# The Voter

League of Women Voters of Berkeley • Albany • Emeryville



### MAY-JUNE 2009

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LINDA CRAIG

## CALL TO ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, June 4, 2009, 5:00 - 8:30 pm

Northbrae Community Church 941 The Alameda, Berkeley

ALL THE DETAILS ARE IN THE "CALL TO MEETING KIT" IN THIS VOTER. PLEASE LOOK THE KIT OVER AND BRING IT WITH YOU TO THE MEETING.

Join us at the Annual Meeting and hear a talk by Linda Craig, Advocacy Director of LWVC, on:

> "How the State Budget Process will Respond to the May 19 Election"

The Governor and the State Legislature have worked out a deal to get a budget adopted, and the League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) has recommended that the voters turn the budget down in the **special election on May 19, 2009**. By the date of our annual meeting on June 4, 2009, we will know the results of the election, after a lot of arguments pro and con, and then plenty of speculation about what comes next.

**Linda Craig** will share with us her well-informed insights about what to expect from Sacramento after the election. If the voters **approve** all or most of the ballot measures that are designed to achieve a balanced budget, what will it really cost – fiscally, socially, politically? And if the voters **turn down** all or most of the ballot measures, will the Governor and Legislature get to work and give us a state budget that the voters can really accept?

During the past two years, Linda has coordinated LWVC advocacy related to: the State budget, redistricting, the State constitution, initiatives and other major issues. An active League member since 1970, Linda also has 25 years of experience in local government finance (prior to Prop. 13) and has seen the evolution of the State's current financial condition. Linda has an economics degree from Stanford University, and she received her Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree from Golden Gate University.

*Jean Safir* VP Program

1414 University Avenue • Suite D • Berkeley • California • 94702-1509

tel: 510.843.8824 • fax: 510.843.8828 • email: office@lwvbae.org • website: lwvbae.org

### RESULTS OF HEALTHCARE SURVEY

In February, the LWVBAE Health Care Committee distributed a survey to the LWVBAE membership asking their help as we, your Health Care Committee, continue our work on the many aspects of healthcare reform which confront us. We wanted to get the membership's opinions at this critical point in time, as U.S. healthcare is about to change, and we want our input and our ideas to be part of that change.

The response to the survey was heartening. From a membership of just under 400, we received over one hundred replies, most of which contained detailed answers to our questions. The survey results clearly reflected members' concerns about how the healthcare problem will finally be resolved, especially given that healthcare reform is at the forefront of the new Administration's deliberations.

Our results also showed that because Medicare is provided by private practitioners, and each Medicare patient may choose his or her own provider, the majority of survey participants did not realize that Medicare is a single-payer system of healthcare and that it is paid for by the U.S. Government. We also discovered that most survey participants believe that all U.S. citizens deserve healthcare as a right.

The final question of the survey asked members to state their opinion of the most urgent problem facing healthcare today. The responses ranged from "Where to begin?" to the following: cost, accessibility, fairness in access, lack of coverage for everybody (children were often mentioned). Respondents said that healthcare should not be for profit, and cited prohibitive drug costs and too much bureaucracy among their many other concerns.

Our Committee thanks everyone who returned their survey to us. We will keep our membership informed of our work as we continue to formulate the League position on healthcare in our country.

> Catherine Lynch, Co-Chair Health Care Committee

### **New Members**

Our Warmest Welcome To Our Newest Members:

Katherine Lunine Howard McNenny

And To Rejoining Member:

Dorcas Kowalski

#### THE VOTER

Published monthly except January, June & August by

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BERKELEY, ALBANY AND EMERYVILLE

1414 University Avenue, Suite D Berkeley, CA 94702-1509

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The VOTER is free to members, \$10/year for non-members. Current and past issues of the VOTER are posted on our website at lwvbae.org.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages active and informed participation in government, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

# GO DIGITAL AND HELP YOUR LEAGUE

Voter printing and mailing costs are the third largest controllable expense in the LWVBAE budget. If you have Internet access, and choose to receive a digital copy of the *Voter* as a replacement for your printed one, you can help us reduce that expense.

