

Kern Voter

A PUBLICATION OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF KERN COUNTY

April/May 2009

President's Message

No Spring Break for the League! The Governor called a special election for May 19 to vote on measures that can have a significant impact on the economy and fiscal practices in the state. Leagues across California are busy preparing educational material and presentations to help voters understand the measures so that they can make informed choices.

Californians will consider six measures on the May ballot. They include constitutional amendments pertaining to the budget, education, compensation for state officers, and changes to Propositions 10 (1998) and 63 (2004). Each of these measures can have a significant impact on California's future economy.

With only a month to understand these measures, the Kern County League recognizes the importance of educating voters. Therefore, we will present a **Pros and Cons session on April 21 at 7 pm in room US2 of the UC Merced Building, 2000 K Street.** Watch for your invitation in the mail and the announcement in the local paper.

Here is the list of the proposed propositions:

- Prop 1A: "Rainy Day" Budget Stabilization Fund – Changes the budget process by establishing a savings when revenues are above average.
- Prop 1B: Education Funding. Payment Plan. Requires supplemental payments to local school districts and community colleges.
- Prop 1C: Lottery Modernization Act – Allows the state lottery to modernize the current system, protect school funding, and allocate funds for current budget deficit.
- Prop 1D: Children's Services Funding – Temporarily provides greater flexibility in funding to preserve health and human services for young children.
- Prop 1E: Mental Health Funding. Temporary Reallocation. Amends the Mental Health Service Act – Proposition 63 of 2004 to transfer funds for two years to pay for mental health services for children and young adults.
- Prop 1F: Elected Officials Salaries. No pay increase during budget deficit years.

For more information on the measures and the LWVC recommendations, please scroll down or visit www.smartvoter.org.—Diane Williams

Calendar

April 14—Tuesday, 6:30 pm. LWVKC Board meeting, Merced Center, 2000 K St, Room USC-3.

April 15—Wednesday, 5:45 pm. A representative from the Kern Transportation Foundation will discuss transportation challenges facing Kern County and show the video, *Crisis at the Crossroad* at the monthly general dinner meeting at the Petroleum Club, 5060 California Avenue. Cost is \$22. Reservations required by noon, April 13; call the League Line.*

April 21—Tuesday, 7 pm. LWVKC presents Pros and Cons of propositions on May 19th special election ballot. Room US2 of the UC Merced Building, 2000 K St, Room USC-3.

May 12—Tuesday, 6:30 pm. LWVKC Board meeting, Merced Center, 2000 K St, Room UC-3.

May 15-17—LWVC State Convention at the Long Beach Marriott Hotel, 4700 Airport Plaza Drive. See www.lwvc.org for more information.

May 20—Wednesday, 5:45 pm. **ANNUAL MEETING** at the Petroleum Club. Guest speaker is Lois Henry, *Bakersfield Californian* columnist. Cost for dinner is \$22. Please RSVP to the League Line* by noon, May 18.

Reminder: General meetings are on the third Wednesday of the month. If you need transportation to a meeting, please leave that message on the League Line.

Reservations are required for dinner and luncheon meetings and special events. Please call the League Line, 634-3773, by Monday noon prior to the Wednesday event. No charge for attendance at program only. Thank you.

Californian columnist Lois Henry is annual meeting speaker

Bakersfield *Californian* columnist Lois Henry will be our speaker at the League's Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 20 at the Petroleum Club. Lois has been a member of the *Californian* staff since 1990. Her first assignment was covering eastern Kern County, including Edwards Air Force Base and China Lake Naval Weapons Center. Since that time she has covered just about every beat except sports including social services, city, county and state government from Sacramento.

Lois became an editor in 1997, leading the metro desk which included three assistant editors, fifteen reporters and five freelancers. In 1999, she became the Assistant Managing Editor in charge of all the newspaper's day side content production efforts. Lois began writing her column in August 2007. The column is her unique take on local issues and people.

A product of our neighbor to the north Fresno, Lois graduated with a degree in journalism from Fresno State in 1989. According to her website, she exchanged "one dusty ag town for another" when she moved to Bakersfield to work for the *Californian*. Lois is married and cares for several rescue dogs.

