

THE VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH SAN MATEO COUNTY

Celebrating 50 years of service to our communities

Website: www.LWVSSMC.org Phone: (650) 325-5780 E-mail: info@LWVSSMC.org

MARCH 2009

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A VERY TIMELY TOPIC

"California's Budget Crisis: Can This State Be Saved?"

A presentation by Professor Larry Gerston

Thursday, March 19 ♦ 7pm

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

Classroom Building, Room 1011

1111 University Drive (next door to Bank of the West)

Talk about a timely topic! Larry Gerston is renowned in media circles as a skilled political analyst with a knack for conveying complex messages in layman's terms. You may have read his op-ed pieces in *San Jose Mercury News*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Los Angeles Times* or



seen him on "NBC Nightly News", CNN's "Inside Politics", and locally on the Bay area's NBC11 at 6:30 PM on Tuesdays and 7:45 AM on Sunday mornings where he comments on California government or heard him on the BBC, NPR, and KCBS radio. An accomplished author, Gerston's books focus on individual empowerment. His *Public Policy Making in a Democratic Society: A Guide to Civic Engagement* has been heralded as a breakthrough in promoting "hands on" citizen participation. His newest

book is *Confronting Reality: Ten Issues Threatening to Implode American Society*. On a lighter note, Gerston has written *The Costco Experience: An Unofficial Survivor's Guide*. Did we mention that he is also a political science professor at San Jose State University, covering the public policy process at the national and state levels?

We are lucky indeed to have such an engaging champion of citizen education as the featured speaker at our TIMELY TOPICS!

DO NOT MISS THIS! The Public Is Invited.

Transportation is available. If you need a ride, contact Program Chair ELLEN

HOPE: ellenjhope@aol.com / 839-8647



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last night someone asked me, "So what does the League do, once the elections are over?" Well, we have had two terrific National Issues discussions on Taxes and Climate Change and will tackle Healthcare this month. This month's Timely Topic promises to be terrific. If you have never read, seen or heard Larry Gerston, you are in for an eye-opening and mind-expanding evening. We will respond to National's call to study the issues surrounding National Popular Vote for direct Presidential elections (see page 3) We're planning to party in April and get down to Annual Meeting business in May. So much for taking a break after the elections!

So consider this YOUR INVITATION to find something worthwhile to do in the League this spring! Ask someone new to come with you. The League is only as vibrant and engaging as we are willing to make it. Sure, the presidential election is over, but the League is never done. Get involved. Learn something new. Have some fun doing it!

Jamie Shepard, Board President
jamieshepard@att.net

BOARD MEETING BRIEFS

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MONDAY EVENING, FEB 2, 2009:

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Members of our League and the North/Central League will be meeting with the San Mateo County Grand Jury on Feb 5 to discuss election issues and the process that was used to fill the recent vacancy on the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors. The State League Convention is May 15-17 in Long Beach. Delegates are to be selected shortly.

BUSINESS MATTERS: The status of our League's insurance coverage was discussed, including what is available from the State and National Leagues. Lucile Spurlock is taking ownership for investigating and recommending appropriate liability coverage for our League.

MEMBERSHIP: It was discussed when/whether to drop from the roster those members who

haven't paid their dues for the year. The Board agreed to leave longer-term members on the roster to receive the VOTER at least temporarily. Also, a meeting of all current users of the membership database is being planned. The goals are to determine which fields to retain and gain agreement on the process and roles for maintenance and usage of the database. Anyone wishing to provide input should send that to Patti Fry. **VOTER SERVICE:** We have received word that the Pros & Cons publication is being discontinued by the State League. The Board expressed concern about that decision and Kathy Armstrong took the action to investigate.

