



VOTER

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CUPERTINO-SUNNYVALE

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29th ANNUAL EDSOURCE FORUM ON CALIFORNIA EDUCATION POLICY

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY & FUNDING: CAN CALIFORNIA GET IT RIGHT?

Date: Friday, March 17
Time: 9 am – 3 pm
Place: Fremont Marriott
Speakers: Jack O'Connell, Superintendent of Public Instruction
 Glee Johnson, President, State Board of Education
Panelists: School Superintendents and Researchers
Cost: \$60 for LWV Members

It's a balancing act: holding schools accountable for results and making sure they have the resources and support they need to do the job. Both pieces—accountability and funding—entail complex policy decisions.

In the late 1990s California adopted rigorous academic standards that make it clear what the state expects all students to know and be able to do. A testing system measures performance against the standards and an accountability system involves stringent consequences for results.

While California created one accountability system the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandated a different set of accountability requirements with which the state's system must align. Other accountability-related policy challenges include avoiding unintended consequences from the high school exit exam and developing effective, targeted intervention strategies for school and district underperformance.

Though expectations have risen, little has changed in California's funding system. Traditional processes determine how much to budget for education, how the state allocates the funds, and how school districts make their spending decisions. But today's results-driven approach raises a host of questions. How much does it take to educate a child under the standards? How much more is the cost for children with special needs? How efficiently and effectively are schools using the money they already have? Could changes in the funding system have an effect on student performance?

At the forum top state leaders and local superintendents will discuss the latest developments and directions in accountability. Panelists will include researchers who are initiating newly-commissioned funding adequacy and efficiency studies.

To register call EdSource at 650-917-9481

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Although it's not prime election season, we aren't all off cruising the Caribbean (aw, shucks!). Current local League activities include interviewing state representatives and senators from each of the districts that we serve. Did you know that the League interviews each of our legislators annually? We send a full team—some to ask questions, some to take notes, one to run the meeting. And we don't just conduct the interview so that those three or four League members in the room know what one politician thinks about an issue or two. We ask so that we can spread the word, and we ask so that those we elect and send to Sacramento to serve our interests are periodically reminded that we the voters do pay attention between elections (or at least that some of us do). This year's interview teams are already set up and the appointments made, but I'll try to give you more advance notice next year so that if you want to sit in and see what this process looks like, you'll have time to give me a call and join an interview team. Keep it in mind!

Another thing to bear in mind for next year is that the nominating committee will be looking around soon for people ready to step up to another level of involvement with their local league. I will personally assure you that there is no more interesting, funny, companionable group around than the LWV-CS Board, and I would happily serve on the board just for an excuse to hang out with these folks once a month or so. If you are considering the possibility of volunteering to serve on the board, I recommend that you attend a board meeting or two (see your VOTER for information on when and where) and get a feel for what such an evening is like. You won't regret spending the time.

Susan

HELP WANTED: PUBLICITY CHAIR

The League has many programs that are of interest to the general public but if people don't know about them they can't take advantage of them. Do you have a few hours each month to devote to contacting newspapers and other media to publicize our meetings or publications? You would be providing a great service to the public and the League.

To help, contact Susan Hough 408-737-8192 shough@mennen.org or Marilyn Howard 408-255-0977 mjzhactivist@yahoo.com.

Board Briefs

At its February meeting the board:

- Learned that our League will host candidate forums for the District Attorney and Judges
- Approved the energy consensus and the Program Planning decisions
- Heard an update of plans for the Community Appeal which will be sent in March

Looking Back

25 years ago members attended a legislative strategy conference and learned why public influence on government is especially needed and what citizen input is most effective.

15 years ago Hon. Len Edwards, Assistant Presiding Judge of the Santa Clara Superior Court, Juvenile Division spoke at the County League Dinner and tied together many threads of our year-long county-wide study of Juvenile Justice.

