

May 2003

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!

Another League year is beginning as we have had or are planning our annual meetings. At our last County Board meeting we welcomed newly elected members Betty Denitz who will cover education issues and Daphne Lake who will cover housing and related issues. We also appointed Lola Ungar who will deal with land use and sustainability.

At the May meeting we will reappoint Sheila Hoff who is doing a wonderful job keeping us aware of health care issues and long time Observer at the Hall of Administration, Carol Slavin. Carol has been doing this for some time and has made wonderful connections. There is a real opportunity for someone to help her, learn from her and take advantage of the knowledge she has gained over these years.

Last month I spoke for League at the Board of Supervisors urging their support for SB 921 and SB 2, the health care bills we are supporting in the state legislature. Also speaking, but not for League, were members Sheila Hoff and Doris Nelson. We didn't get the 5/0 vote we wanted, but it passed 3/2 and Supervisor Molina

went to Sacramento to testify in favor of SB 921, which has now passed its first two committees.

While waiting our turn to speak, CAO Janssen gave a power point presentation on the county budget. I went down to the information office to see if they had a printout of the slides and instead came away with the full four volume budget. Talk about more than you ever wanted to know! One book I found especially interesting, the Children and Families Budget. This is department by department a break out of what is spent on children and families, where the money comes from, how much is just a pass through of state and federal funds and how these funds are spent. I wish our cities would do something similar.

Another interesting activity League is involved in is the planning for the implementation of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Marion Taylor, State Government Director, is serving on the Statewide HAVA Commission and I am part of a local ad hoc group called the Voter Empowerment Circle that is providing input. I have found this to be both worthwhile and informative as I have always been more involved in pro-

President's Message (Continued)

gram and action than in voters service. There is always something new to learn.

The next learning experience is State Convention coming soon. I will report back on that next month.

Joanne Leavitt
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HEALTH CARE

Universal health care coverage is coming at us from all directions. Several bills have been proposed in Sacramento, the insurance industry is also expressing interest to be sure they aren't left out, and at the federal level one presidential candidate is discussing a major proposal. But only SB921 (Kuehl), the Health Care For All Californians Act, is completely consistent with League position. The bill's first hearing was on April 30 in the Senate Insurance Committee, and this will be followed up by a hearing in the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee. (The League of Women Voters of California is supporting this bill, along with SB2 (Burton) which expands coverage for more people through employment based coverage.)

SB921 creates a publicly financed system of universal health benefits for every resident in California, along with a comprehensive benefit package that is either superior or comparable to current market provided benefit packages. It contains costs through administrative savings, bulk purchasing, global budgets and accountability built into the system. It will also reduce the heavy dependence on the expensive emergency room care of last resort. All these savings will allow a much higher utilization rate that is now seen in the medical system without spending new money.

SB 921 was supported by the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors 3-2, with Antonovich and Knabe

voting against it. LWVLAC President Joanne Leavitt testified in support. Supervisor Molina went to Sacramento to support SB921 at the Senate Insurance Committee hearing.

Sheila Hoff
LWVLAC Healthcare Director

NATURAL RESOURCES

ENACT TOURS TWO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN SANTA MONICA— Part I

Sixteen Tour members joined the LWV Southcoast Environmental Action Committee (ENACT). The group including representatives of four Southcoast counties visited two facilities illustrating progress toward "Sustainable Development" in the largely built out city of Santa Monica.

The first, the Colorado Court low income housing project sets an ambitious new standard for energy and resource efficient affordable housing. An urban infill development, Colorado Court is located in a prominent location at 5th and Colorado in downtown Santa Monica, close to shops, jobs, civic buildings, and public transit lines. The 29,900 square foot building includes 44 studio apartments of approximately 375 s. ft. each, with its own bathroom and kitchen. A community room, mailroom, outdoors courtyard spaces, bicycle storage, laundry room, and on-grade covered parking for 20 cars are included in the complex. Storm water runoff from the site goes to a dry well and is filtered back into the groundwater.

Colorado Court is 100% energy independent. It is designed to produce as much energy as it uses, with a natural gas powered turbine/heat recovery system and photovoltaic panels. The cogeneration system converts natural gas to electricity to meet the base load needs of the building and captures waste heat to produce hot water for the building through out the year as well as space heating in the winter.