The digital *Voter* is identical to the printed one (indeed the printed version is created from the digital original), and is available online just after the *Voter* goes to our printer. Digital *Voter* subscribers will receive an email message containing a link to the latest edition each time it is posted, so they can read or print all or part of it at their convenience.

You can see what your digital *Voter* will look like by going to the *Voter* archive that we maintain on our LWVBAE web site. It is located at http://lwvbae.org/voter.htm. Once there, click on the link to any recent *Voter* (September 2007 or later). As long as you have Adobe's free PDF viewer installed for your browser (a link is there to get it if you don't), your choice will open in a new browser window. From there you may read, navigate and/or print what you'll see. Test it out soon.

If you decide to convert your *Voter* subscription from print to digital, phone (510.527.0827) or email (bill@classroomtools.com) *Bill Chapman* to say that you want to make the switch.

Bill Chapman Treasurer

# INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMEMBER BARBARA LEE FEBRUARY 2, 2009

### DELLUMS FEDERAL BUILDING, OAKLAND

#### Attending from Representative Lee's staff:

Congressmember Barbara Lee April Chan, Congressional Aide Anne Taylor, District Director Maha Ibrahim, Congressional Aide and Environmental Specialist

#### Attending from the LWV

Helen Hutchison, LWV Oakland Linda Swift, LWV Berkeley Albany Emeryville Tam Hege, LWV Piedmont Steve Dimmick, LWV Eden Area

We met in Congressmember Lee's office and after introductions and greetings posed the following questions (below, in bold) followed by her responses.

1. What should the federal government do to ensure that every American has health coverage?

Congressmember Lee supports single-payer healthcare, but recognizes the probability that it would pass is slim. She will support it but is willing to compromise if/as it becomes necessary.

Lee feels that the Tri Caucus work (Black, Hispanic and Asian Pacific Caucuses) on health disparities in communities of color is very important, and she supports the Health Care Disparities Bill.

She also supports:

- Universal Health Care
- The Josephine Butler Act (HR 3000), which establishes healthcare service through the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

She sees healthcare as her top priority.

- 2. Do you support legislation to set a declining cap on greenhouse gas emissions, based on the best-available science, in order to combat global climate change?
  - Yes. Congressmember Lee supports a declining cap. She supports the Waxman bill, HR 1590, as well as cap and trade.
  - Congressmember Lee is not fully cognizant of the full ramifications of climate change, but she is very open and willing to listen. Linda Swift reviewed some of the data showing the urgency of the issue.

- Staff member Maha Ibrahim requested that members of the Climate Change Team meet with her to review data and put together an action list. We will pursue this.
- 3. What will you do to help reduce the level of partisanship at the federal level that has blocked progress on a number of important national issues in recent years?

Congressmember Lee is frustrated by the poor success of the attempts by the President to reduce the level of partisanship.

She supports the League taking a positive role to challenge both sides to reduce partisanship – to promote civil discourse and compromise. She said the League should "lay it out there" frankly and clearly, with no finger-pointing, but to be clear that both sides have taken part in exacerbating partisanship. The League of Women Voters, Rep. Lee said, is one of the few groups that has the credibility to make this "call to action" to the Congress.

Linda Swift, Co-Chair Climate Change Team

# Save August 20 For The Annual Community Luncheon!

The 10th Annual Community Luncheon of your League is coming August 20, so please mark your calendars for this very special program, our largest fundraising event of the year.

The speaker will be another outstanding community leader and will be announced in the Summer edition of the *Voter*.

Another highlight of the program will be presentation of the "Spirit of the League" awards to a notable civic philanthropist and to an organization that collaborates with the League in furthering our shared goals.

This event is an annual highlight of the League calendar, and you won't want to miss it. The Luncheon will be held again, by popular acclaim, at the beautiful setting of H<sup>s</sup> Lordships Restaurant at the Berkeley Marina.

Invitations will go into the mail later this summer, so watch for yours, and in the meantime, save August 20 on your calendar.