10 years ago the focus of the County League Dinner was "Building Sustainable Communities"

Membership News

Thank you for renewing your membership: Ann McElroy.

Thank you for including a donation with your dues: Joyce Bartlett, Peter Botsford, Wynne Dobyns, Susan Hough, Sharon Jenks, Dianne and Regis McKenna, Sonja Messner, and LaVerne Prentice.

Welcome new members Delores Carson and Francis McDonald.

INFRASTRUCTURE A HOT TOPIC

Infrastructure means the basic building blocks, the public structures and facilities, that support our social structure. Normally, it is not the focus of major debate at the start of an election year, but this year it is at the top of both the Governor's and the Legislature's agendas. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) has issued a report summarizing some of the main considerations on the subject.

The state's capital facilities include everything from colleges to highways, dams to prisons and parks to offices. The state also funds local public infrastructure, usually requiring local matching funds. The LAO says that "most of the state's infrastructure investment was made in the 1950s through the 1970s, particularly in such areas as higher education, transportation, and water management."

Spending dropped sharply in the 1970s, before resuming a steady rise after 1981. It has not, however, kept pace with our population increase or the needs of an expanding economy, nor has it adequately provided for the maintenance that might have kept facilities from deteriorating. For example, the Central Valley's levee system needs more than \$1 billion just to rehabilitate aging levees, and that would not necessarily protect newer urban development in areas subject to flooding.

A 1999 law called for a comprehensive five-year plan for infrastructure to be submitted each January by the Governor. Such plans were produced in 2002 and 2003, but not since then.

Now state agencies are updating information and a plan is expected soon. It was foreshadowed in the Governor's State of the State speech and press announcements, which called for multi-billion dollar capital expenditures for transportation, water storage, levees, schools, prisons and air quality. Legislative leaders are working on an \$11 billion infrastructure bond measure with a different list of projects.

Although user fees or taxes such as the gas tax or water fees have been used to pay for some facilities, most infrastructure is financed by bonds and repaid from the state GF. Facilities are expensive to construct, but last a long time and serve generations of taxpayers. Interest costs to repay the bonds can make the total cost nearly double the bond proceeds, but adjusting for inflation over the usual 30 year repayment span makes the price tag much less, e.g., \$1.25 million for each \$1 million borrowed.

California now has about \$53 billion of GF debt outstanding, \$42 billion for infrastructure and another \$10.4 billion for the deficit financing bonds. We also have about \$30 billion of bonds authorized but not yet sold, although some of that is committed to projects not yet ready to build. Debt service costs will be about \$5.8 billion in 2006-07. The state's level of debt service is still within what is considered an acceptable range, but could become problematic if not carefully managed. California's credit rating has improved but is still the lowest of any state rated by the major credit rating services, and this increases our cost of borrowing. The major reason given is not our total outstanding debt, but the state's continuing inability to deal with its structural deficit.

With any plan, a key question is how it would be funded. The 2003 plan proposed expenditures of \$54 billion over five years, about 54 percent from existing state and federal transportation funds, 36 percent from General Obligation (GO) bonds and lease-revenue bonds, and the rest from direct appropriations from the General Fund (GF) and other special funds. Governor Schwarzenegger has listed lease-revenue bonds, a water fee on households and businesses, higher port fees, tolls and other possible revenues as additional sources of funding. Of the Governor's \$223 billion ten-year infrastructure spending proposal, about \$101 billion would be from existing sources, \$68 billion from new GF-supported bonds, and \$53 billion from new funding sources.

Infrastructure spending is an investment in California's future, and we have many areas of critical needs. The question, however, always comes down to how to weigh those needs against other needs that are competing for the public's dollars.

*Reprinted from the League of Women Voters of California
Update February 2006.*

Bay Area League Day

STATE OF THE BAY SYMPOSIUM: RESTORATION, STEWARDSHIP, ACCESS

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area was organized to address the region-wide issues and governance of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to the counties that surround the Bay, the region was further defined by the air basin, the watershed, economic activity and, not the least, by the Bay itself. Primary regional concerns of the time were pollution and filling of the Bay, air pollution, water pollution and loss of open space. Six regional agencies have been formed to deal with these issues.

