



April 2005

The Sacramento Voter

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SAVE THE DATE

The Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Sacramento County occurs 6PM Thursday, May 26 at Casa Garden Restaurant. An RSVP form in the May *Voter* will also accompany the mid-April *Call to Annual Meeting*.

General Meeting

April 14th 6 to 8 PM

Topic: LWVC's Legislative Agenda,

Featuring speaker Trudy Schaffer, our legislative advocate.

Sacramento Co. Medical Clinic, Community Room

4600 Broadway

SE corner of Broadway & Stockton

Plenty of off street parking

See *The 2005 State League's Legislative Agenda* on page 4 for comprehensive directions.

No unit meetings this month.

President's Column: State of the Community Luncheon Recap

By Suzanne Phinney

The League's annual State of the Community Luncheon has come and gone. This was our twenty-first such event. Almost all of the Sacramento City Council and Board of Supervisors attended. We heard from Mayor Fargo and Supervisor Dickinson about the challenges and successes within the city and the county; they both intertwined our theme (Wanted: A Civil and Informed Political Dialogue) in their remarks.

The League bestowed the Anne Rudin Scholarship on Tamar Foster, a remarkable young woman with League blood - her grandmother is very active in the Santa Barbara League. The prestigious Civic Contribution award was given to Brian Augusta for his efforts in affordable housing, especially his role in the County's new landmark zoning ordinance, and to The Greenhouse, a volunteer after-school program in South Natomas.

The League also recognized two very different but very important groups of women voters. Iraqi women, both candidates and voters, were acknowledged for their civic responsibility in the face of intimidation and escalating violence. Also acknowledged were the 7.5 million more unmarried American women who turned out to vote last year.

Although the sponsorships were fewer this year, almost every table at the Convention Center was full. Each table was challenged with a voting fact display creatively prepared by Hazel Bergtholdt. The Mayor's staff liked them so much that they collected several to display on their desks. The program moved along swiftly and the attendees were pleasantly surprised to have the event adjourn at 1:00 pm.

It took many, many hours of hard work by volunteers both from within and outside the League to put on the Luncheon. Special thanks go to Kathy Souza, the luncheon chair, for a superb job of handling the myriad details, and remaining calm, cool, and collected despite last-minute changes. Melinda Avey developed all the written materials (the invitations, program, and table signs). Carol Moon Goldberg tallied reservations and created detailed lists that greatly helped volunteers check in guests. Mignon Marks, a new member, enthusiastically coordinated the many volunteers; we especially thank these unsung Leaguers. You know who you are! Cathy Geppert oversaw the Anne Rudin Scholarship Committee and Trudy Schaffer led the Civic Contribution Award Committee. Michele McCormick provided PR and created a great-looking League Report Card, based on material submitted by Hazel.

The Steering Committee was led by Suzanne Phinney and it's members included Steve Goldberg (Downey Brand), Jennifer Ortega (Raleys), Jan Geiger, Jane Thomson (McGeorge), Jillian Schwinn (SureWest), Tina Treis (Perry-Smith), Margaret Teichert (Kleinfelder) and Teri Munger (Hewlett Packard). It was a tough year to request donations; many firms told us that

they were supporting the tsunami victims and would not be able to participate in the League event. All told, the League raised \$20,000, not including \$5,000 from in-kind sponsorships.

The time has come to assess the Sacramento's need for and approach to fund raising. With our recent name change to "League of Women Voters of Sacramento County" and the number of new cities since our luncheon premiered 21 years ago, we want to see how we might branch out to incorporate these cities. In light of this, and the increasing difficulties in finding volunteer leadership for the event, we will be evaluating the luncheon and fund raising in general. We need to determine how much money the League needs to raise each year to fulfill our mission, and what are the best ways to do that. A committee will be formed to recommend next steps. Please let Suzanne Phinney know if you would like to participate. Mayor Fargo has even indicated that she would like to help the League brainstorm. There are exciting possibilities out there!

Report Card: LWV Sacramento

Each attendee at the League's State of the Community Luncheon got the following "report card."

2004 Summary of Voter Service and Education Projects

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.

League voter service and education projects are directed primarily at voter education, but we also are involved in educating people on how to be civically active. Following is a summary of our voter service and education projects during the past year.

