



LWV/LACounty

An Interleague Organization

VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

An Interleague Organization — Beach Cities • Claremont Area • East San Gabriel Valley • Glendale-Burbank • Long Beach Area
Los Angeles • Palos Verdes Peninsula-San Pedro • Pasadena Area • Santa Monica • Torrance Area • Whittier

Editor: Mary Ellen Barnes Website: <http://lacilo.ca.lwvnet.org> Email: LWVLACounty@msn.com October 2012

LWV / LACounty Board of Directors 2012 - 2013

Executive Board
Nancy Mahr
President

Lola Ungar
Vice President

Margo Reeg
Second Vice President

Kay White
Secretary

Dorothy Stewart
Treasurer

Directors

Joan Arias
Raquel Beltran
Betsey Coffman
Linda Herman
Vi Iungerich
Rebecca Johnson
Phyllis O'Connor
Marie Palmeri
Sally Seven
Jack Sullivan
Georganne Thomsen

Calendar 2012 - 2013

Wed. Nov.7	County Board Meeting 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Wed. Dec. 5	Holiday Lunch and Board Meeting 10:00 AM at the home of Sally Seven
Wed, Jan 2	County Board Meeting 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Sat, Jan 26	Winter League Day
Wed, Feb 6	County Board Meeting 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Wed, March 6	County Board Meeting 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Sat, March 30	County Convention

In this issue...

President's Message.....	page 2
First 5 LA.....	page 3
Hiltzik On The Initiative Process.....	page 4-6
Smart Voter - Next Generation.....	page 7

From the President's Desk...

October is a busy month! The ballot measures are complicated for voters. The ads only add to their questions. Our league presentations are more important than ever – and are quite popular. Don't forget to encourage League and community members to use SmartVoter.org for election information. The County measures have been posted on the LWV/LAC website.

As you plan for the coming months, please save time for program planning. We will be doing state, county and local planning this year. County results will be due in February and state results will be close to that time frame.

The state Initiative and Referendum Reform Study will also be due early in 2013 - more to include in your schedule.

Our Leagues are in the spotlight for the next several weeks. Enjoy the election season.

Nancy Mahr



Policy Pick: Poverty Increases, Services Decrease From First 5 LA

As the number of young children and families living in poverty in Los Angeles County continues to rise, pressure is growing on local safety net programs to provide services while public budgets are in crisis and being cut.

The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey [1], released Sept. 19, is used to determine demographic information about the U.S. population based on a survey of approximately 3 million people [2] across the country on an ongoing basis.

Since 2007, the number of households with children 5 and younger living below the federal poverty line has increased by almost 3½ percent [3] to 17.8 percent, or approximately 40,000 families. That number is even higher for families led by a female without a husband present: 47.9 percent, or approximately 108,000.

These numbers represent a serious dilemma for elected officials in California. Safety net programs like CalFresh, Medi-Cal and CalWorks are entitlement programs, meaning that certain individuals are automatically entitled to benefits based on income and family characteristics. As incomes have dropped for families with children since the economic crash in 2008, the numbers who qualify for public benefits have risen - all while California lawmakers have been forced to cut the budget.

For example, Medi-Cal is available [4] to various low-income individuals, including pregnant women and children ages 0-5 in California, whose families earn below a certain income level. Since 2008, the number of individuals served by Medi-Cal has gone up from 6.8 million [5] recipients to 7.7 million [6] in 2011. At the same time, policy makers have been forced to make dramatic cuts to the program in spite of the growing numbers of individuals who qualify for it.

HILTZIK ON THE INITIATIVE PROCESS

Report on the Annual Kickoff Meeting of
Beach Cities, Palos Verdes Peninsula & Torrance Area
September 22, 2012
By Pat Colby, LWVPVP

Michael Hiltzik, business columnist for the Los Angeles Times, used political history and excerpts from his own columns to address “The Foibles of the Initiative Process” at the League’s annual kickoff meeting in the Kimono Room of the Depot Restaurant on September 22, 2012.

Hiltzik said California Governor Hiram Johnson (1911-1917) believed big business and special interests had too much influence in politics. Under Johnson’s leadership, the California legislature passed a flurry of progressive measures and almost two dozen amendments, three of which gave more power in the form of “direct democracy” to the California voter—the initiative, the referendum and the recall. However, the initiative as applied in present day circumstances would, Hiltzik stated, “probably make Johnson turn over in his grave.”

From Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s failed special election in 2005 to the voter approved initiative Proposition 13 in 1978, California is moving toward near ungovernability and much of the fault lies in attempts to circumvent the legislature, most often through initiatives. Of Proposition 13, he notes, “the tax structure bequeathed to us places too much emphasis on personal income tax, which frustrates the wealthy and the entrepreneurial class and on sales tax which hammers the working class. The school financing system, also an offspring of Proposition 13, hamstring local administrators by making them beholden to nostrums issued from Sacramento.”