PROGRAMS: National League has adopted National Popular Vote Compact as a study, with consensus questions due May 1. The Board discussed convening a planning committee with member volunteers and conducting local consensus meetings in March/April. Lucile Spurlock reported on Annual Meeting plans. A tentative date (May 26) and venue (Sultana in Menlo Park) were selected. The speaker is to be confirmed.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, March 2, 7pm, at Lucile Spurlock's, 856 Creek Drive, Menlo Park

Kathy Armstrong, Acting Board Secretary

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE WELCOMES YOUR INPUT! If you would like to hold an office, be on the Board, or perform a regular or special job for our League during the coming year, please contact the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee is charged with proposing candidates for elected 2009-2011 Board positions and any vacancies in the current year 2008-2009. The Committee will submit its list of names and positions for July 2009 – June 2011 in the Annual Meeting Kit in May. If you want to be on the Board, serve in an off-Board position, or can suggest someone else, contact committee members **Lida Urbanek (lurbanek@sbcglobal.net or 324-9105)** or **Evan Hughes (evanhughesphd@**



"NATIONAL ISSUES DISCUSSION" #3 ON HEALTH CARE SET FOR MARCH 25

The third in our National Issues Discussion Series is slated for Wednesday, March 25, at Ellen Hope's home, 854 Seminole Way, Redwood City (839-8647), at 1-3pm. We turn our attention this time to health care, a topic on which the League has been very active on the national, state and local levels. To help further your understanding and ground our discussion, the 2-page issue paper from the National VOTER article "Open Letter to the Next President" (October 2008) is re-printed on pages 4-5.

Our January discussion on taxes was very well attended. Barbara Boles led us ably and knowledgeably through a variety of tax issues. We agreed that we should track national developments, particularly in the areas of capital gains and dividends, estate taxes, and the earned income tax credit, to see what changes are proposed over the course of this year. We also need to investigate whether or not a gas tax, which most of the attendees favored, would conflict with the National position against regressive taxation.

GOOD NEWS ABOUT OUR MAY ANNUAL MEETING



American History professor and Pulitzer Prize-winning author David M. Kennedy will be the speaker at our Annual Meeting on May 26! Prof. Kennedy is a best-selling author and longtime distinguished Professor of History at Stan-

ford, with a very timely book, published in 2005, [Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945](#). Our book group has been discussing this very compelling book. Details on the Annual Meeting's location will be finalized this month.

Ellen Hope, Program Chair ellenjhope@aol.com

READ A GOOD BOOK:



Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945 by David M. Kennedy, our guest speaker at the Annual Meeting. For information about March and future meetings, contact Judy Orttung: jorttung@att.net 234-9837

DID YOU KNOW THAT KEPLER'S BOOKSTORE SUPPORTS OUR LEAGUE? Kepler's donates 10% of your purchases in store or online if you specify *our* League. To shop online, click on the Kepler's link on our website for the credit.

NEWS FROM New Voices

Second semester is under way at the Menlo-Atherton High School Computer Academy and our New Voices students are building on their video skills and their stories. "Attention Freshmen" is our newest student project. In it, the students are addressing current freshmen and telling them what they themselves wish that they had done as freshman. The messages include study, go to class, save your "goofing off" for weekends and make the most of yourselves. With the guidance of Project Director Anne-Marie McReynolds and teacher Chris Rubin, the stories are compelling and the visuals and narratives are good viewing. You can watch it online at <http://newvoicesforyouth.blip.tv>. The New Voices team is developing a next project that will include League and community mentors.

REDISTRICTING

The State Auditor's Office will be holding public meetings across the state to solicit input on how to make the recruitment and selection process for the citizens' redistricting commission as open and broad as possible. Leagues in San Diego, Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Francisco should plan to attend. The important work of monitoring the process starts right now. Who better than our members to act as watchdogs? **See the LWVC website for details.**

NATIONAL ISSUE #3

HEALTHCARE

SOURCE: OpenLettertothePresident.pdf at www.LWVUS.org, October 2008 issue, The National VOTER.

What We Must Do:

America is facing a health care crisis caused by a combination of skyrocketing costs and an insurance system that leaves 47 million of us without any coverage. We must make quality, affordable health care available to all U.S. residents. All Americans should have access to a basic level of care that includes the prevention of disease, health promotion and education, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute care, longterm care and mental health care. At the same time, the federal government needs to take action to reduce the costs of health care for individuals, businesses and communities.