Voter Registration

- Contracted with Sacramento County to distribute voter registration cards to locations throughout the county
- Conducted 23 voter registration drives throughout the community, registering over 300 voters

Speaking Engagements

- Demonstrated new voting equipment at locations throughout Sacramento County

- Presented pros and cons of ballot measures at 62 locations, including local community clubs, schools, offices and retirement homes
- Presented information on women and voting to Federal courthouse employees

Candidate Forums

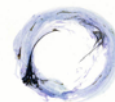
- Conducted 26 televised candidate forums during primary and general elections
- Moderated 10 local candidate forums in locations throughout the county

Other Education Projects

- Provided election information to smartvoter.org website, which publishes information on ballot measures, candidates and the voting process
- Worked with the California Voices Project to learn how to encourage greater civic participation, particularly among those who have been unrepresented in the political process
- Co-hosted Voter Infoline with KCRA on election day
- Distributed ballot measure Pros and Cons publication and Easy Voter Guides to local libraries, schools and community organizations throughout the county

Action Projects

- Presented Regional Transportation/Air Quality Forum
- Participated in the regional Water Forum, a community group whose mission is to provide a safe, reliable water supply while preserving fishery, wildlife, recreation and aesthetic values of the lower American River
- Worked with the American River Task Force to review project proposals that may impact the American River corridor and parkway
- Participated in Sacramento Area Council of Governments workshops to develop "smart growth" transportation plans and policies
- Participated in the Sacramento City/County Transportation/Air Quality Collaborative



With Only a 24.5% Turnout Was the MetroCable Candidates Forum Worth it?

By Hazel Bergtholdt

On March 8th as I was on the way to a League Board meeting, still aching from completing the LA marathon, I passed a sign for a candidate running for a seat in the 5th Congressional District's special election. It made me smile and remember the chaos of 12 candidates negotiating for display space in the front of the County Supervisor's chambers.

But it wasn't until I heard the radio talking about the results in the LA mayoral race that I realized that I had completely forgotten to vote.

Fortunately for me the polls are open until 8:00 pm so I headed to them as soon as our meeting let out. With fifteen minutes left on the clock until the polls closed, I was only the 99th person to vote that day. There was only one other person at the polls after me meaning only 100 of the 1500 in that precinct voted which is much lower than the overall turnout of just under 25%.

So with such low turnout was the candidate's forum worth it? I think so. Thanks to the help of many people it went on without a hitch. Barbara Hopkins was invaluable. She coordinated the whole event with MetroCable, fielded questions from the candidates, and lined up reluctant media questioners. I also need to thank Kathy Souza for moderating and her husband for timing so well that we actually ended early. Rick Bettis was also a big help in sorting out space for each candidate outside of the forum in the foyer.

Every candidate had time to answer questions and give their opening and closing statements. With just about every party represented, it was interesting to hear some views of minority parties that are usually blocked out of races for higher offices.

Never before had I ever seen such great attendance for a MetroCable forum. As a testament to our good work, several of the candidates mentioned to me and others that they wished there were more opportunities to present their ideas like they did at the MetroCable forum.

I don't know about the rest of Sacramento, but, for this voter, the forum was a valuable tool in helping me decide how to vote. Would I do it again? You bet.

Our Democracy, Our Airwaves

By Rick Bettis

Are the public airwaves being used effectively and fairly to inform the public on candidates and issues? The "Alliance for Better Campaigns," a national coalition with more than 70 member organizations, including the League of Women Voters, conducted its "Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Campaign" during the 2004 national election. The Alliance, whose Board includes Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and Walter Cronkite, has as its goal motivating the television media to provide more substantive and balanced coverage of election issues and candidates. As part of this effort, a local ad hoc association of concerned citizens, the "Sacramento Media Group" (SMG), including members of the LWVS, and led by California Common Cause, met with and evaluated the Sacramento television market commercial broadcasters.

The effort included the review of the Public Files for Channels 3/58, 10, 13, 31, and 40. Station Managers and News Directors were interviewed for all the Channels, except Channel 13, which declined citing the proprietary nature of its programming plans. Channel 6 was not included since they do not locally produce regular news programming. Most of the stations also submitted a letter outlining their election news coverage.

Some of the key findings of this effort were:

- None of the Sacramento stations came close to the Alliance recommendation of 2 hours of locally produced balanced election coverage per week during the prime time hours of 5 PM to 11.30 PM for the six weeks prior to the election. The coverage varied between the stations, however it appeared to be generally consistent with national statistics that indicate the typical election coverage to be approximately 2 to 3 minutes or less per 30 minute newscast.
- Station management cited the high cost of locally produced programming, the competitive Sacramento market and the need to be responsive to the interests of their viewers. They felt that the 2-hour goal was not realistic.
- Stations pointed to their web sites as good sources of more in-depth candidate and issues information.
- Stations noted their special segments on ballot measures and candidate interviews, and one made particular reference to their "Truth Test" series on campaign statements. They indicated their commit-

ment to fairness and balance and denied that there was significant corporate influence or control of news content.