The symposium held on January 27, 2006 in Oakland focused on the State of the Bay with the intent to help Leagues understand the progress that has been made in restoring and maintaining the quality of the Bay.

Saving the Bay: Why the Bay Matters

The San Francisco Bay and Delta make one of the world's largest estuaries and the largest wetlands in California. They need fresh water to maintain their health. The problem is most of the fresh water coming into the Delta goes to cotton fields and swimming pools. According to Will Travis, the Executive Director of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), the Bay is not only an economic asset but it has spiritual value. It is the heart and soul of the Bay Area and gives us a sense of place. It is a "book of history and a hymnal." He said saving the Bay is a testimonial to the spirit of democracy. Travis closed by saying, "Without the Bay we would be just like anywhere else."

History of Bay Issues

According to Arthur Feinstein of Audubon California, there are several million birds that need the Bay habitat for rest and food on their migration. We are losing seasonal wetlands due to contamination. Human disturbance including dogs, cats, trails and boating also affect the migratory birds.

Sylvia McLaughlin, one of the three women who founded "Save the Bay," spoke about the history of the organization. It started in Berkeley in 1960 when the city planned to fill 200,000 acres of wetland. These three women persuaded the City Council that there was a better way to get rid of the fill. They realized they needed state legislation to protect the whole Bay, not just the Berkeley shoreline. State legislation was passed in 1965 and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission was formed in 1967. McLaughlin felt they were successful because they learned about issues, presented accurate information, attracted dedicated volunteers and gathered a wide variety of allies. She said, "When we started out all we thought we needed was a good law and the Bay would be saved. We found out it is an ongoing problem."

The Bay Institute was founded in 1981 to argue at the state level for fresh water flows through the Delta. Grant Davis, Executive Director of the Bay Institute, pointed out that two out of three Californians depend on the watershed of the Bay for their water. Lack of fresh water in the Delta is contributing to the decline of species. The Bay Institute has created the Bay Index, indicators that answer key questions about Bay health. Their scorecard can be found at www.bay.org.

Stewards for the Health of the Bay

Steve Ritchie, California Coastal Conservancy and Executive Project Manager of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, pointed out that although the salt ponds removed tidal habitat in the South Bay they did preserve land from development and provided stops for many migratory birds that found their food in a saltier environment. In 2003 a Framework Agreement led to public acquisition of the salt ponds for \$100 million. The project is preparing a scientifically sound, publicly supported restoration project that can be implemented within five years. Restoration will begin in 2008. See www.southbayrestoration.org for more information on the project.

State of the Bay (cont.)

Bruce Wolfe, Executive Officer of the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board reported that filling the Bay has almost stopped. We are holding our own on water quality by preserving, controlling, and enhancing all water in the state. Now the Board's efforts are focused on enhancement projects; salt ponds, breaching the dikes at Hamilton Air Base, and rerouting Peyton slough around mountains of waste from a copper plant. He pointed out that floods are caused by paving and building. Water gets to creeks faster because rain cannot be absorbed into the ground nor percolate into the water table. He says he has hope and optimism but we have to get all agencies and stake holders to work together and get the message out.

Laura Thompson, manager of the San Francisco Bay Trail Project in Oakland pointed out how the Bay Trail benefits the public. It provides recreation for hikers, bicyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts, environmental education, wildlife viewing, and transportation benefits. Approximately 270 miles of the trail are complete. When finished it will extend over 500 miles and link the shoreline of nine counties and 47 cities and cross seven toll bridges. For more information on the trail go to www.baytrail.org.