> Suzanne Chun and Sherry Smith Luncheon Co-Chairs

# The Registration Deadline FOR THE MAY 19 Special Election is Monday, May 4, 2009

CA STATE LEAGUE OPPOSES PROPS
1A, 1C, 1D & 1E
ON THE MAY 19
SPECIAL ELECTION BALLOT

View/Print <a href="mailto:the-Vote with the League Flyer">the Vote with the League Flyer</a> (PDF)

Read the Press Release

The State League has posted its In Depth look at the May 19 ballot measures. The index is available at:

http://www.ca.lwv.org/lwvc/edfund/
elections/2009may/index.html

Read/Print the League's Easy Voter Guide

Read the CA Official Voter Info Guide

Read the CA Quick Reference Election Guide (PDF)

open the SmartVoter page for the May 19 election

All links (underlined and italicized) that you see here can be followed from our home page on the web (http://lwvbae.org/). As the election season unfolds, new links that become available will also appear there. The SmartVoter page should also add useful links during this time.

# AC TRANSIT IS SHINING STAR IN CLEAN AIR BUSES

Diesel pollution is a serious problem and as a result many transit systems are making clean improvements to better serve our communities. One such example is AC Transit, which is a partner with the American Lung Association (ALA) in California on their clean air campaigns.

"AC Transit is truly is a shining star in the transit world when it comes to clean-air buses," according to ALA Regional Air Quality Director Jenny Bard who spoke to LWVBAE's Environmental Concerns committee on February 9, 2009. "They are operating some of the most advanced technology and cleanest buses in the nation, if not the world, including hydrogen fuel buses."

There are many advances both in diesel trap technology, diesel fuels and diesel engine engineering that have significantly reduced diesel emissions, Bard said. "The American Lung Association in California promotes zero emission vehicles and alternatives to driving, including walking, cycling and transit. It is critical that public transit is strengthened and utilized."

League members will get the chance to hear about the latest technologies first hand in November when AC Transit's Jaimie Levin will address Environmental Concerns as part of our Fall program.

Gail Schickele, Co-Chair Environmental Concerns

## **March Donations**

TO THE LWVBAE GENERAL FUND

Charlotte and Martin Lichterman

Charlotte and Martin Lichterman Kitty and Hugh McLean

TO THE LWVB FOUNDATION

Ruth Arkley Georgia Babladelis

Many thanks for remembering your League.

Louetta Erlin Donations Secretary

# SICK AROUND AMERICA:

#### WHAT EXACTLY WAS FRONTLINE TRYING TO SAY?

By Trudy Lieberman, April 1, 2009

It is not clear what message Frontline wanted to deliver in last night's Sick Around America documentary. The show, conceived as a sequel to its acclaimed Sick Around the World special, was a limp, flat journalistic effort that did nothing to help the public understand the current politics of health reform. It both demagogued the insurance industry and then sent valentines their way, making me wonder if the show's bad cop/good cop portrayal was a deliberate attempt to reflect the nation's schizophrenic attitude toward the industry. In the end, it just made for a confusing and unfulfilling hour of television, and made me think that Frontline missed an opportunity to say something meaningful and new about the topic at hand.

The first half of the show piled on anecdote after anecdote about individuals' experiences with health insurance. It was all familiar territory. We hear about a Microsoft employee whose super insurance paid a million dollars to help his premature infant survive. Then there was Paul Stevens, once a manager at a telecommunications company in Houston, who was in his late fifties when he lost his job. Stevens found COBRA too expensive and had to venture into the individual health insurance market where his diabetes disqualified him from coverage. When he had his heart attack, he had no insurance and got stuck with bills totaling more than \$200,000. The Texas high risk pool was out of the question because it, too, was expensive and required a long wait for coverage. Stevens says he is trying to live long enough to get coverage from Medicare. But there was no talk of what problems await him once he gets there.

Interspersed among the stories are lessons about how the individual market works – sort of an actuarial primer for the public about medical underwriting. That's the process of weeding out sick applicants for coverage. We hear about hundreds of people who declare bankruptcy each year, partly because of medical bills, and that others are hurt by a practice called rescission, where insurance companies drop those people whose applications failed to disclose all their medical conditions. The producer focused on California, where Los Angeles Times reporter Lisa Girion has written extensively about this subject. In Sicko, Michael Moore made the same point with a different carrier. Not much new territory here.