The League of Women Voters has positions on certain of the propositions/initiatives slated for the November 2012 ballot; some of the other propositions, Hiltzik suggests, are cloaked in obfuscation. Proposition 32, (government no longer allowed to automatically deduct union dues from paychecks), for example, is promoted by the state’s biggest billionaires, “looking out for you and me.” To reinforce this perception, Hiltzik, quoted from FDR’s 1936 speech at the New York State Democratic Convention, “Let me warn you and let me warn the nation against the smooth evasion which says, ‘Of course we believe in all these things; we believe in social security; we believe in work for the unemployed; we believe in saving homes. Cross our heart and hope to die, we believe in all these things; but we do not like the way the present administration is doing them. Just turn them over to us. We will do all of them—we will do more of them; we will do them better; and most important of all, the doing of them will not cost anybody anything’.”

Hiltzik says that twice before moneyed conservatives have tried to destroy unions and they are back again with Proposition 32, pouring money into T.V. ads and sound bites. The initiative process, he believes, will become the instrument of big business and the tool of the wealthy.

Hiltzik referenced the narrowly defeated June 2012 Proposition 29, Tobacco Tax for Cancer Research Act as an example of another problem with the initiative: **Intention vs. Result**. According to Hiltzik, increasing the state tax on cigarettes by \$1.00 a pack to generate \$800 million was good; discouraging smoking was good; sequestering the money for a limited purpose—not good at all. Given the over-all state budget gap of \$16 billion, it is hard, he says, to make the case for long-term research alone. Moreover, we should not be drawn in by personal narratives. This is not the right way to make public policy. Many others could use the \$800 million—students trying to enter college, food programs for hungry children, home services for the disabled.

Continued on the next page

Hiltzik - continued from page 4

Another major downside of these ballot proposals is that the only way to campaign on their behalf is on T.V. The cause becomes wrapped in slogans and sound bites. A major example of over-the-top promises was Proposition 71 which was sold to a gullible public via images of Christopher Reeves walking again and Michael J. Fox cured of Parkinson's. The implication was that these miracles would happen if voters approved a \$3 billion bond issued for stem cell research. As it turned out, "the stem cell measure created an unwieldy bureaucracy and etched conflicts of interest into the state constitution. By last count about 85% of the \$1.3 billion in grants handed out by the program has gone to institutions with representatives on the stem cell board. The program is immune to oversight by the legislature or other elected officials. For these reasons and others, it has grappled with only mixed success with changes in stem cell science." Bob Klein who drafted the stem cell bond later became chairman of the program.

Hiltzik reflects that sound science builds on the efforts of others and the cooperation of many. So how much can we trust scientific studies? Generally, Hiltzik looks at the pros and cons of scientific findings generally included in scientific papers. It's important to look at disclosures—what researchers were paid and for whom they work. Look for biases that can be introduced. Science is always a work in progress. Responsible scientists do not claim they have found "the cure." James Watson and Francis Crick spoke modestly of their research into the DNA Double Helix as having "relevance to the structure of DNA."

Hiltzik is not a fan of Proposition 37, also on the November 2012 ballot. It is his contention that "one thing you say for sure about California's ballot initiative process is that it's the absolutely worst way to craft policy dealing with complex scientific issues." Proposition 37 would require some, but not all, food sold in California and produced via genetic engineering to be labeled as such. There are exemptions for milk, restaurant food, beef and chicken. The current advertising implies that there is a threat to food. We don't know if genetically engineered food is dangerous or if it does so little damage over a lifetime that it is irrelevant. Hiltzik argues that if a particular food is dangerous—take it off the shelf. In voting for this measure we are fooling ourselves that we have addressed the problem, but we haven't. Those lined up against Proposition 37 are Monsanto, Pepsi and DuPont—the big food processors toward whom this measure is aimed. On the yes side is Joseph Mercola who runs an alternative physician practice in Illinois. He is the founder and editor of an alternative-medicine website. Mercola criticizes many aspects of standard medical practice, particularly child vaccination, use of prescription drugs and surgery to treat diseases. Mercola has built his business around some of the scare claims inherent in an anti-genetic engineering initiative.

Hiltzik states that the ad battles between Mercola and Monsanto are absolutely fact free, and goes on to say, "the public's interest lies in a reasoned, informed debate about whether to label, what to label and how to label. In the next six weeks that debate will be waged in 15 and 30 second television spots, and that's no way to make law."

