

January
2004

LWV/LAC InterLeague Newsletter

President's Message

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.

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Hello all!

Happy New Year! I have long ago given up on New Year's resolutions. This time of the year seems to be the one where we would be least inspired to keep them, it gets dark too early, the days are long enough for what we want to do, but I do enjoy reading other peoples thoughts at this time of the year.

One, from Joey Adams is my wish for each of you: "May all your troubles last as long as your New Year's resolution." If this was an email a smiley face would go here! Another I liked came from Liz Smith: "Don't ever commit the sin of being bored." If a League member is bored, it has to be by choice.

I am not talking about taking time out to daydream or just veg out and enjoy the peace and quiet. I am talking about the irritating, restless type of boredom that often is a part of the second week of winter break for young children. Times when you want to do something, but don't know what. This should never happen to an active League member unless they are stranded on an island without an internet provider or a cell phone receiver!

It is less than two months until the next election. The committees working to pass Propositions 55 and 56 can always use more hands. Any of the county board members will be happy to put you in touch with the committees, there is a meeting on Prop 56 coming soon (see the flyer enclosed) and we will be doing speakers training on both of these at the same time the Pros and Cons training is happening on January 31 (flyer also enclosed). There is no charge for this meeting, but if you are planning to attend the speakers training please let me know so we will be sure to have enough packets for everyone.

Young people are turning 18 every day. Check with your local voters service director and see what they are doing to register new voters at your local high schools. This is always something I enjoy doing.

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There is an energy and a vitality on a high school campus that I not only enjoy, but seem to draw new energy from. It is as if those kids have enough to share and not miss it!

Health Care is an issue for emphasis at both the county and state levels. Be informed as to what is happening. As the new legislative year is beginning there will be much information coming out on SB 921, which League is supporting. Stay tuned for frequent updates, speakers training meetings, forums, etc. This is an area where we very much want to stay engaged.

The state wide update of our education positions is now fully funded. As you are doing local program planning, this is a wonderful opportunity to piggy back on the information the state committee will be providing for you and do local information gathering and plan local forums. Some limited funding will be available in the next few months to help underwrite these forums, so start thinking in this direction. What are the challenges Pre-K through 12 public education is facing in your community. 2004 is the 50th anniversary of the "Brown vs. the Board of Education" Supreme Court decision. This might make an interesting topic for a local forum. Our definition of diversity has changed over 50 years and it is no longer just a question of black and white.

The county nominating committee is still looking for members to fill positions both on and off board. If you are interested contact Jean Cohen or Marilee Scaff. They would love to hear from you.

No, there is no good reason for any League member to whine "I'm bored." I could have given you another page of two of challenges that we need to meet...clean air and water, reproductive rights, implementation of the Help America Vote Act, challenges to our civil liberties that have arisen from the Patriot Act...the list goes on and on. So, if you are bored on a dark and chilly day, pick up the phone, call your President and ask what you can do for your League. I am sure there is something you would find interesting, challenging, and defiantly NOT BORING.

So here is to an active, interesting and productive New Year!

Joanne Leavitt (ac997@lafn.org)

VOTER SERVICE

Reducing Voting Barriers for Handicapped

When AbilityFirst's housing coordinator, Chris Otero, called the League, it was clear that the opportunity to reach out to people with disabilities and help overcome the barriers to voting was irresistible. First established in 1926 as the Crippled Children's Society, AbilityFirst works as a partner across the life span of persons with a wide range of disabilities. Their outreach includes independent living apartments, group homes and senior housing; employment training and placement; socialization programs; and summer camp for all ages. Their objective is to look beyond disabilities and to focus on capabilities and expanding possibilities.

AbilityFirst was eager for its clients to learn how to become active advocates for the disabled and focus on the importance of one vote and the power of many votes. Headquartered in Pasadena, AbilityFirst has facilities throughout Los Angeles city and county. Thus, the Los Angeles city LWV and the Pasadena Area LWV joined forces to create a curriculum with the objective of preparing AbilityFirst's clients to vote in the presidential election in November, 2004, as well as encouraging current voters to participate in every applicable election as informed citizens.

