

November
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!

League work seems to go in cycles. One election is over and we start preparing for the next one. At least two League supported ballot measures will be on the March ballot; Prop 55 is the statewide school bond measure and Prop 56 is the Budget Accountability Act which we collected signatures for. We will have speakers training for both at the same time as the Pros and Cons training at our January 31 League Day. More details will follow but please save the date.

This is also the program planning season. In the next week or so you will receive Program Planning information as a first step in planning our County Convention for next spring. Start thinking about where you would like to see the County Board focus their energies over the next two years. Do you want another study? If so on what topic? Do you want the focus to be on just education and advocacy? Again, in what area?

This is also the time of year that we have consensus meetings on current studies. Some of you may have already had meetings about the County Government study. but if you have not and have any questions, please

contact Katherine Dunlap or any member of the study committee. We are here to help in any way we can.

This is also the season we start thinking about the nominating committee and who will serve on the next board. If you have suggestions or would like to serve please contact Jean Cohen. She will be happy to hear from you!

In this time of unsettled climate, both real and political, it is nice to have a pattern of activities that we can rely on to happen every year or every two years. If only the weather was half so dependable! Heat, wind, fire followed by cold (by California standards), rain and snow with a few small earthquakes thrown in that were hardly noticed. I saw a cartoon this week of a man standing before St. Peter outside the Pearly Gates. St. Peter was saying "Sorry, because of your sins, you'll have to spend the rest of eternity in California." I could think of worse fates!

This will be our last Newsletter until 2004. Enjoy the Holiday Season and make time for friends and family. As you gather in the warmth of your home, remember those who have no home, either because of the recent fires or for other reasons. Share the

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joys of the season in whatever way fits your traditions and come back refreshed and ready for another calendar year of making a difference the League way.

Happy Holidays!

Joanne Leavitt
ac997@lafn.org

NATURAL RESOURCES

CLEAN AIR: LWVUS has identified clean air and the maintenance of the Clean Air Act as a second tier priority for action. A "Clean Air Grassroots Advocacy Kit" was sent to each local League president. You should contact your League president to review the Kit and to plan strategies for action. Alternatively, you can find additional information about clean air and the Clean Air Act at <http://interactive.lwv.org/Issues/IssuesList.cfm?c=75>. You can also find information about different strategies for action at <http://interactive.lwv.org/Issues/Issues.cfm?ID=673&c=75>.

The Bush administration's "Clean Skies" proposal would weaken the Clean Air Act substantially and it is important that we all take action and write letters or phone our congressperson and our two California senators. You can use LWVUS's "Legislative Action Center" found at the second URL above. You can also use the LWVUS site to alert family and friends about the urgency of this issue and encourage them to write letters also. If your local League president did not get the LWVUS Kit, please email me at john_sullivan@pitzer.edu and I will forward a copy to you.

WATER: In recent Newsletter articles, we have surveyed some of the issues involving water in Southern California. It is important to note that the transfer of water from the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) to San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) has been approved by the four districts involved. In addition to IID and SDCWA, the

agreement was signed by Metropolitan Water District (MWD) and Coachella Water District. The agreement includes a provision for the purchase by MWD of additional water from IID. Part of the proceeds of such sales will be used for the restoration of the Salton Sea.

One is tempted to conclude that peace has finally come to the Colorado River and that the water wars are over. Current projections of population growth in Southern California suggest, however, that we need to be cautious here. There will be continued pressure on water resources in this state and it is likely that there will be more water wars in the future. In the next issue of the Newsletter, we will take a look at the San Francisco Bay Delta and its importance to Southern California.