Continued from page 5

How can we better improve on the initiative system? Hiltzik proposes the following changes:

- ✓ Strengthen disclosure laws; need to “drill down” to persons/organizations responsible for an initiative and what the real issue is.
- ✓ Sponsors need to be more explicit.
- ✓ Required vetting through the legislative process.
- ✓ Any initiative must be subject to hearings to create a base of information before the ads are aired through the media.
- ✓ Strong oversight by the legislature after an initiative’s passage to refine it; to maintain its purpose. (The originators of Proposition 13, for example, were accused of drunken drafting. Legislature had to go back and fix the irreconcilable.)
- ✓ Return legislature to an experienced body removed from term limits.

Hiltzik says the roots of our current state dysfunction are these: “It’s too easy to enact spending programs by ballot initiative; too hard to get the required 2/3 vote of the legislature to pass a budget and impossible to keep talented legislators around when they’re rapidly turned out by term limits.” There is a tendency to demonize those in public service; to see these individuals as “failures” for having spent a life in public service. In Hiltzik’s eyes, this thinking is erroneous. Legislators are our representatives and in many cases, experienced law makers and experts in matters important to the community and the state. As such, they must consider potential laws by weighing all contending views, compromise if necessary and ensure the laws’ compliance with existing state laws and codes. Making law through the initiative and its companion sound bites pales in comparison.

Q & A

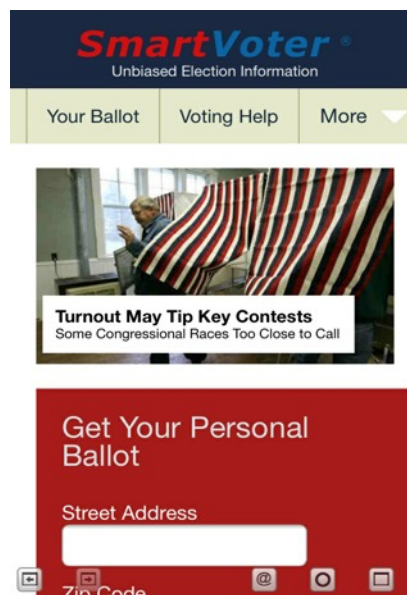
- Concern regarding the influence of lobbyists. Response: Lobbyists would have less power if confronting an experienced legislature
- Joe Matthews’ book “California Crack Up” deals with the recall. Response: Highlights the difficulty politicians have in a state the size of California; they must meet people through the TV.
- GMOs become proprietary crops. Can’t re-use the seeds. Must adhere to Monsanto’s pattern design. Response: Monsanto restricted by license; someone else may offer the product.
- Truth in advertising? Response: Supreme Court (The Big 9 in Washington D.C.) might say that this infringes on free speech.
- Add an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to control lack of truth in advertising? Response: The procedure for changing in amendments requires a great deal of consideration. This is as it should be.
- Is arsenic in rice included in Proposition 37? Response: No
- Giant rag weed taking over certain communities cause by to GMO resistant insects. Response: Cause attached to phenomenon must be studied very carefully.

Smart Voter[®] Dramatic New “Next Generation” Design for Smart Voter Debuts

A revolutionary experience is waiting for you at Smart Voter’s brand new Next Generation website! You can go to the special web address of m.smartvoter.org right now to check it out. This cutting-edge update of the League’s award-winning service sports a new streamlined look and an array of feature stories that changes every day. The many enhanced features are especially helpful for the quick information needs and small touch screens of smartphone and tablet owners -- but promise to be fun and interesting for desktop and laptop computer users as well. Get together with your friends and compare the appearance of the Next Generation site – its exact layout will depend on the size of the screen and type of device each of you is using.

Announced at last year’s state League Convention in Ventura and years in planning, the Next Generation site addresses dramatic changes in the way that the public now accesses and uses information on the Internet. According to national market analyses and surveys, a majority of the computer devices now being purchased are smartphones and tablets rather than desktop or laptop computers, and a rapidly-increasing proportion of voters are relying primarily on such mobile devices to get information on politics and elections.

For this November’s election, Smart Voter will be available to California voters in both its traditional format and the new Next Generation design which will have most of it’s new capabilities functioning already. For future elections the state League will expand the capabilities, features and innovative content of the versatile Next Generation site. If you have questions, comments or suggestions regarding it, please email ca-director@smartvoter.org. And click the “More” button on the new site to sign up for the Smart Voter newsletter, like us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/smartvoter) or follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/smartvoter) and receive our latest updates.



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.

SUBSCRIBE to the VOTER

Send the information below to be notified of the latest VOTER posted on our website at:
<http://www.lacilo.ca.lwvnet.org>

For a hard copy subscription send \$10 to:

LWV/LA County Treasurer,
3970 Sepulveda Blvd. # 201, Torrance, CA 90505.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

League _____

E-mail Address _____

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

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



Nancy Mahr, LWV/LA County President
28028 Ella Road
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275