The documentary progressed to a discussion of consumer-directed health plans that, it said, were "loaded with caveats." No kidding! Deductibles of \$7500 or more and 40 percent coinsurance (that means you pay 40 percent of the medical bill) pinch the pocketbook, as Patricia Campbell of San Diego found out. OK, nothing new here either, as Campaign Desk has noted.

When the documentary addressed the subject of health insurance for everyone, it began by serving up a lot of confusion about health insurance provided through social insurance, as in Europe, and that provided by private carriers, as in the U.S. The narrator noted that many experts believe that a fairer system would cover everyone, just as all the other developed countries do for their citizens. He said that was "what insurers call guaranteed issue." That's a new one on me – referring to other countries' social insurance systems as guaranteed issue. (When private insurers offer to guarantee coverage, they are saying they will do so generally without evaluating their applicants' medical conditions.) Since there's little private insurance in most of those countries, the concept doesn't seem to track. There was no discussion of how social insurance works - that everyone pays taxes to fund health care; that everyone is guaranteed care as a matter of right; and that the national health systems pay for medical services in most cases, not private insurance companies.

The program did mention five states that have guaranteed issue coverage that is, they require that insurance companies offer a policy to everyone, sick or well. But then it featured experts who talked about the problems with that approach. One said that the premiums were three times higher in those states because sick people often fall into the insurers' risk pool because they may have waited to sign up for a policy until they are sick. FYI: It's also true that they may have been in the pool all along and then got sick.

By now, viewers might think that covering everyone may be a bad idea, but the narrator asks Karen Ignagni, who heads the insurers' trade group America's Health Insurance Plans, why the U.S. couldn't guarantee coverage for everyone. Ignagni replied that it could if we did what other countries do: have a mandate requiring everyone to have insurance. Then, she said, it would be reasonable to require her industry to guarantee coverage to everyone. The narrator summarized her thoughts: "That's what other developed countries do. They make insurers cover everyone and they make all citizens buy insurance. And the poor are subsidized."

That would certainly come as a surprise to anyone in Canada or the United Kingdom, for example. Insurance companies, making people buy insurance, subsidizing the poor? What's the narrator talking about? The system that Ignagni imagines is nothing like the ones in Canada or England – but how is the poor viewer to know?

[The conclusion of this article will appear in the Summer 2009 *Voter*.]

Trudy Lieberman is President of the Association of Health Care Journalists and Director of the Health/Medicine Reporting Program at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism. She is the author of five books, and is a Contributing Editor to the Columbia Journalism Review. This article was published in the Columbia Journalism Review, http://www.cjr.org/campaign\_desk/sick\_around\_america.php.

# What To Do Before the May 19 Election

- 1. Remind anyone who has moved since the last election to re-register by May 4.
- 2. Know that the Berkeley-Albany-Emeryville League has speakers prepared to talk about the pros and cons of the ballot measures do you know a group who would like a speaker?
- 3. Go to lwvbae.org and to Smartvoter.org for information about the ballot measures and refer your friends to these resources.
- 4. Read the information in your ballot booklet.

And of course, vote on May 19.

Phoebe Watts and Lois Brubeck Co-VPs, Election Services

### WHAT ARE LEAGUE MEMBERS READING?

Supercapitalism, Robert Reich, 2007. A timely and critical exploration of the entangled relationships between capitalism and democracy that have brought us to our current condition. Reich addresses many questions central to the mission of the League, such as: How do we restore and strengthen citizens' voices in the democratic process? How do we guarantee social justice in a fiercely competitive capitalistic economy? What are the proper roles of government and of business in our nation? Reich offers original insights that changed some of our notions and that will keep us pondering these important questions for a long time. [Mim Hawley and Eloise Bodine]