Three League members met to design a curriculum of topics to present at bimonthly meetings held at various residential sites. The topics included: "What is Voting/Why Don't You Vote?" "Registering to Vote," "How to Vote," "Why Vote?" "Access to Voting," "Who are your Representatives?" "How to Decide About Candidates?" and "How to Decide About Issues?" These interactive sessions provided information, encouraged participation, and solicited involvement from those who attended.

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The residences were in a wide-ranging geography from Woodland Hills to Signal Hill, from Malibu to Glendale. The hour long presentations were offered on Saturdays and Monday evenings to be available to the most people, a number of whom worked. The disabilities were as diverse as the geography, testing our flexibility as we engaged people with significant cerebral palsy, blindness, severe balance problem, as well as other mental and physical challenges.

Each presentation brought different rewards but the one in Glendale about the question of "Why Vote?" was memorable for the issues that were generated by the seven attendees: "What are the laws of citizenship for Native Americans?" "Should we have compulsory voting?" "What happens if you are called to jury duty and can't get to your assigned room because of physical barriers?" Four residents were registered to vote that day and one thought she might want to become a member of the League. Thinking about this group of people only from the point of view of disability would have been a big mistake. Other presentation high points were the support we got from the County Registrar of Voters to demonstrate Ink-A-Vote and Touch Screen voting to several groups; the opportunity to introduce SmartVoter as a resource for ballot and office information on-line; and the creation of erasable posters for listing various elected officials that could then be posted in a residential public place and changed with new elections.

According to Chris Otero, persons with physical and mental challenges historically have not had a voting voice; they need to be empowered to use their voting voice so people will listen; and they need the ability to take part so they can effect changes. "The League of Women Voters is helping us empower our clients." It is our hope that the curriculum we have devised and our experience in presenting it can assist other League members as they inform, educate and empower as well. For more information, contact Liza White at lizawhite@earthlink.net or (310) 441-4461

Liza White, LWVLA, Jean Thomson, LWVLA,

Sharon Mullinex, LWV Pasadena area

FriendsOutside and the LWV

The horizons (like hips) keep broadening! If there is one thing you can say about the League of Women Voters, it is that it is always a learning experience. Recently an organization called **FriendsOutside** asked if the League would be interested in talking to their group. Their L.A. County organization was founded in 1972 by Martha Jane Dowds, member of the Pasadena League and wife of Superior Court Judge Norman R. Dowds, at the recommendation of Federal Judge William P. Gray. They provide services to individuals currently or formerly incarcerated and their families. In the Los Angeles area they have three community-based offices, in Long Beach, Pasadena, and Watts, and offices within county jails.

When they asked us to talk to them about voting—well, of course, that is what we do! But little did I know when I was asked to join Daphne Lake of the LWV Los Angeles County Board on this visit—of the blind alleys, and the “attitude” I would run into statewide trying to find out more about the process these folks go through. Even my umbilical cord—the internet—failed me.

However, Daphne and I ventured forth to their Watts community room and met with Mary Weaver, the dynamic Executive Director of **FriendsOutside** in this area, and about 20 people who had gathered to celebrate the completion of parole of two men. We had the opportunity to talk with them about what they knew about their voting rights. Unfortunately, though the stories varied, it was apparent that those who even had the “pre-release class” were never told about their voting rights—or else were told that they would never be able to vote again! We proceeded to assure them that the California election laws do allow felons who have completed their sentence and any parole term to register (or re-register) and vote. FYI, each April and September the California courts notify the appropriate county registrar of all those convicted of a felony. Los Angeles County then codes these names and removes them from the

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“approved” voting lists. Thus, each person must register (or reregister) when they are discharged from parole to regain their voting right. Our voting rights and procedures discussion and Ink-a-Vote demonstration gave everyone a chance to see what they would encounter when voting in 2004.