The LWV Kern County is delighted that Lois accepted our invitation to speak at the Annual Meeting. Come prepared with questions about anything that you have seen in her columns or about what's behind the news in Bakersfield.

Election of officers and directors, presentation of the 2009-2010 budget, the president's report and other business are on the Annual Meeting agenda, as well. The meeting begins at 5:45 pm with dinner. Cost of the dinner is \$22. The Petroleum Club is located at 5060 California Avenue. Please make your reservations by noon May 18 and join us for a very special event.—Lynne Rosenstein

Kern Co transportation problems presented in new video

A representative from the Kern Transportation Foundation (KTF) will speak at the April 15 general meeting and present the video, *Crisis at the Crossroads*. This video reviews prevailing inadequacies in Kern County's transportation systems and enumerates the extreme challenges

confronted to meet the needs of the 21st century. *Crisis at the Crossroads* reminds us that not only is our population exploding but also Kern County is geographically situated at a key crossroads location for traffic and the movement of goods in California.

Since Kern County cannot wait for legislative actions to address these transportation predicaments, it is important to be aware of opportunities to assure the solution of local problems. It is KTF's hope that, after seeing and hearing the message, League members will share the urgency by reaching out to appropriate groups and individuals.

This video was produced through contributions from various groups, including our League of Women Voters. Please join us on Wednesday, April 15 at 5:45 p.m. at the Petroleum Club to view and discuss this all-important video and program. Cost of the dinner is \$22. The reservation deadline is noon, April 13. Please call the League Line, 634-3773. There is no charge for attendance at the program only.—Barbara Lovell

Career Technical Education Pathways coming to Kern high schools

Janis Jones and I attended the February Kern High School District Board of Trustees as League observers. The Board discussed many items, but the two of primary interest to the community were the budget issues and a new program, the Career Technical Education Pathways.

The state of California projected a \$41.6 B deficit over the next 18 months. Concerns were that it could go higher. (The state has since passed a budget designed to address this deficit. The huge cuts to education in this budget will negatively impact all school districts.)

The Governor made a proposal which would give school districts greater flexibility in moving categorical funds (those slated for specific programs only) to their general fund. Additionally, no COLA will be provided to staff. In fact, one Board member has suggested that teachers take a 4% cut in salary. Declining enrollment in the district will result in further loss of funds. Additionally, it is important to keep the reserve intact since the money may be needed to fund costs if the state defers the state apportionment. The district intends to fund its health insurance liability for all retirees up to the age of 65 and to adhere to the current employee contracts. The Federal Stimulus Package may bring \$9.9 B to California schools over two years, but it is unclear exactly how that will work.

The Board passed a new program requirement for high school graduation, the Career Technical Education Pathways, in spite of opposition from parents and teachers. The program, scheduled to begin in fall 2009, requires that incoming freshmen select a pathway, either college preparatory or a particular career, and follow that pathway to graduation. Students must take a minimum of three "career" courses over their high school years, which supporters say will lead to employment upon graduation. Most schools have few of these pathways now available, and it appears that some existing courses will simply be re-labeled to fit the career. It is unclear if the course content will change to reflect the career orientation.

Students may get an inter-district transfer if the school to which they are assigned does not have the career pathway of interest to them. However, this carries with it a two year athletic ineligibility. Supporters contend that no new courses will need to be developed in the first year of the program, but most schools are very thin on having career pathway courses. The supporters contend that elective programs, principally, the arts, will not suffer any losses in enrollment. The

career pathway will be become a graduation requirement for the class of 2013. There seems to be very little time to get the information to the feeder schools so that incoming freshmen can understand and prepare for this program.—Terri Stanton

Ballot measures explained; League recommendations

This material is from the Secretary of State's website and is meant to prepare you for the May 19 special election. Please note that this may not be the final wording. There may be court-ordered changes made to the Voter Information Guide before you receive it in the mail. The LWVC recommendations have been added after each proposition. See www.smartvoter.org for updates.