The Uncommon Reader: A Novella, Allan Bennett, 2008. Queen Elizabeth II comes across a portable library at Buckingham Palace and begins to frequent it. What does she read? What happens to her formal receptions? The Queen, it turns out, wants to know what everyone is reading. Her interest carries her forward to an unusual end. [Wendy Markel]

Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust, E. Thomas Wood and Stanislaw M. Jankowski, 1996. A fascinating account of Polish patriot and humanitarian Jan Karski, the first person to personally inform FDR about the European Holocaust against the Jews. Karski moved to the U.S. in 1943 and subsequently became a professor of history at Georgetown University. (I took a class with him and was awed by his intellect, his breadth of knowledge and his passion.) [Alice Kisch]

# DEFENDING HISTORIC PUBLIC RIGHTS IN COMMON RESOURCES

Following is a report of the LWVBAE Environmental Concerns meeting which was held on March 9, 2009:

Michael Warburton, Executive Director of the Public Trust Alliance, explained the legal concept, history and practices for the Public Trust of common resources, especially with regard to access to water. From English law, the U.S. recognizes that private ownership does not apply to navigation or to waters and land beneath the seashore which are held in trust for public use for the current population and for future generations. Groundwater has been called 'an underground river on a different time scale.' Reasonable use of water is defined as usage that does not diminish the natural flow in quantity or quality.

Tidal areas are owned by the State. The people, not kings or legislatures, are sovereign. Oyster beds, fisheries and waterfront property cannot be sold, ever since Illinois Railroad's attempts in 1869, which were overruled by the U.S. Supreme Court, and established precedent. In the 1880's, the California economy changed from mining to agriculture. Mining was declared a nuisance, and water was declared a public trust and therefore was not to be owned by the farmers. [This year farmers claim rights to water in amounts 8.5 times the amount of actual water available.] But agriculture has kept land from being paved over for housing.

Public Trust provisions were written into the California constitution. Locally, cities have sometimes ignored the laws of Public Trust, with examples in Oakland, Richmond and the Port of Oakland. In San Diego, developers are allowed to violate the Public Trust more than anywhere else in California. San Diego has no Coastal Commission or equivalent of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission to protect the coast within 100 feet of mean high tide. The Navy is a big violator, working with developers to limit public access. Some of the Bay fill is legal, some illegal, but it is considered usable for public purposes now. The Law is what one can get away with. Is an issue worth challenging? It's hard to guess how the court will rule on an issue.

The concept of Public Trust has grown in California: to preserve the land's natural use for species and scenic value. The right to breathe clean air is also Public Trust. Mere economic use (houses) is not in the Public Trust.

#### Pertinent witticisms:

- Water flows uphill towards money.
- Gold brought people to California, but water made them rich.

Ginette Polak Director-at-Large

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN MAY

On Monday, May 11, 2009, the LWVBAE Environmental Concerns Committee will hear from Maximilian Auffhammer, Assistant Professor in Agriculture and Resource Economics/International Area Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Professor Auffhammer has conducted extensive research on the environment and carbon dioxide emissions, and has published and continues his research on projections of carbon dioxide releases in China. Auffhammer will speak on the Economics of Climate Change.

The meeting will take place at the home of *Roselyn Rosenfeld*, 160 Southampton Avenue in north Berkeley, from 7:30-9:00 pm. For additional information, contact Carol Stone at 510.549.0959 or seastone01@comcast.net.

Carol Stone, Co-Chair Environmental Concerns

### USEFUL CONTACTS

### League of Women Voters, US

League of Women Voters 1730 M Street NW, Suite 1000 Washington, DC 20036-4508 Tel: 202.429.1965

Fax: 202.429.0854 www.lwv.org

# League of Women Voters of California

League of Women Voters of California 1107 Ninth Street, Suite 300 Sacramento, CA 95814-3608

Tel: 916.442.7215

Tollfree: 888.870.VOTE (8683)

Fax: 916.442.7215

General email: lwvc@lwvc.org Webmaster email: web@lwvc.org

ca.lwv.org

# League of Women Voters of the Bay Area

League of Women Voters Bay Area Inter-League Organization 1611 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 300 Oakland, CA 94612

Tel: 510.839.1608 Fax: 510.839.1610 www.lwvbayarea.org

### LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BERKELEY, ALBANY AND EMERYVILLE BOARD 2008-2009

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(ONE VOTE) GAIL SCHICKELE
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(NON-BOARD PORTFOLIO)

Climate Change Team: Jan Blumenkrantz (non-Board portfolio) Linda Swift

# TELEPHONE TREE VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED!

As approximately forty percent of our 370 members either do not have email or have not shared their addresses with us, it is important that LWVBAE have a dependable telephone tree. Each member receives *The Voter*, but many events get planned after *The Voter* has gone to the printer.