A Little Background

Every state enacts its own laws regarding the voting procedures and rights including the disenfranchisement of prisoners. Only Maine and Vermont allow prison inmates to vote. Twenty-one states allow probationers to vote, and 17 allow those on parole to vote. Some states never allow a convicted felon to vote again, and a few have laws forcing a three or five-year wait after serving the sentence and receiving a discharge off parole. In Alabama, persons convicted of felony offenses are required to provide DNA samples as a condition of obtaining a pardon!

It was as recently as 1974 that the Supreme Court overturned a California court ruling to restore voting rights to ex-felons who had served their sentence and completed parole. Another case in 1978 appeared to have been implemented and the California Election Code was amended to restore these rights. United States Congress has had several amendments to the election laws proposed to make this a nationwide right, but it has always been denied. I understand that this subject was even discussed during the HAVA (Help America Vote Act) negotiations, but there is no mention of it therein.

Though I do not have a current California breakdown in statistics, according to Demos-USA, the total number of people thus disenfranchised in the U.S. in 2000 were :

Felons on Parole	444,405
Felons in Prison	1,222,378
Felons on probation	1,320,684
Ex-felons	<u>1,609,710</u>
For a total of	4,597,177

Future Plans

We have promised to provide **FriendsOutside** with registration forms and materials so that they

have materials on hand in their offices. Mary Weaver, Daphne and I look forward to maintaining our relationship. The League of Women Voters of Los Angeles County as well as the Los Angeles League will be considering how we can be the most helpful to this organization on a long-term basis.

*Jean Thomson, Voters Service Committee Member,
LWV Los Angeles*

PROP. 13: 25 YEARS AFTER

Expert panelists discussed the financial impacts of the passage of Proposition 13 on cities, counties and the state as well as the benefits to taxpayers at the Los Angeles City/County League Day in Burbank on November 15. Nearly 100 League members and guests attended the event.

As an introduction to the topic of Prop. 13 as a significant player in the arena of state and local government finances, **Susan F. Rice, LWV Los Angeles**, former president of the League of Women Voters of California presented a summary of the LWVC positions on taxes and government financing. Chief among the points in the League's position, updated in 1995, are Adequacy of Revenue; Equity of the Tax Burden; Flexibility of Revenue; Statutory Control over tax sources, rates and expenditures; Distribution of Revenue Sources among state and local governments to fund responsibilities and requirements of each; and Accountability.

In addition Ms Rice noted ballot measures that the League has supported and opposed over the years, including opposition to Prop. 13 in 1978; Prop. 4, the Gann Limit on Spending; Prop. 8 which specified that California would reimburse cities in proportion to the funding lost in 1978; and most recently Prop. 49, the Schwarzenegger After School Program; Prop. 51, the Traffic Congestion and Relief measure; and Prop. 54, the Funds Dedicated for State and Local Infrastructure. On the March 2004 ballot will be the Budget and Accountability Act,

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Prop. 56 which the LWVC supports.

Giving their perspectives on the impact of Prop. 13 and revenue sources since its passage were William T. Fujioka, Los Angeles City, David Janssen, Los Angeles County, and Fred Silva, California.

William Fujioka, Chief Administrative Officer for LA and long-time administrator in LA County who worked to implement Prop. 13, pointed out that cities survived the loss of local property tax revenue by raising or enacting new fees, parcel taxes, and by increasing sales tax opportunities. In the 25 years since the passage of Prop. 13, the share of the Los Angeles City generated by property tax has shrunk from 41% to 21%.

What hurts cities most is the uncertainty created by the state's use of local revenues to balance its own budget and the frequently very late budget passage which makes it difficult for cities, counties and schools to budget and to pay their bills. The legislature's "Triple Flip" Tax Proposal, which would return some property tax to cities in exchange for sales tax, would pose its own problems, particularly cash flow, because sales tax revenues come in monthly but property taxes come in only twice per year.

Loss of the Vehicle License Fee increase will cost Los Angeles \$127 million. Repeal of the VLF will amount to a loss of \$200 million in funds for local services. "The most important change that needs to take place is to return local control of taxes to cities," stated Mr. Fujioka.

David Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer for Los Angeles County, pointed out that there were two benefits to Prop. 13. It slowed the growth of government and it made government more creative. He noted, however, that since the state passed Prop. 8 to reimburse local government for property tax losses, the state Legislature took the attitude, "We bailed you out, so now we get to tell you how to use the money." He also reminded the audience that the "obscene" surpluses in the state budget caused by tax increases under Gov. Reagan both angered the public and gave the state the ability to

send money back to local governments.

Janssen also suggested that Los Angeles County was responsible for both Prop. 13 and Prop. 218, which requires a two-thirds vote for all tax and fee increases because the Supervisors had developed budgets which were inflated and then figured out what tax rate would be necessary to fund the budget, with little regard for the effect on individual taxpayers. Reassessments by neighborhood, specifically the San Fernando Valley in the late 1970s sparked the tax revolt, because real estate values were escalating.

Mr. Janssen mentioned that he agrees with the *LA Times* editorial which advocated modifying term limits to 12 years for each house, removing responsibility for Redistricting from the Legislature to an appointed commission, and modifying the Initiative Process to make it more difficult to qualify initiatives for the ballot. In his opinion, ballot box budgeting does not work for the state or for local government because the consequences of initiatives are not predictable.

Fred Silva, Senior Advisor for Governmental Relations at the Public Policy Institute of California, reviewed the history of State and Local Fiscal Relations in California. From 1849 to 1910 the state controlled all local revenue. The Progressive movement in 1910-11 reacted to heavy private business influences by passing a set of reforms including the Initiative, Referendum and Recall processes, and separation of sources of revenue, creating state and local tax sources and control. A second revolt occurred in 1978 with the passage of Prop. 13. This caused control of local finances to return to the state.

Silva reiterated that state and local finances are interdependent. About 30% of all state revenues pay for state functions, of which 22% goes to higher education and 30% funds prisons. Local governments get 70% of the revenue of which 43% goes to schools and 41% goes to counties to pay for state mandated services. Since 1978 cities have slipped from having control of 70% of their own funding to about 30%, while counties which had control over about 50% of their funds now have

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discretion over only about 15%. The counties have very little ability to increase revenues due to the two-thirds vote requirement of Prop. 218.

After lunch two experts debated the Effects of Prop. 13 on the state. Taking the Con position was former LA County Supervisor and LA City Councilman Ed Edelman and arguing in favor of the measure was Joel Fox, formerly president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers.

Ed Edelman argued that Proposition 13 caused a loss of Home Rule for cities and counties and a lack of local accountability. It "caused abdication of responsible representative government in California." Edelman agreed that in the 1970s there had been a need for a "change in assessment practices, especially in LA County, so that people with little income would not be devastated by escalating property taxes." But he emphasized that relief was needed for homeowners but not for commercial property because commercial property generates income with which to pay its taxes. He reminded the group that a competing measure which failed, Prop. 8, would have created a split roll (treating homes and commercial property differently) and would have provided less financial relief. Prop. 13 passed with 64% of the vote, but it required a two-thirds vote to amend it and to pass future tax measures.

Mr. Edelman also opined that the Initiative Process in California needs to be reformed. He suggested the Indirect Initiative, which the League also supports, to prod the Legislature into acting before collecting signatures to place a measure on the ballot. He said that Prop. 13 has caused a "what's good for me or my little interest group" attitude instead of what's good for the whole society. This he called "out-of-hand democracy."

In supporting Prop.13 **Joel Fox** asserted that Californians were better off because Prop. 13 set limits on the power of government to tax and created stability for neighborhoods and taxpayers. He posited that people are better off now than before 1978 because there is predictability of an individual's taxes

over the long term and that important limits were placed on government.

Fox stated that Jarvis did not create a Split Roll for homes and business in the original Prop. 13 because he wanted to keep the measure very simple. According to Fox, the Chamber of Commerce loves Prop. 13 because it provides for tax certainty which helps to attract business to and within California.

Fox acknowledged that a big issue for government is stable and predictable revenue. But, he reiterated that taxpayers want certainty also.

In the debate Edelman brought up the ballot initiative promoted by the California Teachers' Assn. which creates a Split Tax Roll with specific requirements for reassessing commercial property. the proceeds of the increased tax revenue would be earmarked for teacher salaries and other school expenses. Edelman stated that he was opposed to earmarking the proceeds from a split roll.