FIRES: We have all watched with horror the enormous destruction caused by the fires that began around November 23. Different approaches to land use planning that emphasized density and redevelopment in urban core areas might have resulted in much less suburban sprawl and fewer homes built in areas prone to fire and flood. Steve Lopez has a very interesting article in the Los Angeles Times (Oct. 28, 2003) in which he develops this argument at some length. Perhaps these fires will serve as a wake-up call to policy makers that we need to rethink our development strategies. You can find Lopez' article at <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-lopez28oct28,1,4352963.column?coll=la-headlines-california>

John D. Sullivan, LWVC Natural Resources

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The Working Party for Children is on Hiatus until the Legislature reconvenes in
January 2004.



California VOTER

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF CALIFORNIA

Action and Membership

October 2003

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

During the campaign for the recall election, a gubernatorial candidate publicly complained that the League of Women Voters excluded him from its debates. Many of you e-mailed me to express your concerns. Although I tried to respond individually to each of you, I realize that there must be others who question the League's stance.

For the recall election we had 135 certified candidates on the ballot—candidates from all seven political parties recognized by the Secretary of State, and dozens of candidates with no party affiliation. To be fair to all the candidates, the criteria for the debates had to be objective and to ensure that televised forums did not include 135 candidates.

Whenever there are multiple candidates for an elected office, it is necessary to set some quantifiable and impartial criteria for deciding who will be included in a forum. For state-wide contests, the League usually uses a percentage of support indicated in one or more respected polls with a cutoff date as close to the event as is technically possible.

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ACTION REPORT

Budget Accountability Act: Thank you to all the League members who gathered signatures for this proposed initiative to change the vote requirement for adopting a state budget from 2/3 to 55%. A remarkable twenty percent of the 1.4 million signatures were gathered by volunteers. We will soon know if the measure qualifies for the March 2004 ballot.

Community College System: LWVC sent a letter in support of open access to the Community College Board of Governors' special session on access on September 9. LWVC also wrote asking the Assembly Committee on Higher Education to support sufficient resources for the colleges to fulfill their overall mission and ensure access for all Californians to a quality higher education.

Health Care: LWVC supports both SB 2 (Burton) and SB 921 (Kuehl). We were active during the final steps toward passage as changes were made to SB 2, a bill that requires employers to provide health benefits. We also took part in talks about the universal health care bill SB 921, a two-year bill that will continue to be debated in 2004.

Water: LWVC wrote to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Water and Power for changes to H.R. 2828. The changes would affect the CALFED Bay-Delta Program whose purpose is to restore the ecological health of Central Valley Rivers and the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary.

Marion Taylor
Legislation Director

STATE WATER PLAN

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) will soon begin to publish its required five-year update to the California Water Plan. Polly Smith, LWVC Off-board Program Director for Water and Agriculture, and Jack Sullivan, LWVC Natural Resources Director, have contributed to the update as members of the Water Plan Advisory Committee (AC).

The AC consists of about seventy members including representatives of agriculture, urban water districts, businesses, environmentalists, Native Americans, and environmental justice advocates. Since January of 2001, the AC has met about twenty-five times. In addition, hundreds of workgroup and caucus meetings have fed into the main AC.

Smith and Sullivan have attended almost all of the AC meetings plus many of the workgroup meetings. Both Smith and Sullivan participate in the Environmental Caucus, which feeds into the ecology and environmental parts of the plan. In addition, Smith and Sullivan have submitted written comments on various draft chapters that DWR staff has produced, and Sullivan has co-authored a short paper submitted to the DWR on environmental justice and water.

DWR will issue a public comment draft of the first of four volumes by December 31, 2003. After public comment, the volume will be edited to reflect the nature of the comments. Smith and Sullivan will likely be involved in that rewrite and in the development of the remaining three volumes.

Jack Sullivan
Natural Resources Director, LWVC

ISSUES FOR EMPHASIS: A STATUS REPORT

Other than action, here is what is happening with LWVC's five Issues for Emphasis.

State And Local Finances: Education consists of suggestions for local programs and camera-ready material for use in local VOTERS. The material is distributed in UPDATES.

Health Care: To facilitate statewide communication, a health care listserv will be set up in October. The Ad Hoc Committee plans to send its proposal for education and action to the Board for consideration in November. Information on the plan should be available in November UPDATE.