Why It's Important:

As a nation, we are spending \$1 out of every \$6 we earn on healthcare. Over the last three decades, increases in the amount we spend on healthcare have consistently risen faster than wages and inflation. If nothing is done to control costs, we could be spending \$3 trillion for health care by 2011 and \$4.2 trillion by 2016. That's 20% of US gross domestic product (GDP). If the true measure of a country's healthcare system is the health and well-being of the people it serves, then Americans are getting a raw deal. Women and children suffer the most under the current U.S. system. More than one in five pregnant women in the United States do not receive timely prenatal care starting in the first trimester. Among the results: the wealthiest nation in the world regularly ranks near the bottom among developed countries in infant mortality and low birth weight rates. Today, 47 million Americans have no health insurance at all, up from less than 40 million in 2000. The uninsured include more than 9 million children. And, if you think this is a problem that mostly affects the poor and unemployed, think again: 70% of the uninsured are in families with at least one full-time worker. In addition, critics charge that the US healthcare system is geared too much to treat-

ment of problems and not enough to prevention, which costs less in the long run and results in a healthier America. Today, 75 cents of every health care dollar spent in the United States is spent on treating chronic diseases, many of which are completely preventable.

Part of the reason our system focuses on treatment over prevention is shrinking access to needed health insurance and services. Most uninsured Americans can't afford check-ups and preventive care, so they don't go to the doctor or the hospital until it's an emergency.

What's in It for Us:

Providing quality, affordable healthcare coverage will reap rewards for all Americans:

Healthcare for all. A comprehensive federal health care system will guarantee healthcare coverage for all Americans as a matter of public policy. In recent polls, a majority of people support universal healthcare coverage for all Americans.

Reduced costs. The average annual premium for employer-sponsored health insurance was more than \$12,000 per family in 2007; the average worker's share was about \$3,300. For individuals and families without employer-sponsored plans, the costs can be much higher. Every year, health insurance is becoming less and less affordable for families and businesses. Part of the problem is "cost shifting"—i.e., insured Americans continue to foot the bill for expensive emergency care for the uninsured. Experts recommend two key steps for reducing costs for everybody: 1) an increased focus on prevention for all Americans; and 2) the expansion of health insurance coverage to the uninsured. Any healthcare reforms must reduce or eliminate cost-shifting and excessive administration costs.

A stronger U.S. economy. Other industrialized countries are getting a lot more bang for their health care buck. The United States spends nearly 16% of GDP on healthcare, while the average for all industrialized countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is roughly half that number: 8.9%. Most of the other developed countries also spend far less on healthcare than the United States on a per capita basis. Are the people of these countries less healthy than Americans? For the most part, no. The United States will have trouble competing in a global economy if it can't keep health care costs under control.

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It's been widely reported, for example, that the price tag for every car produced by US auto manufacturers includes as much as \$1,500 for health care that their competitors in Japan and other nations do not have to pay. The annual bill for chronic diseases alone threatens to reach \$6 trillion by the middle of the century—money that could be put to more productive uses in the economy.

Where We Are Now:

Over the past eight years, the President and the Congress have done little to reduce healthcare costs or expand coverage for care, while costs have climbed and the numbers of uninsured have grown. President Bush's main reform was the expansion of Medicare to cover a portion of the cost of outpatient prescription drugs. Another change enacted under President Bush was the creation of health savings accounts (HSAs), which are touted as a way for consumers to save for future health expenses using tax-free dollars. Studies have shown, however, that HSAs, which require consumers to enroll in health plans with higher-than-normal deductibles, are primarily an option for "healthy and wealthy" Americans. Furthermore, HSAs may actually encourage consumers to skip necessary health care services because they have to pay more money out of pocket.

Another health care reform topic that was the focus of Washington debate in recent years was the reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). In the decade since Congress passed SCHIP in 1997, the program has provided health care coverage to 6 million low-income children who are not eligible for Medicaid, the state-federal health insurance program that primarily serves the poor. SCHIP has proven the most successful expansion of health care coverage in a generation, reducing the percentage of low-income children without coverage by one-third. Based on the program's success, both houses of Congress passed a bipartisan measure in 2007 to reauthorize SCHIP, but President Bush vetoed the bill. The bill called for an increase in the program's budget in order to expand coverage to 4 million more children. A House vote to override the presidential veto failed, prompting Congress to pass a short-term extension of the program. Looking ahead, the next President and Congress face a re-

newed effort to reauthorize SCHIP. But an even bigger debate looms over plans for more comprehensive reform of the U.S. healthcare system.