Fox brought up the Herzberg "Triple Flip" tax shift proposal which would return some property taxes to local government in exchange for some of the local sales tax. This, he said, would encourage local areas to build housing.

Edelman proposed that if Schwarzenegger does away with the VLF, amounting to \$4 million in local government funds, then he should give local governments the power to raise revenue to make up for the loss of VLF money. Fox countered that Schwarzenegger is proposing a \$20 million bond to cover both the VLF and the past and current years' deficits. The legislature proposed a bond to cover the debt but the public should vote on approving the bond. He also stated that "Arnold plans to come forward with a broad plan to reform the structure of finance" in California. The \$20 million bond is to get "over the hump."

Margo Reeg, ,LWVLAC Voter Service Chair

County Budgets/County Services



Often overlooked when considering state budget issues are local governments and the funding for services they provide. Among their chief activities, counties furnish programs mandated by the state. The county is often seen as the provider of last resort—many of its programs serve the least able in our society. Important programs administered by counties are the court system including the District Attorney, probation department, juvenile hall, and sheriff; the provision of health care including county hospitals and Medi-Cal; and social service agencies including General Assistance, children’s services, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), foster care, etc. These account for the largest share of any county budget; however, the county also provides a public works agency, registrar of voters, auditor, and more.

Relying almost exclusively on a portion of the property tax as allocated by the state Legislature, counties have very few other ways to augment their income. About ten years ago, the legislature began shifting some property tax revenues from cities, counties, and special districts to schools as a way to meet the minimum allocation from the state’s general fund for K-12 funding. The loss from this shift in funding grows as the property tax grows and local governments fail to receive that income. The annual shift is nearing \$5 billion, and the total shift from counties to schools approaches \$30 billion, according to the California State Association of Counties (CSAC).

This year’s budget issue of highest concern for counties relates to the rollback of an important county funding source—the Vehicle License Fee (VLF). Reducing the fee without adequate backfill will create additional hardship for county programs. Although the Governor has made strong statements indi-

cating support for local governments, he has left it up to the legislature to find the financing to back up such statements. Now that the VLF rate has been reduced, a substitute source of revenue must be found that will not decimate county programs.

Counties are seeking state funding for reimbursable mandates, coverage of the costs of the special recall election, additional mandated child support costs, and other program costs. How the legislature chooses to fund counties for these expenditures is of grave importance to all county programs and those served.

Labor costs, the growing expenses of health care coverage and workers compensation expenses create major and ongoing budget pressures for counties. The caseload growth of In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and increased health and safety costs for homeland security add to monetary pressures. When the state or federal government cuts health and social service programs, it usually means additional costs to counties.

As the program arm of the state for many mandated programs, but with little control over revenue sources and many of their own expenditures, counties find themselves in a difficult position. The quality of life for the poor and near poor is often totally dependent on county services. It is important that this arm of the state government has a dedicated source of funding for the programs important to California citizens. A state budget process that provides funding for local government services may require some structural changes.



LWVLAC SPEAKER TRAINING

Saturday, January 31st
9:30 am: Pick up Pros & Cons, Coffee
10:00—12:00: Speaker Training for
Pros & Cons and Advocacy

Hollenbeck House
573 South Boyle Avenue
Los Angeles 90033
(I-5 Exit is Fourth Street,
to Boyle Avenue)



LWVLA SPEAKER TRAINING

Wednesday, January 28th
6:15 pm: Speaker Training for Pros &
Cons and Advocacy

LWVLA Office
3250 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1005
Los Angeles 90010



January 2004

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

Joanne Leavitt, President
Chris Carson, Editor
carsonlww@earthlink.net

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

Calendar

January 13—LWVLAC
Board Meeting

January 22—Working Party
for Children Meeting, LA
League Office, 10:00 AM

January 31—Speakers' Train-
ing, Hollenbeck House, Los
Angeles

January 31—First call to
County Convention

February 10—LWVLAC
Board Meeting

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