Education Update: The Board has approved the scope of the study, and the eight-member committee has started the study process.

Community College System: The Board has approved the Ad Hoc Planning Committee's interim plans. The committee plans to establish a listserv to facilitate statewide communication and to send a proposal for education and action to the Board in November.

Energy Update: The Ad Hoc Planning Committee is working on a plan to recommend to the Board.

Marion Taylor, Legislation Director

EF REACHES OUT— To Venezuela

Mony Flores-Bauer of the League of Women Voters of Oakland recently represented the League of Women Voters in a one-hour video interview on California's recall election. The Venezuelan government requested the interview because of the growing tension around Venezuela's democratically elected President Hugo Chavez and a referendum process that is underway.

When, for the interview, the U.S. State Department needed a Spanish-speaking expert to discuss how to educate and involve voters, the Department—naturally—thought of the League. Chon Gutierrez, Deputy Secretary of State for Operations in Sacramento, provided legal and constitutional expertise.

In her opening statement, Flores-Bauer gave an overview of the League's history and mission. Following the opening statements, an audience of 40 to 50 representatives from Venezuela's Congress and their 17 political parties, journalists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) asked wide-ranging questions. Representatives from women's NGOs were particularly interested in whether women were intimidated from voting and how the League helps with civic empowerment.

In the course of the interview, Flores-Bauer referred to the *Easy Voter Guide, Voting is Easy as 1-2-3*, our "Running and Winning" curriculum, and the LWVUS publication *Guide to the Presidential Election* to illustrate the range of previous and current voters service projects.

Flores-Bauer said, "I sensed an interest and appreciation for the role of the League in the U.S. [In Venezuela] they have NGOs, but not with the same history and unique ability to cross into political and government sectors as a respected voter education source." She felt it was especially important that we were able to present a Spanish-speaking voice from the civic participation arena in California and that we were able to demonstrate how, despite all the hoopla of this special election, the work and impact of the League goes on year-round.

Many thanks to Mony Flores-Bauer for taking League's mission to Venezuela!

Robbie Davis

Education Fund Chair

ONE WORLD Countless Challenges Unlimited Solutions



The LWVC is proud to be one of 25 Tech Museum Laureates for 2003. Specifically honored for its election Web site **smartvoter.org**, the League is one of five Laureates in

the area of Equality.

The Tech Awards were inspired in part by the American Council/United Nations University's State of the Future report, and the United Nations is a partner in the award process.

Inaugurated in 2001, The Tech Museum Awards honor those who use technology to address challenges facing humanity in the areas of Education, Equality, Environment, Economic Development and Health.

For 2003, an international panel of judges selected 25 Laureates from over 500 nominations from 70 countries. Five winners, one Laureate from each of the five categories, will share \$250,000.

The final winners will be announced on October 15 in San Jose at a gala dinner presented by Applied Materials, Inc.

Trudell Een

Project Director

Smart Voter and Guide to Government

Continued from page 1

For this election the percentage was set significantly lower than usual to take into account the more widely divided support among the large list. The rules for each forum were set up in collaboration with the other partners in the events, and the candidates received letters in advance advising them of the criteria for inclusion. Once the criteria have been agreed upon and sent to all the candidates, it is unfair to the other candidates to change the rules because we would like to see a particular candidate or candidates included.

League members take pride in our long and respected history as a nonpartisan voter education organization. We do not arbitrarily include or exclude any candidate based on party affiliation or lack thereof. We are committed to educating voters as fully as possible about candidates. Every candidate was invited to post information on our Smart Voter Web site, and the short list of candidates listed in the supplementary material for the *Easy Voter Guide*, in which the League is a partner, included the candidate who was dissatisfied with our policy.

This was an historic special election. In it the League members worked hard to continue the mission we started more than 80 years ago – strengthening democracy by acting as an unbiased resource that both candidates and voters can rely on.

