



League of Women Voters of San Diego County

COUNTY VOTER

Fall 2009

An Inter-League Organization (ILO) - City of San Diego ▪ East San Diego County ▪ North Coast ▪ Escondido

Website: <http://sdcilo.ca.lwvnet.org>

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Co-Presidents' Letters

Since we only have quarterly newsletters it is not easy to remember what happened since the last report to you. One event was the County Council meeting in early June. It was an important meeting and our attendance was small, which is unfortunate. We tried to identify the reasons, June is a busy month, local Leagues are holding local meetings on Saturday during May and June, it was scheduled on Father's Day weekend, and the cost was \$20, or none of the above. It might have been the topic was depressing, "Hunger in San Diego County." If you ever doubted that fact after the presentation by Joni Halpern and Bill Oswald you would have known that hunger does exist. However, it is unlikely that you doubted such, since you see it on the streets of your city every day.

The major portion of the registration fees will be donated to a non-profit group that works with those living in poverty. The agency has not been selected. County Board members donated brunch items for the meeting and many brought canned food for distribution.

Ms. Halpern is a lawyer, co-founder and director of the Supportive Parents Information Network (SPIN). Dr. Oswald presently chairs the Caring Council, a network of organizations and individuals focused on policy issues that impact the lives of people living in poverty. The focus of their presentations was to encourage the County League to support the food stamp program in urging the County Board of Supervisors to make the program more accessible.

We are still in need of additional members to serve on the LWV County Board. Vacant positions include, 1st VP of Administration, VP of Financial Planning, Directors of Natural Resources, Voter Service and Social Policy. I am happy to report that Ursula Wagstaff-Kuster from City League has agreed to serve as the On-Board Director of County Government. Eddie Cisco who has held this position for some time will continue Off-Board as observer of the Board of Supervisor meetings and make regular reports to the Board. The Board has asked Ursula and Eddie to work on revising the "Know Your County Government" handbook.

The Fire Study Committee continues to meet and most recently several members of the committee met with Supervisor Dianne Jacob to gain further insight into her goals for consolidation. The committee generally meets the fourth Saturday of

the month at 10:30 am at the League office. If you have an interest in this important study, please call me 619-922-8133, as we would be happy to have you join us.

Kay Ragan, Co-President

The San Diego County Regional Water Quality Board (SDCRWQB) established August 12, 2009 for a hearing on the discharge permit sought by Gregory Canyon LLC for its Gregory Canyon Landfill and had invited public comments. Since water is a significant vital resource in our county, the County League was concerned that adoption of the Tentative Order No. R9-2009-004 would be a hazard for San Diego County.

The construction and maintenance of the landfill would require a lot of water, therefore it would impact the current county low water supply as well as endanger the aquifers underneath the landfill and possibly the San Luis Rey River if the liner sprang a leak. I assembled the following comment letter and sent it to the SDCRWQB.

"The League of Women Voters of San Diego County includes the LWV of San Diego, LWV of North Coast, LWV of East County and LWV of Escondido. We are concerned that an adoption of Tentative Order No. R9-2009-004 would not be in the best interests of San Diego County. Water is a significant vital resource for our County.

The Gregory Canyon Landfill would be built on a valuable and irreplaceable fractured rock aquifer. The vital water resources in Gregory Canyon provide crucial beneficial use to local residents and municipalities located near the proposed project. Building a landfill adjacent to the San Luis Rey River would create a significant threat to the water quality and create human health risk.

The League supports the public right to know the potentially harmful effects of substances that they could encounter in their home, workplace and community. The Gregory Canyon's groundwater includes hazardous waste. There is also a potential impact of water contamination by toxins such as lead, pesticides, and mercury from batteries, old thermometers, and compact fluorescent lamps and bulbs.

If the Tentative Order is approved, the landfill will forever remain a threat to valuable water resources that are increasingly scarce. The LWV of SD County urges the SD Regional

Water Quality Control Board not to adopt the Tentative Order for the Gregory Canyon Landfill.”