The impetus to make the project a showcase of green technologies and design came from the city's involvement with the Regional Energy Efficiency Initiative (REEI), a program that supports municipal energy efficiency demonstration projects. The City of Santa Monica Environmental Programs division worked in cooperation with the City Housing division, the Community Corporation of Santa Monica and the project architects to identify and implement the green features.

The combined cost of all of the Project's special energy measures is approximately \$500,000. This added cost is being covered roughly half and half by the City of Santa Monica and the REEI. The REEI is a joint program of the Southern California Edison, the California Energy Coalition and the cities of Irvine and Santa Monica. It uses public good surcharges from utility bills to fund energy efficiency demonstration projects in those two cities.

Because REEI funds energy efficiency features only, Santa Monica covered the cost of the energy generation systems (the photovoltaic panels and gas turbine generator). The Community Corporation of Santa Monica expects to receive a by down of almost \$65,000 from the California Energy Commission for the photovoltaic system, which cost \$220,000. In addition, Southern California Gas Company is providing a \$17,800 rebate.

Joanne Leavitt, Santa Monica activist and LWV-LA County President, who arranged the Tour, informed us that Santa Monica now has a total of 100 buildings owned by the city and used for low income residents, some with 6-8 units and others with 40 to 50. An average of 4,000 applications are received and processed annually in January to fill 150 vacancies. Rent range from \$350 to \$370 a month and annual incomes of residents average \$17,000.

The Tour was conducted by Robin Raida, Project Manager (310) 394-8487 Ext. 118.

*Mary Johnson,
ENACT Representative*

HOLD THE SALT, PLEASE

During rain storms, people often complain about all of the water, especially when it floods streets, houses, and buildings. During drought times, we get anxious about water and try to conserve it as much as possible. During normal times, we tend not to think about water but take for granted that it will flow from the tap or hose on demand. As population continues to grow, and with it the demand for water, we will likely find that our mind-set about water is more like times of drought than about times of plenty. This drought mentality is often reinforced, even in humid environments, by the fact that many people find that the water available to them is unhealthy. The OECD estimates that approximately 1 billion people around the globe only have access to water that is unhealthy for human consumption. Thus as we shift into this drought mind-set we will see a drive emerge to find "new" water, and high quality water, to cover increased demand from high population levels.

However, in many places in the world, such as the arid western U. S., there is no new surface or ground water to be had. Most of what is available has been appropriated and efforts to develop possible new resources run into environmental concerns like open space preservation and endangered species legislation. As a result, people are more and more turning to the vast resources of the ocean and to desalination as a source for new water. At first glance, desalting ocean water seems an ideal solution given the vastness of the resource. As usual, closer inspection highlights many problems along with the many opportunities.

Western Water (published by the Water Education Foundation-www.watereducation.org) recently did a survey of desalination projects in California along with an assessment of desalination as a source of water. The preferred technique for desalting water now is reverse osmosis. This involves forcing salt water through membranes, which allow the water molecules to pass through but prevents the salt molecules from accompanying them. The hitch is that it takes a great deal of energy to develop the pressure necessary to force

the water through the membrane. Thus, the cost of the process at present is quite high. The cost of imported water in southern California is probably around \$400 to \$500 dollars an acre-foot (about 236,000 gallons). The estimates for an acre-foot of desalinated water vary from \$800 to \$1200 for an acre-foot.

There are other factors that need to be taken into account when considering desalinating ocean water. Any process in which you remove something from water leaves you with a residue that must be disposed of in some way. Desalination results in a brine residue and the current approach is to return that brine to the ocean. This is a reasonable solution if the amount of brine is not large. What we do not know is the effect of a large number of desalting operations on the ocean ecology of Southern California.

Beyond the brine residue, we also need to recognize that these facilities are plants with a footprint that will not likely be benign. Thus space on or near beaches will be given over to the desalting operations and will have an impact on people who live near the breaches or who recreate at them. Another concern raised by some focuses on the possibility that the availability of desalinated water will fuel additional population growth in Southern California. If desalinated water were used to fuel residential growth, we would be faced with additional levels of smog and auto congestion and the loss of more open space.

Despite these concerns, the march to the development of desalinated water is underway. California currently has 11 desalination plants and 23 plants are currently being planned. Saudi Arabia has 33 plants in operation and Tampa, Florida is developing a large facility at present.

As the efforts to develop desalinated water proceed, we should all continue to focus on our patterns of water consumption and consider ways in which we can reduce the amount of water running from our taps, hoses, and showerheads. We all should also focus on our gardens and consider

ways that we can reduce flows into, and out of, our outdoor areas.