Jacqueline Jacobberger

President

The League of Women Voters of California

California VOTER

October 2003

President: Jacqueline Jacobberger

Editor: Lynda Hungerford

About the League:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The League has two separate and distinct roles. The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, which conducts our voters service and citizen education activities, is a 501(c)(3) corporation, a nonprofit educational organization. The League of Women Voters of California, a membership organization, conducts action and advocacy and is a nonprofit 501(c)(4) corporation.

The League never supports or opposes any political party or candidate. We advocate only on issues that members have studied and come to a consensus on. In an era of proliferating and powerful special interests, the League's advocacy in the public interest is increasingly recognized as an essential voice of democracy.

League invites your comments, letters, articles, and book reviews. They may be sent to the State Office or emailed to Lynda Hungerford, Communications Director, via our Web site.

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Tax Shift Funds State Debt



The irresistible force of California's budget crisis met the immovable object of partisan political differences in Sacramento this summer. One result of the wreckage is an unusual \$10.7 billion debt financing scheme in the 2003-2004 state budget. It has features that have been advocated for both fiscal and land use reform; the state will market bonds it says are not really bonds; and the maneuver has already been challenged in court.

Democratic legislators' distaste for program cuts ran up against their Republican counterparts' refusal to accept tax increases until an increasingly frustrated and angry Legislature agreed that the state would issue \$10.7 billion in deficit retirement bonds. The bonds would be repaid by a three-way shift of existing taxes that some call the "triple flip," and others have called a "shell game."

The state would market the bonds to investors and deposit the money in the General Fund. Wall Street, which would be providing the financing, wanted a reliable source of dedicated funds for repayment. So to repay the bondholders, 1/2 cent of the sales tax now going to local governments would be redefined as a "new" state tax. An equal amount of property tax money would shift from K-14 schools to cities and counties, and finally state General Fund money would shift to reimburse schools.

State law requires bond measures to be approved by the voters and to be used only for a "single object or work," such as a dam or a building. Some state attorneys have concluded that paying off debts for multiple purposes with bonds might not pass judicial scrutiny. The Pacific Legal Foundation has in fact filed a suit challenging this move, and was encouraged by a recent ruling against a \$2 billion bond issue the state hopes to sell to cover state pension funds.

Ordinary bond borrowing is repaid through a continuing appropriation which is not reapproved by the Legislature each year. This measure will need an annual legislative okay, which future Legislatures are expected to give because otherwise the consequences to the state's credit rating would be unacceptable.

A lot of fingers are being crossed in Sacramento about how this will work, because of the novelty and complexity of the legal questions. Even if this Legislature is prepared to stick to the deal, it cannot be guaranteed that future Legislatures will do so. Local government representatives, such as the League of California Cities, are understandably nervous that the promised pea may not continue to be there when they pick up their shell. The two parts of the shift designed to keep local government and school revenues constant are not dedicated funds, and local government has no protection like Proposition 98.

This bond money only covers the funding gap in this year's budget. If the two parties have no better luck next year in agreeing on further spending cuts or new revenues, there will be another very big budget gap next year, and it is unlikely that the state will be able to continue borrowing at the necessary level to fill the gap.

The idea of swapping local sales tax money for property tax money has been a regular feature of various calls for reform. Local property tax money is a more stable source of funding, and tends to increase more over time, than sales tax funds. Moving away from dependence on sales taxes has also been advocated as a departure from the "fiscalization of land use" in which local jurisdictions compete for those projects expected to bring in the most sales tax dollars, whether they make land use sense or not. Some insiders believe this piece of the tax swap might stay in place after the bond holders have been repaid.

Any Governor and future legislators will still have to face the same hard fiscal and political facts that brought us to this strange exercise in budget management and will have to deal with a voting public that apparently believes it can have government services without the inconvenience of paying for them.

November 2003

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

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

Calendar

December 9—LWVLAC
Board Meeting

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

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