A landfill setback occurred when the water company that promised to supply the water has refused. At this time the Board has not scheduled a hearing to adopt the permit for the landfill because recent events have changed the SEIR for Gregory Canyon requiring that it be revised for the Board to consider adoption, as the SDCRWQB had concluded there are significant unresolved CEQA issues.

Nancy McCleary, Co-President

Smart Voter Report

Our media already is full of stories about candidates preparing to run for election in 2010. Undoubtedly this is due to their need to raise money for their campaigns, increase their name recognition, and almost certainly to discourage potential competitors.

In San Diego County there are no local elections scheduled this November. The county's local elections are regularly scheduled in even-numbered years. Special local elections (i.e., a recall or filling a vacated seat) can occur at any time. For instance, there will be a recall election for an Oceanside city council seat on Dec. 8. Many local jurisdictions choose to wait until the next regularly scheduled election in order to save money.

The cities of San Diego and Chula Vista will hold primaries for some city council seats on June 8, 2010. Also on that ballot will be two Board of Supervisors seats, other county offices, including District Attorney and Sheriff, open or contested judgeships, some seats on the County Board of Education, the San Diego Community College District, and the San Diego Unified School District. One U.S. senator (Boxer) and all Congressional seats also will appear on the June primary ballot. Run-offs for some of these offices will be on Nov. 2, 2010, the statewide general election. The large remaining number of local offices throughout the county, including special districts, will be on the Nov. ballot. More information about the schedule of all seats up for election next year can be found on the Registrar's website, www.sdvote.com, in the Directory of Public Officials 2009/2010 document.

Three statewide ballot measures have qualified for the June primary, with more expected. You can find information about them and others that are circulating on the CA Secretary of State's site, www.sos.ca.gov. Smart Voter (www.smartvoter.org) will be activated next spring once the Registrar has certified the list of candidates for the June election. All qualified state and local propositions, will be included on the site. As in 2008, we will include many links from local media about specific contests. Some new features of the LWVC and Smart Voter sites will be discussed at the LWVC regional workshop scheduled for Saturday, October. 3

in Encinitas. Go to the LWVC members-only website for the workshop's registration and program information.

Joyce Joseph, Smart Voter Coordinator

League of Women Voters of San Diego County Council Meeting First United Methodist Church June 20, 2009

Kay Ragan, Co-President, opened the Council program at 9:30 a.m. The program planning committee, Marjie Larson, Elaine Barton, Liz Kruidenier, and Sylvia Hampton were recognized for organizing the program, securing the speakers, and soliciting from the Inter League Board all the tasty brunch selections.

The Program focus was, "Poverty and Hunger in San Diego." Dr. Bill Oswald, faculty member at Springfield College and Chair of the Caring Council spoke first and illustrated his presentation with a visual summary of the status of the poor and hungry in San Diego.

Some of the statistics were:

- Only 30% of the people in the county who are eligible for food stamps actually receive them
- There are 136,000 unclaimed food stamps
- This represents a loss to grocery stores of \$63,601,000
- There are 37 million poor in the U.S. and 20 million of them are of working age
- 700,000 out of the 37 million are actually eligible to work
- A family of 4 earning \$22,050 or less annually is considered poverty level
- 12.7 % live below this level
- 75% of people live from 1-2 paychecks away from poverty
- Less than 1 in 5 are on public assistance for more than 2 years at one time
- Causes of poverty: loss of job, 48% reduced work hours; and 10% death of breadwinner
- 47% of the population will experience poverty some time in their life

A survey was conducted with 187 people in poverty and the findings were revealing

- Food does not last for the month
- 74% say they can't provide balanced meals on the food stamp allotment
- We are teaching children to over eat when food is available
- Some parents not eating in 4th week
- The county considers fraud when there is inconsistency in an application

- Takes from 3-5 trips to qualify for food stamps
- Out of the hundreds of people applying for food stamps, only 36 have been prosecuted.

Joni Halpern, Attorney and Director of SPIN (Supportive Parents Information Network) spoke about the work of the volunteers in the organization. She noted the stereotype that is often referenced about people in poverty. She explained that it is an untrue and unfair picture. Twelve women who were struggling to survive while trying to secure job skills started SPIN.