John D. Sullivan
LWVLAC Natural Resources Director

COUNTY GOVERNEMENT STUDY

Los Angeles County currently stretches from the Pacific Ocean in the south [Palo Verde, Los Angeles, and Long Beach] to Kern County in the north [north of Lancaster]. It includes San Clemente and Santa Catalina Islands, and its mainland reaches from the Pacific Ocean [Malibu, Westlake Village] to San Bernardino County in the east [Pomona, Claremont]. Of its 4,084 square miles, about 65 per cent is unincorporated; the rest is divided among 88 cities and towns. The northern portion is more sparsely populated than is the southern, but there are still many unincorporated areas in the southern part of the county.

Shortly after the county was created in 1850, it was enlarged to 34,520 square miles, stretching to the Colorado River, and also including what is now Orange County. Orange County became independent in 1889 and after 40 years Los Angeles County was down to its present size, still larger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined.

In 1900, the Los Angeles County population was 170,298. The county's web site lists the July 2002 population as 9,902,700, over a million of them living in unincorporated areas. Thus, in 1900, each of the five supervisors represented 34,059; by 2002, that number was 1,980,540 or almost 2 million. Currently, Gloria Molina represents the 1st District; Yvonne Burke, the 2nd District; Zev Yaroslavsky, the 3rd District; Don Knabe, the 4th District; and Mike Antonovich, the 5th District.

County responsibilities include the Assessor's, the District Attorney's, and the Sheriff's offices; Child Support Services; Health and Mental Health Services; Museums of Art and Natural History; the Public Library; Parks and Recreation; Regional

Planning; Tax Collection; and more. There is an Ombudsman to help residents deal with this bureaucracy.

Los Angeles County has 93,439 budgeted employees, making it the largest employer in the five-county Southern California region. The 2002-2003 budget was \$16.3 billion. The proposed budget for 2003-04 is \$16.4 billion. Given the county's continuing growth and the fiscal crisis in the state and the nation, the county budget will require reductions in many county programs.

Sixteen health clinics are already closed; Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center and the High Desert Hospital are scheduled to close soon. Health, Children and Family Services, the Sheriff, the Library, Parks and Recreation, and other county departments face severe shortfalls, partly due to the county's heavy dependence on the state for funding. Further cuts in the state budget will mean additional cuts in the county and significant changes for this county and its large, diverse population.

John Sullivan & Sally Seven,
LWVLAC Directors

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

The Free Air Time Campaign, led by a coalition of 60 civic groups, is working to build support for the McCain-Feingold-Durbin Broadcast Bill, introduced in the U.S. Senate last October. This bill will open up the public's airwaves by requiring television broadcasters to provide free air time to all qualified candidates, not just those who can afford to pay exorbitant rates for political advertising. We expect the Senate Commerce Committee to hold hearings on this important legislation later this year. In the meantime we need your help!

Here's what you can do right now to help make free air time a reality!

* Forward this email to your friends and relatives and ask them to sign up to receive email action alerts and updates at the campaign website www.freeairtime.org.

* Go to the Take Action section of our website - www.freeairtime.org/takeaction - and send a free email or fax to your Senators asking them to sponsor the McCain-Feingold-Durbin Broadcast Bill. Or better yet, call your Senators' offices!

Your involvement in this campaign is crucial to our chances for success. We'll keep you up-to-date on developments with occasional emails. And you can also check the website to find out the latest!

Marilee Scaaf has been honored as one of the YWCA 2003 Women of the Year. Congratulations from all League members.

Tracking the flood of election reform activity around the country since the passage of the historic Help America Vote Act (HAVA) has been a difficult task – until now.

electionline.org today launched “HAVA Information Central,” a comprehensive resource offering a one-stop site for the latest information on legislation and working drafts of state election reform plans. The document is available at electionline.org in both [Adobe PDF](#) and [Microsoft Word](#) formats.

Information Central tracks the status of the nearly 100 HAVA compliance bills now under debate in state capitals. It links to drafts of every available state plan on election reform. In the coming months, HAVA Information Central will expand to offer detailed summaries and analyses of state plans to comply with the sweeping, \$3.8 billion federal bill.

May 2003

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

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

Calendar

May 13—L.A. County Board Meeting, LA League Office

May 16-19—LWVC Convention, Oakland

May 29—WPC Meeting, LA League Office

June 10—LWVLAC Board Meeting, LA League Office

July 26—Popovers in Pasadena, Women's City Club

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