55% voter approval. Prop 39 amends article XVIII of the California Constitution to allow for the levy of *ad valorem* (Latin for "according to value") taxes on real property in excess of the 1% limit to pay debt services on bond issues for school construction with the approval of 55% of the votes cast. This allowed the Los Angeles Unified School District to build out of multi-track schools.

Question: What's the future of teacher and other pension plans in the state?

Answer: In general, California pension plans are dangerously under-funded, the result of overly generous benefit promises and unwillingness to plan prudently. Unless reforms are made now, the problem will get far worse, forcing counties and cities to severely reduce services and lay off employees to meet pension demands. The Little Hoover Commission, State of California (February 2011) found the state's ten largest pension funds—encompassing 90% of all public employees—are over extended in their promises to current workers and retirees. A hybrid model, which contains a lower defined benefit pension with an employer matched defined-contribution plan (such as the State Teachers Retirement System has) is a model that must be made to public agencies. The state needs to collapse unsustainable pension formulas and create a lower defined benefit formula to facilitate this approach. A cap must also be placed on the maximum pension an employee can earn. The California pension system—a conglomeration of 85 defined-benefit pension plans—demands more uniformity and oversight.

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

The League of Women Voters welcomes new members, both men and women, who are citizens of voting age. Associate membership is open to all others.

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Internet Election Resources

Smart Voter www.smartvoter.org

Statewide propositions plus local candidates & issues on your ballot, with extensive

Background materials and media links from LWV California Ed Fund

LA County Registrar-Recorder www.lavote.net

Election calendar, polling place look-up, absentee voting info, multilingual voting materials, Locations for Touchscreen early voting

Easy Voter Guide www.easyvoter.org

Concise facts on statewide propositions; Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese, and English

Secretary of State www.ss.ca.gov

Official text of ballot measures

CA Legislative Analyst www.lao.ca.gov

Analysis of all ballot measures

CA Voter Foundation www.calvoter.org

Data on campaign contributions to candidates and measures

CA Budget Project www.cbp.org

Analyzes the fiscal effects of statewide ballot measures

CAVotes.org www.cavotes.org

The LWVC Education Fund website

This **VOTER** is ready for viewing on our website: www.lacilo.ca.lwvnet.org



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