She noted the BOS agreed to reduce the processing time for food stamps when in reality it has been lengthened and the human element has been largely removed. If the number of workers performing the required fingerprinting of everyone in a household 18 and older and those employed to do home searches where able to work with clients, there would be enough personnel to serve the client population

Members were challenged to send postcards to the BOS asking them to remove unnecessary barriers to food stamps; invest the resources necessary for the efficient delivery of services; and to humanize the application process. We were also asked to write letters, meet with individual Board members, be trained and monitor the offices where clients must go for service, and share the message with others.

Certificates were presented to Ms. Halpern and Dr. Oswald by Co-President McCleary. She also presented Jeff McDonald, staff writer for the Union Tribune, a certificate for his work in getting the word out about the issues surrounding food stamps.

Co-President Ragan presented an award to Sylvia Hampton for her 10 years + of service to the County League. An engraved clock that read, "Sylvia Hampton – Invaluable Counsel –1999-2009. Sylvia is completing her current term as Vice President, Health Care.

Co-President Nancy McCleary called the business meeting of the Council to order at 11:10 A.M.

1. Credentials Report

Sandy Cavanagh reported 20 members were present and 17 were official Voting delegates.

2. Parliamentarian

Mary Jean Word was introduced as the Parliamentarian

3. Council Rules

It was M/S by Nan Valerio and Sandy Cavanagh to approve the Council Rules as published on page 5 of the workbook. Passed unanimously

Approval of the Agenda

It was M/S by Nan Valerio and Sandy Cavanagh to approve the Agenda as printed. Passed unanimously

4. State of the ILO

Kay Ragan referenced the written report in the workbook and highlighted the need to fill vacant positions on the board.

5. Treasurer's Report

Ellen Gifford distributed the Treasurer's report and it is filed with these minutes.

6. Introduction of County Board Members –

Nancy introduced Vice President Vicki Beck who will fill the position vacated by Sylvia Hampton, as VP, Health Care. Nancy presented each of the Board members with a LWV pen.

7. Budget for 2009-2010

Ellen Gifford briefly reviewed the budget and explained the increased cost of rent for office space. *It was M/S by Ellen Gifford/Gail Tullao that the budget as presented on pages 18 &19 of the workbook be amended to increase the category, "Rent" to read \$3,300 and that the money be taken from Operational Reserves to cover the increased cost of \$1,950.* Questions were raised about whether there was an effort to renegotiate the rent with so many unoccupied office spaces. It was noted that such an effort had been made but the City League officers attempted to do that. They are under a lease agreement for another year. Their only option was to find another group that would sublease a part of the space. *Motion Passed unanimously.*

8. Directions to the Board by delegates

The following directions were given:

- 1) Roni Seay directed the board to allocate a large donation to the LWVC SMART VOTER in next year's budget
- 2) Marjie Larson directed the Board to recommend to the City League that they sponsor a luncheon program on Poverty and Hunger in San Diego to provide the opportunity for more people to be informed.
- 3) Ramona Kiltz called on the Board to report the status of the revision of the County General Plan and to direct efforts toward completing an update of a plan that is ten years old.
- 4) Roni Seay directed the Board to reconsider the dates for County Council and Convention meetings. There are many graduations and weddings commonly taking place in June which impacts attendance.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Kay Ragan in the absence of Anita Reith who was out of town.

Fair Elections Act is first step from abyss

Sacramento Bee (8/22/09) Op Ed by LWVC President Janis Hirohama.

Recent polls tell us that the Legislature's and Governor's approval ratings are at record lows, but we don't need surveys to

tell us that California has increasingly become a state that fails to represent the will of our people. We see it every day in our crumbling infrastructure, our failing schools and our packed emergency rooms. And now Sacramento has passed a budget that will put the California Dream further out of reach for a large swath of Californians. With the nation facing its deepest recession in decades, it was inevitable that our state would be forced to make painful choices to balance the budget. But the budget passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor is nothing short of disastrous, with average Californians left to shoulder most of the burden. We've been handed a budget of cuts, borrowing and accounting gimmicks. This latest budget will decimate our safety net by making massive cuts to vitally important health and human services programs, and our public schools and colleges – the building blocks of California's golden age of prosperity – will be gutted. We've mortgaged our future.