We want to share information in a timely way with all our members, whether they are connected to the Internet or not, and that requires individual telephone calls to all the people whom we are not able to reach by email. This means setting up a telephone tree to help get the word out.

If you could participate in our telephone tree, please call our office manager, *Cheryl Nichols*, at the League office at 510.843.8824 (email is office@lwvbae.org), and she'll pass your name along to the tree coordinator. Many thanks in advance for your help!

Cheryl Nichols Office Manager



### League of Women Voters

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# how to join

fill in coupon below and mail with your check in the amount of \$65 (\$30 for each additional household member; \$30 for a student membership) to the order of LWVBAE,

1414 University Avenue, Suite D Berkeley, CA 94702-1509

Name:
Address:
Tel. Day:
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Joining at the local level makes you a member at all levels: LWVBAE, Bay Area, State and National. Dues and contributions to the League are not tax deductible. Contributions to the LWVB Foundation are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

# calendar

MAY		NO VOTER DEADLINE IN MAY									
4 Mon.		REGISTRATION DEADLINE FOR MAY 19 SPEC	CIAL ELECTION								
11 Mon.	7:30-9рм	Environmental Concerns (see p. 7) 160 Southampton Avenue	C. STONE, 549.0959								
12 Tues.	12:15-2 рм	Brown Bag Lunch Speaker Series, Albany Public Library, 1247 Marin Ave., Alban Topic: To Be Announced	H. Lecar, 549.9719 NY								
15-17 18 Mon. 19 Tues.	FriSun. 1:30-3:30 pm	STATE LWV CONVENTION, LONG BEACH, CA	LWVBAE Office, 843.8824 C. Lynch, 527.2173								
	3-5 рм 1:30-3:30 рм 7:30-9 рм	ACTION COMMITTEE, LWVBAE OFFICE CLIMATE CHANGE TEAM, LWVBAE OFFICE CIVICS EDUCATION ACTION COMMITTEE	M. HAWLEY, 527.7727 J. BLUMENKRANTZ, 548.3845 J. GARDNER, 548.5292								
25 Mon. 28 Thurs.	7-9 рм	MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVED - LWVBAE OF BOARD MEETING, LWVBAE OFFICE	FICE CLOSED  M. HAWLEY, 527.7727								
Anyone interested in attending a Membership Development Committee meeting in May or June should contact Jinky Gardner at 548.5292 or Jinkybsg@comcast.net June											
2 Tues.	12:15-2 рм	Brown Bag Lunch Speaker Series, Albany Public Library, 1247 Marin Ave., Alban <b>Topic: To Be Announced</b>	<i>H. Lecar</i> , 549.9719 NY								
5 Fri. 15 Mon. 16 Tues. 17 Wed.	5:00 PM 1:30-3:30 PM 7-9 PM 1:30-3:30 PM 7:30-9 PM	ANNUAL MEETING (SEE P. 1)  DEADLINE FOR SUMMER VOTER  HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE, LWVBAE OFFICE  ACTION COMMITTEE, LWVBAE OFFICE	LWVBAE Office, 843.8824 A. Kisch, 985.0651 C. Lynch, 527.2173 M. Hawley, 527.7727 J. Blumenkrantz, 548.3845 J. Gardner, 548.5292 M. Hawley, 527.7727								
August 20 Thurs.		Annual Community Luncheon (see p. 3)	S. Снип, 843.7855 S. Sмітн, 548.1769								

#### Berkeley Addresses Unless Otherwise Indicated