Commitment to the future

Russell Hancock, CEO of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, spoke about Silicon Valley's economy and its effect on the environment. The valley experienced a 220,000 job loss between 2001 and 2005 but since it had added 350,000 jobs leading up to the crash he saw the job loss as a return to normalcy. New growth areas are biotechnology and nanotechnology convergent with regular technology. Both business and the civic community are committed to open space, housing density and air quality. Businesses of the future are environmentally friendly and non-polluting. They are selling ideas. The environment is a huge asset when competing for workers because the workforce loves the outdoors.

San Francisco Bay is essential to the Bay Area sense of place according to Jeff Blanchfield, Chief Planning Officer of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). It is our Eiffel Tower, Big Ben or Niagara Falls. It is what draws people to the Bay Area. Blanchfield says that new workers will be willing to pay for civic amenities because they need a quality of place.

Nadine Hitchcock serves as Program Manager of the San Francisco Bay Program at the California Coastal Conservancy which was formed in 1976. Recent accomplishments of the agency are the restoration of 1,000 acres of tidelands, acquisition of 100,000 acres of tidelands and leading efforts to eradication of Spartina, an aggressive non-native Atlantic cordgrass on 1,000 acres of mudflats and restored tidal marshes. Hitchcock said the Conservancy has enhanced or restored 20,000 acres of Baylands but the needs for the future are a regional vision, scientifically quantifiable economic benefits, new partners, and greater citizen involvement.

Before 1850 the status of the San Francisco Bay was determined by nature. After 1850 it was determined by people according to David Lewis of Save San Francisco Bay Association. This organization is trying to "get people to wake up" and learn how we have an impact on the Bay. Lewis feels that people need a direct experience with the Bay. Taking people to the bay opens possibilities for people to learn that we can't just be for the right things; we need to do something about it.

The Jack London Aquatic Center, JLAC, is a non-profit organization. They constructed and operate the JLAC boathouse located in Oakland's Estuary Park. Robert Kidd, president of the board of directors said that the organization's purpose was to bring children from low-income areas to the bay to experience water activities such as rowing. They ran into unexpected barriers. The children had no transportation to get them from school to the boathouse. They were afraid of the water because they couldn't swim. JLAC had to deal with these issues before they could proceed with their original purpose. His point was that you need to look at the bigger picture when you are planning an activity.

As some of the speakers emphasized, the key to keeping the Bay open and improving its health is getting people out to see it, and understand its importance to all who live here—plants, birds, people and other animals. Many are endangered. Direct access to the Bay wetlands and shores is available at various Baylands parks—Sunnyvale, Mountain View, Palo Alto—and particularly at learning centers with exhibits and programs such as Alviso, Palo Alto Baylands and the Don Edwards education centers in Alviso and across the Dumbarton Bridge.

Roberta Hollimon and Louise Levy

SHINING THE LIGHT ON GOVERNMENT

What's going on? This is a question we ask every day as we go about our lives. We need information, all kinds of information, in order to make decisions about what we should do and how we plan our lives. And when we are trying to decipher what government is doing, what it should do and how we should vote, accurate information is absolutely crucial.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens at all levels of government. Citizens have the right—and the responsibility!—to keep themselves informed about what government is doing. In order to be informed, citizens must be able to obtain accurate information about their government at every level. Thus the League believes that governmental bodies must protect the citizen's right to know by making public records accessible.

Once citizens have the information they need, it is their right—and responsibility!—to contribute to public discussion of policy. Active participation by the public in federal, state and local government requires that officials make decisions openly and that they provide broadly publicized, convenient opportunities for participation by the public in the process.

California has enacted a number of state statutes that provide for the public's access to government information, including documents and meetings. They can be divided into two categories:

Access to Government Documents. There are two basic laws that provide for the public's access to government documents:

- ***The Legislative Open Records Act*** provides that the public may inspect legislative records. The act also requires legislative committees to maintain documents related to the history of legislation.
- ***The California Public Records Act*** establishes the right of every person to inspect and obtain copies of state and local government documents. The act requires state and local agencies to establish written guidelines for public access to documents and to post these guidelines at their offices.