Agenda for the New President:

America's health care status quo is endangering our economy and our health. The new President must advance reforms with two principal objectives in mind:

- Guarantee that a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost is available to all US residents.
- Work toward containing out-of-control health care costs so that healthcare dollars go to caring for people rather than cost-shifting or excess administration.

Expanding Health Coverage:

Weighing the Options

Policymakers have proposed several approaches for reforming the U.S. health care system and achieving the goal of universal coverage:

Single payer: A single payer system would replace the current U.S. health insurance system with its multiple payers (individuals, employers, insurers, governments, etc.) with a system financed through general taxes.

Expanded federal programs: Another solution requiring an expanded federal role in healthcare is to broaden access to existing federal health insurance programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and the health insurance program for federal employees.

Individual mandate: In the same way that drivers are required to purchase auto insurance, many policymakers have proposed that all American adults be required to purchase health insurance. Massachusetts passed such a requirement in 2006.

Tax credits and subsidies: Some policymakers have proposed offering enhanced tax credits, subsidies and other incentives to encourage more businesses to offer health insurance to their employees, and to encourage more uninsured people to purchase insurance.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION:

Thursday, March 25, 1-3pm at Ellen Hope's home, 854 Seminole Way, Redwood City
839-8647



IT'S OFFICIAL: WE WILL JOIN IN THE NATIONAL LWV STUDY ON THE

NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE COMPACT

Our League will be joining Leagues across the nation this spring as we learn, discuss, and come to consensus on whether to support a proposed new approach to electing the President of the United States. If approved, the "National Popular Vote Compact" would assure that the person who receives the largest popular vote, nationwide, would be the President of the United States. The Compact would give this result without the need to have 3/4ths of the states approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Here's your chance to get involved in the League's wonderful grassroots process of education, discussion, and finding common ground.

We Need YOU To Get Involved NOW!

A committee is being constituted right now to organize our League's participation in the NPV study, and we are looking for members who are interested in joining this committee. You don't need any background in the topic – just an interest in learning and a willingness to help with organizational tasks. As President Obama has urged us, quoting Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Everybody can be great – because everybody can serve!" Come serve Democracy and be part of the consensus-building process – the very core of what the League of Women Voters is all about – and we guarantee you'll have fun and learn a lot in the process!

Get Ready To Make Your Voice Heard!

The "National Popular Vote" (NPV) study is a terrific opportunity for all of us to learn and give our personal input about an important topic which is central to our democracy. Be a part of this fun, democratic process! Start by reading the very informative series of background arti-

cles that the National League has put together on this issue. [Last month's VOTER featured an article from the National League]. Go to www.LWVC.org. Under the "For Members" pull-down menu in the blue bar, click "Projects and Programs"; then select "National Popular Vote Compact Study" in the right sidebar. Plan to join your fellow League members at one of our local consensus meetings in March and April. Dates for those meetings and additional information will be sent out via e-mail later this month, as well as appearing in next month's VOTER.

If you want to be kept informed, but are not sure that the League has your correct contact information, please contact either Kathy Armstrong (karmstro@conncoll.edu, 321-3623) or Judy Ortung (jorttung@worldnet.att.net, 234-9837).

NPVC Background Article on Page 7

LWVC State Convention: May 15-17, Long Beach, CA



Friday, May 15 - Sunday, May 17, 2009 - three days of fun and policy at the LWVC Convention 2009! The Long Beach LWV has been hard at work preparing a warm welcome to California League members. We have a lot of business to take care of but

will have a lot of fun doing it.

Want to represent our League and learn a lot about the League at Convention? Contact Jamie Shepard (jamieshepard@att.net 867-0885)

STATE LWV DISCONTINUES PROS & CONS PUBLICATIONS

Citing mounting overhead expenses, the State League announced that it will discontinue publishing and distributing the traditional paper version of PROS & CONS. The EASY VOTER GUIDE will continue to be available. Local outcry has been heard! This issue is certain to be addressed by your League's representatives at the State Convention.