- Stations public files were of limited value. There appeared to be relatively few comments that directly related to election coverage. The files did include phone call logs, however electronic messages were not available.
- Stations surveyed received approximately \$12 million in political advertising revenues during the 2004 calendar year. This represents approximately \$8 per registered voter in the Sacramento-Modesto-Stockton television market area. The cost of the “spots” varied widely from \$300 to \$8000 for 30 to 60 times depending on the issue, time of broadcast, programming, and proximity to the election. Data published by the alliance indicates that there was approximately \$1.6 billion spent on political advertising nationally during 2004 which is double the amount spent during the 2000 elections.

Common Cause is publishing a comprehensive report prepared by the SMG. This report will include substantive background information, a more detailed summary of the group's activities and findings, and recommendations for the following:

- Continue monitoring of news broadcasts for adequacy and fairness of coverage of elections and other public affairs.
- Develop a means for both public complaints and compliments to be encouraged and made available through the stations web sites.
- Advocate that Congress and the FCC reinstate the Fairness Doctrine and develop more comprehensive and meaningful public interest guidelines.
- Urge the expansion of the guidelines on what should be included in their public files and that the information be made available on the stations web sites including data on advertisers and ad revenues.
- Encourage public involvement in the upcoming FCC station re-licensing process that will occur in California between now and the end of 2006.

A healthy democracy is dependent upon an informed and involved electorate, and we must work towards furthering one of the LWV primary goals of voter education by advocating for a more in-depth and responsible political coverage by our media.

The 2005 State League's Legislative Agenda

Trudy Schafer, California League of Women Voter's legislative advocate at the state capital, will speak on this year's League's legislative agenda at the Sacramento County Medical Clinic's Community Room on April 14, 6:00-8:00 PM. The Clinic is at 4600 Broadway (southeast corner of Broadway and Stockton).

From the west on Hwy. 50: Exit Stockton Blvd. Turn left onto Stockton. Go 1.3 miles to Broadway. At the well-lit Stockton-Broadway corner turn left. (Before reaching the corner you will see a red “Walgreen's Drugs” sign on your right.)

The Medical Clinic is on the far left (SE) corner enfronted by a large “Sun” design. Go 100 yards. Turn right into the driveway. The well-lit parking structure will be on your left. Turn left and down into it. The Clinic entrance is across from the garage.

In the Clinic walk to the end of the first floor hallway. Elevators are on your left. Exit on the second floor. The Community Room will be straight ahead at the end of the hall.

Directions coming south on City Interstate 80: Exit on J St. Turn left onto J St. Go two blocks to Alhambra turn right. Proceed 6 blocks to Stockton Blvd. Turn left. [Right at this corner takes one onto P Street, which is one-way.] Proceed 1.7 miles to the corner of Stockton and Broadway. Turn left and follow the above directions.

When coming north on Interstate 80, exit on N St. and Turn right. Turn right on Alhambra then go two blocks to a left on Stockton Blvd. Proceed 1.7 miles to Stockton and Broadway. Turn left and follow the above directions into the Clinic.

Stoplight Fails the Test

by Mark Dempsey

Land use and public works decisions have larger implications. An informed public would correct this, but most folks don't know about the alternatives to what “experts” propose. Consider a simple school traffic light: With some encouragement from Casa Robles administrators, Sacramento County proposes spending nearly a half million dollars on a traffic light at the corner of Filbert and Oak Avenues, in front of this High School.

If it just promoted pedestrian safety, such a light might be worth supporting. Unfortunately, the County's design largely ignores what endangers pedestrians.

If it were promoting pedestrian safety, the County would improve the many other inadequate pedestrian amenities near the school--the walkways, for example. The kids may spend 1% of their time crossing Oak Avenue, but the other 99% they're walking beside it and the surrounding streets. While plans exist for a pedestrian trail in the neighborhood, what the kids generally walk on are a) disconnected sidewalks right next to the fast flow of traffic, or b) the dirt or shoulder of the road right next to the fast flow of traffic--both of which are more unsafe than any crossing. Furthermore, Oak Avenue's design speed--the speed its width invites--exceeds the posted speed limit.