Access to Government Meetings. There are several laws that provide for the public's access to government meetings:

- ***The Ralph M. Brown Act*** governs meetings of legislative bodies of local agencies. The act requires local legislative bodies to provide public notice of agenda items and to hold meetings in an open forum. It also covers the right of the public to speak at the meetings of legislative bodies.
- ***The Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act*** requires that meetings of state bodies be conducted openly and that documents related to a subject of discussion at a public meeting be made available for inspection.
- ***The Grunsky-Burton Open Meeting Act*** requires that meetings of the Legislature be open to the public and that all persons be allowed to attend the meetings.

The California Constitution did not generally address the public's access to government information until 2004 when a constitutional amendment was passed to ensure adequate protection for these laws. **Proposition 59 added to the State Constitution a constitutional right of public access to information.** The measure still exempts some information from disclosure, such as law enforcement records. But future governmental actions that limit the right of access would have to demonstrate the need for that restriction. In light of today's concerns about government secrecy and threats to civil liberties, the statement Californians made by elevating this access to constitutional status is a significant one.

Armed with these tools, citizens can move forward to obtain the information they need to make informed decisions about public policy and contribute to the public debate about the future of our government at every level.

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LEAGUE NEWS

National – Thanks in large part to the League’s activists, at the end of 2005 the Senate upheld its rules and refused to allow the opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in the Department of Defense Appropriations (DOD) bill.

State – President Jackie Jacobberger announced, “The LWVC Education Fund has taken on a major responsibility in assuming management of the *Easy Voter Guide*. This, with *Smart Voter*, *Pros and Cons* and *In Depth*, means that the LWVCEF will have a full range of materials available for educating voters about the election.”

County – The Santa Clara Valley Water District presented an award plaque to the League of Women Voters and other members of the Water Resources Collaborative. It states “AWARD HONORING THOSE WHO HAVE VOLUNTARILY MOVED BEYOND THE CONSTRAINTS OR HAVE OVERCOME OBSTACLES IN ORDER TO MOVE CALIFORNIA WATER POLICY FORWARD Presented by Public Officials for Water & Environmental Reform at the California Water Policy 15 Conference November 2005.”

SUNSHINE WEEK

During the week of March 12 – 18 Americans around the country will celebrate Sunshine Week 2006. In California, we have the opportunity to celebrate the commitment we made to open government in 2004 when we supported Proposition 59 and elevated our right to know from government code to a fundamental constitutional right.

Journalism groups, media companies, open-government and First Amendment advocates, librarians, and educators across the country are joining together to sponsor Sunshine Week 2006. Our goal is to stimulate public discussion about why open government is important to all of us.

The survival of our democracy depends upon active participation by the public in state and local government. Such participation involves both the right and the responsibility to be informed, to be heard, and to be involved not only in, but also beyond elections. Such participation requires that officials make decisions openly and that they provide broadly publicized, convenient opportunities for participation by the public in the governmental process.

LEAGUE WEBSITES

LWV Cupertino-Sunnyvale	www.cs.ca.lwvnet.org
LWV Santa Clara County	www.scc.ca.lwvnet.org
LWV Bay Area	www.lwvba-ca.org
Bay Area Monitor	www.bayareamonitor.org
LWV California	www.lwvc.org
Members	www.lwvc.org/lwvonly
LWV United States	www.lwv.org

Help Make Government Work Join the League of Women Voters

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to all men and women of voting age who are U.S. citizens. Others are welcome to join the League as associate members.

Send your check to LWV Cupertino-Sunnyvale, P.O. Box 2923, Sunnyvale, CA 94087.

___ \$50 Individual member	Name: _____
___ \$75 Two members in a household	Address: _____
___ Contribution \$ _____	City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____
Telephone: _____	Email: _____

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