Background for the National Popular Vote Compact

The League has a long-standing position in support of the direct election of the president by popular vote. Currently four states have passed legislation to enact the NPV Compact. Now, League members have the opportunity to consider whether to support the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV Compact) as a viable process to achieve that result. The NPV Compact would avoid the need for a constitutional amendment abolishing the Electoral College (EC), and would assure that the individual receiving the most votes would become president.

The NPV Compact proposal uses the mechanism of the EC. States that legislatively enact the NPV Compact would agree that their state electors would vote for the individual that received the most votes nationwide. Thus, the popular vote count from all 50 states and the District of Columbia would be added together. State elections officials in all states participating would award their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who receives the largest number of popular votes.

This alternative method of assigning a state's EC votes would take effect only when enacted by states collectively possessing a majority of the electoral votes. This 270-vote threshold also corresponds essentially to states representing a majority of the people of the United States.

The plan includes procedural provisions to help assure smooth functioning of the agreement – conditions that deal with states deciding to withdraw from the Compact at the last moment, enforcement issues and recounts.

There are pros and cons to this plan, which are discussed in full in papers found on the LWVUS Web site. Summaries of these papers are also available. League members can learn more about the plan from these sources and consider its rami-

fications at consensus meetings across the country. Be sure to participate! Who better than the League to be ready to speak to this good-government issue?

To prepare for the consensus meeting, please read the complete version of this paper by the LWVUS National Popular Voter Compact Study Committee online at www.lwv.org. There is also a comprehensive 4-page Pros & Cons table.

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UPDATE:

The National League has published a concise but comprehensive PROS & CONS Chart which we can use for our discussion. It does not, however, yet appear on the website. We will make copies available to League members, post it to our website and forward the file via email to our League members.

The National Voter TO BE DISCONTINUED

This notice was received from the LWVUS on February 10th: At its January meetings, the LWVUS Board of Directors decided to suspend publication of *The National Voter* magazine (paper and digital) until the League's finances are stronger.

Publication costs for *The Voter* are prohibitive in a time of budget cutbacks. The Board and the LWVUS staff are committed to finding new ways to deliver information to our members and supporters. We will keep you informed as we move forward. Address questions and comments to Board Member Nancy Eitreim: netreim@speakeasy.net

LEAGUE INFO ONLINE

South San Mateo County:

www.LWVSSMC.org

LWV Bay Area: www.LWVBayArea.org

LWV CA: www.CA.LWV.org

LWVUS: www.LWV.org

UPCOMING EVENTS on THE CALENDAR

MARCH

2 Mon	7pm	LWVSSMC Board Meeting at Lucile Spurlock's home, 856 Creek Dr, Menlo Park / 323-5358
19 Thurs	7pm	TIMELY TOPICS: Political Analyst Larry Gerston on "CALIFORNIA'S BUDGET CRISIS" Location: Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, Room 1011 at 1111 University Drive, Menlo Park (see Front Cover) Note that BOOK GROUP meeting will be changed. Contact Judy Orttung (see page 3)
25 Wed	1-3pm	NATIONAL ISSUES DISCUSSION #3: "Health Care" at Ellen Hope's home, 854 Seminole Way, Redwood City. 839-8647 (see pages 3-5)

APRIL

6 Mon	7pm	LWVSSMC Board Meeting at Lucile Spurlock's home, 856 Creek Dr, Menlo Park / 323-5358
16 Thurs	7:30pm	BOOK GROUP For location and information, contact Judy Orttung at jorttung@att.net or call 234-9837

MAY

4 Mon	7pm	LWVSSMC Board Meeting at Lucile Spurlock's home, 856 Creek Dr, Menlo Park / 323-5358
26 Tues	6pm	ANNUAL MEETING with guest speaker DAVID M. KENNEDY. Details will be announced soon! (See page 3)

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Please add my name to the membership rolls of the League of Women Voters and begin my membership today. Annual dues \$75. Make your check payable to LWVSSMC. Joining at the local level makes you a member at all levels: County, Bay Area, State, and National.

Name _____

Street _____

City, Zip _____

Phone _____ Home or Cell

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Return this form and your \$75 check to: LWV of South San Mateo County, 713 Santa Cruz Avenue, Suite 9, Menlo Park, CA 94025. (Note: Membership dues are not tax deductible)