An antiquated requirement for a two-thirds supermajority vote in the Legislature to pass a budget is partially responsible for bringing California to this point. This requirement – which only two other states have – allows a small minority of lawmakers to dictate the terms of the debate. It leads to budget gridlock and it gives special interests the ability to co-opt the public interest by influencing just a small fraction of legislators. But this broken budget process is merely a symptom of a broader problem. We need change in Sacramento.

The League of Women Voters, one of the state's oldest government reform organizations, has long advocated eliminating the outdated two-thirds vote requirement. And we will continue to champion sensible reforms such as the California Fair Elections Act, which will appear on the June 2010 ballot to reduce the influence of the special interests that use money to buy power in Sacramento. Our current campaign finance system forces even the most well-intentioned elected officials to spend far too much of their time raising money from wealthy private donors and corporate interests, to the detriment of good public policy. At the conclusion of the legislative session this August – the very same time the fate of hundreds of bills will be decided in Sacramento – the money-raising frenzy will again kick into high gear. If anything positive can come from this most recent budget fiasco, it's the growing awareness by Californians of the need for structural reform in the way our government operates. Californians know the current campaign finance system doesn't have enough safeguards against the outsize influence of special interests, and the dysfunctional budget just passed in Sacramento gives us all the more reason to do something about it. We must start by passing the California Fair Elections Act in June 2010.

The California Fair Elections Act is based on the simple notion that elected officials should be accountable to the voters, not donors. Authored by Sen. Loni Hancock, D-Oakland, and signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the initiative would establish a voluntary pilot project that allows candidates running for California secretary of state in 2014 and 2018 to qualify for public financing if they agree to strict spending prohibi-

tions and can show they have a broad base of support by raising a large number of \$5 contributions. The program would be funded primarily by fees on lobbyists, lobbying firms and lobbyist employers, with no taxpayer dollars going to candidates.

The California Fair Elections Act represents the kind of change our state needs and voters want. It is an important first step toward breaking the toxic tie between campaign cash and public policy. Ultimately, by implementing a fair elections system we can help ensure that California gets a government made up of public-spirited lawmakers who are looking out for the interests of their constituents rather than the interests of their donors – in short, the government that California deserves.

Mary Wilson's LWVUS message to the League

"The public option in health care reform may not be essential to bureaucrats or insurance companies but it absolutely is essential to the almost 47 million uninsured Americans who live day to day without health care coverage," said League of Women Voters National President Mary G. Wilson.

"The current health care system is endangering our economy, our health, and our national security," Wilson said. "Last fall, voters elected a Congress and President that promised to reform our health care system. Voters made it clear that they want a change in our health care system, a change that puts the brakes on the excesses created by a system dominated by large insurance companies," she continued. "It is universal coverage that will determine the humanity of our system and a public option will make that possible for Americans who cannot obtain coverage through the traditional employer-sponsored plans," noted Wilson. "We believe that health care reform legislation must guarantee access to comprehensive and essential benefits to all U.S. residents."

"But the possibility of universal coverage is not the only advantage of the public option," warned Wilson. "We must control costs and the public option is the best chance to bring costs into line with reality. As a nation, we are spending \$1 out of every \$6 we earn on health care. Over the last three decades, increases in the amount we spend on health care have consistently risen faster than wages and inflation. Health care reform must provide effective cost controls, equitable distribution of services and allow for efficient and economical delivery of care. Offering everyone the choice of a government administered health insurance plan like Medicare that would compete with private health insurance plans is key to lowering costs."

"The public option is critical to health care reform," Wilson concluded. "Now is not the time for politicians to get cold feet just because a handful of special-interest-backed protesters spread lies and make noise at public forums. Congress and the President need to demonstrate real leadership and move forward with true health care reform."