What really promotes pedestrian safety are narrow roads and wide sidewalks. If you want to see such pedestrian amenities, take a look at pre-1950 neighborhoods. There, you'll see wide sidewalks set back from narrow streets with an additional barrier between pedestrians and traffic: parallel parked cars. (See <http://home.comcast.net/~dempseys3/mpark/mpindex.html>, if you're interested)

In contrast to something that might actually enhance pedestrian safety (a narrower street, traffic calming measures like an island in the middle of Oak at Filbert, etc.), the proposed traffic light actually *widens* the street, inviting traffic to go *faster*!

Some neighbors tell me they fear this light is the beginning of a general widening of all of Oak Avenue that would culminate in making it a thoroughfare going all the way to Folsom (with a new bridge). That would *really* increase the traffic, and reduce pedestrian safety.

This proposal is no great surprise; Sacramento County regularly proposes such auto-centric improvements. The County's bias is apparent in its development procedures. Any proposed development must pass traffic engineering review before the County will approve it; such proposals *never* have to pass pedestrian engineering review.

Of course design like the proposed light effectively eliminates any alternative to auto transportation. Transit is not viable where pedestrians (potential riders) are so thoroughly discouraged. People too young (or old) to drive are marginalized by such designs. They are told they must be passive passengers; Mom, or paratransit, must be the chauffeur.

Building the walk out of our daily lives also leads to extraordinary health problems: record rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Auto-centric land use is also the root of our need for a resource war once a decade. (U.S. domestic oil production peaked in 1971; imports are essential as long as we must drive everywhere.)

So while it may be just a traffic light, thinking of larger implications while we're acting locally reveals the consequences of such "improvements" may be more than just a little misguided.

Perhaps most frustrating is that subsidizing such expensive, auto-centric improvements, and designing our cities so everyone must own a car (our most regressive "tax") takes revenue that might otherwise go to schools. "California, the eighth richest state, spends 3.8 percent of per capita income on education, making it the 46th in that category," says PBS

In other words, ultimately, if they support such expensive, badly designed improvements, schools are ultimately denying themselves funding.

New Members You Have Not Been Forgotten

At the State of the Community Luncheon I met several new members who were interested in becoming active with the League but just did not know exactly what it was all about and what kind of activities are available for them.

Without a Membership Director for the past couple of years, connecting with new members has been haphazard at best. We apologize for this. We do plan to have a new member orientation meeting this summer in June or July.

Also please don't forget that the 85th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage is this August 26, 2005. We should plan a celebration around that. If you are interested in planning social events during the summer please contact Hazel at the League office 447-VOTE.

Mark Your Calendar for Two State League Events

The Democracy Dinner and the LWV State Convention

A Democracy Dinner and celebration of the LWV's 85th Anniversary is on Friday, April 22nd at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose, CA.

Continued on the next page

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Time Value

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Continued from the previous page.

Ambassador Nancy Soderberg is featured, speaking on “Global Challenges, Global Realities.”

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren is the MC California Senator Joe Simitian will conduct the Silent Auction that offers vacation trips and other gifts from Leagues around the California This annual event fund-raiser for the Ed Fund depends upon your member support. Plan to attend and meet other League members, business and public officials and contributors. Tickets are \$100 per person for League members (\$150 for others). Send the RSVP and the check by April 12 to the LWV-San Jose/Santa Clara, PO Box 5374, San Jose, CA 95150. To carpool to San Jose please email Barbara Hopkins at barbarah@surewest.net.

Sacramento League members are also invited to the State League Convention in the Crowne Plaza Resort Center in Garden Grove, California the weekend of May 20 and 21.

For more, email or call Sacramento League members Carol Moon Goldberg at moonberg@msn.com; Barbara Hopkins at barbarah@surewest.net or Donna Chipps at dwchipps@sbcglobal.net.

Calendar

April

- 14–General Meeting: [The 2005 State League's Legislative Agenda](#)
- 22–Democracy Dinner

May

- * – Energy Update Study Kit/Leader’s Guide mailed to local Leagues
 - 26 – 6PM LWVS Annual Meeting.
 - 20 - 22 - LWVC Convention in Garden Grove
- Thanks to the board and fellow LWV members for their help getting this newsletter out.
- —Mark Dempsey, Editor, Jim Collins, Assistant Editor Ideas? votereditor@lwvsacramento.org.