Proposition 1A: "Rainy Day" Budget stabilization Fund. Changes the budget process. Could limit future deficits and spending by increasing the size of the state "rainy day" fund requiring above-average revenues to be deposited into it for use during economic downturns and other purposes. Fiscal Impact: Higher state tax revenues of roughly \$16 billion from 2010-11 through 2012-13. Over time, increased amounts of money in state rainy day reserve and potentially less ups and downs in state spending. **NO**

Proposition 1B: Payment Plan. Requires supplemental payments to local school districts and community colleges to address recent budget cuts. Fiscal Impact: Potential state savings of up to several billion dollars in 2009-10 and 2010-11. Potential state costs of billions of dollars annually thereafter. **SUPPORTS BUT IS CONTINGENT ON PASSAGE OF 1A**

Proposition 1C: Lottery Modernization Act. Allows the state lottery to be modernized to improve its performance with increased payouts, improved marketing, and effective management. Requires the state to maintain ownership of the lottery and authorizes additional accountability measures. Protects funding levels for schools currently provided by lottery revenues. Increased lottery revenues will be used to address the current budget deficit and reduce the need for additional tax increase and cuts to state programs. Fiscal Impact: Allows \$5 billion of borrowing from future lottery profits to help balance 2009-10 state budget. Debt-service payments on this borrowing and higher payments to education would likely make it more difficult to balance future state budgets. **NO**

Proposition 1D: Children's Services Funding. Temporarily provides greater flexibility in funding to preserve health and human services for young children while helping balance the state budget in a difficult economy. Fiscal Impact: State General Fund savings of up to \$608 million in 2009-10 and \$268 million annually from 2010 through 2014. Corresponding reductions in funding for early childhood development programs provided by the California Children and Families Program. **NO**

Proposition 1E: Mental Health Funding. Temporary Reallocation. Helps balance state budget by amending the Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63 of 2004) to transfer funds for two years to pay for mental health services provided through the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Program for children and young adults. Fiscal Impact: State General Fund savings of about \$230 million annually for two years. Corresponding reduction in funding available for Mental Health Services Act programs. **NO**

Proposition 1F: Elected Officials' Salaries. Presents Pay Increases During Budget Deficit Years. Encourages balanced state budgets by preventing Members of the Legislature and statewide constitutional officers including the Governor from receiving pay raises in years when the state budget is running a deficit. Prevents the Citizens Compensation Commission from increasing

elected officials' salaries in years when the state Special Fund for Economic Uncertainties is in the negative by an amount equal to or greater than one percent of the General Fund. Fiscal Impact: Minor state savings related to elected state officials' salaries in some cases when state is expected to end the year with a budget deficit.—**NO POSITION** —California Secretary of State website

Sacramento Delta concerns

The Sacramento Delta is acres and acres of verdant green farms and wetlands divided into islands by meandering waterways. Many of these so-called islands are lower than the water ways that separate them. Early settlers of this area built earthen levees to protect the land during early spring flood season. The islands have subsided due to years of use and the pumping up of fresh water from under them. This has caused the farmland and residential development to be much lower than the water that surrounds them.

There is growing concern that the Delta has become a fragile eco-system with the very real possibilities of levees collapsing due to old age or possible earthquake damage; fresh water contamination by industrial outflow, salt water, or sewage waste; and five endangered or threatened species of fish becoming extinct. Currently water flows through the Sacramento Delta south to Tracy and is then pumped into the California Aqueduct and sent to the southern regions of the state.

Three proposals have been put forward: build a peripheral canal to the east; continue to direct water through the Delta; build a canal/tunnel to the west of the Delta. Each of these possibilities has its good points. However, the big question remains: Is there or will there be enough water to meet the Sacramento Delta's needs and send the required amount of water needed for the Central Valley farmers and Southern California city dwellers?—Lois Watson

STAY INFORMED

For current up-dated information, check the local, state, and national

League of Women Voters' websites:

www.kerncounty.ca.lwvnet.org

www.ca.lwv.org

www.lwv.org

League of Women Voters of Kern County

PO Box 132

Bakersfield, CA 93302

League Line (661) 634-3773

e-mail diane.williams.cht5@statefarm.com

Diane Williams, President

Barbara Lovell, 1st Vice President

Terri Stanton, 2nd Vice President

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