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August 2015

The Palo Alto *VOTER*

The League of Women Voters of Palo Alto
www.lwvpaloalto.org



Join the fun
at
LWVPA's

Summer Social !

Wednesday, August 19, 2015

7 pm - 9 pm

at the

Garden Court Hotel,

520 Cowper Street, Palo Alto

Our speaker will be

The Honorable Joe Simitian,

Santa Clara County Board of

Supervisors

Coffee, dessert, and socializing to precede the speaker. Bring along a friend and potential new League member.

Please RSVP by August 15, to
lwvpaoffice@gmail.com or 903-0060

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Register New
Citizens to Vote
at New Citizen
Ceremonies in
Campbell.

Thursday, August 20 and Thursday,
September 17.
Details on page 3.



Message from our President

I hope your summer has been refreshing! While *we* might have been relaxing, the members of an LWVUS Study Committee have been finishing months of work on the **Study of the Constitutional Amendment Process**. And this fall it's our turn.



Wondering why this is important right now? Well, the country's gaping political divide has prompted some partisans on both the left and the right to suggest using constitutional amendments to settle certain controversial topics. This year we've seen calls for amendments to overturn Citizens United, to allow the states to decide whether gay marriage should be legal, and to subject Supreme Court Justices to popular vote.



Article V of the U.S. Constitution outlines two procedures that may be used to initiate a change to the document: (A) both the *U.S. Senate and House* garner a 2/3 majority vote on a proposed amendment OR (B) 2/3 of the *state legislatures* agree to call a national convention. Once an amendment passed by either method, of course it faces an arduous ratification process.

Although none of the 27 amendments to the Constitution has been proposed by a Constitutional Convention (the 1787 Convention having been authorized only to amend the Articles of Confederation, not to produce a new Constitution), there are now nationwide efforts for the *states* to call an Article V Convention. Proposed subjects include reducing the federal government's power and overturning Citizens United.

Is it true, as some claim, that such a convention would become uncontrollable since it could write its own rules and set its own agenda? Or, as others insist, are the rules and procedures governing a convention clear and the fears of a "runaway" convention nonsense?

This fall each local League will get to address these important questions. As many LWV leaders will tell you, being part of a **local or county study committee** is the best way to find your League footing. Now is your chance to join other members to review the LWVUS materials and then share the information with our membership. We hope to combine efforts with one or more neighboring Leagues where, at a single event, the facts will be laid out and, in separate parts of the meeting room, each local League will discuss and reach its own consensus.

To understand both the **Constitutional Amendment Process** and the **Money in Politics Review** (also scheduled for this fall!), I encourage you to "attend" the July 29 webinar explaining each. See the link on page 6 to register.

Ellen Forbes

LWV of Palo Alto: Officers, Directors, Off-Board Roster (650) 903-0600, www.lwvpaloalto.org

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Board Meeting Summary June 27, 2015

Administration. The “new” Board met on June 27, immediately after the Board retreat that morning. Most of the business concerned organizing for the upcoming year.



The Board approved appointments for the Calendar Committee, the Nominating Committee, and the Budget Committee.

Guide to California Government

Discussion. The Board decided to purchase seventy copies of this book at a 40 percent discounted price for distribution to social studies teachers in the Palo Alto schools. The Board considered whether teachers appreciated and used this publication. There was a strong opinion that the books are good public relations for the League and are used in schools and libraries as well as the League voter services activities.



Membership Renewal. The membership mailing will be sent to LWV members in July.

Marlene Prendergast

A Newcomer's Perspective

I am a new member of the Palo Alto League, although I have been attached to The League in various States over the years as my go-to source of information about voter issues. As you can imagine in this part of the world, leadership, activism for the common good, knowledge, skill, and experience are at the levels to make a real difference in society. To be connected to LWV Palo Alto has been, and is, a joy and an education. There is so much good work being done, so much inspiration to a newcomer, and so much to learn. And, here is the best part: whatever task you can take on in The League, large or small, is so very much appreciated and needed.



At my first ‘Welcome New Members’ evening I was moved to be in the presence of so many accomplished women who have been creating wonderfully diverse and active life stories in which service to others has been key. My first year as a member has included registering high school seniors to vote at Gunn and Paly beginning the important work of encouraging people to actually vote, regardless of party or position.

There has been a lot more going on, “Lunch with League” events, the Annual Meeting, meeting members from other Bay Area Leagues, but importantly for me I was asked to join the Board to coalesce Voter Service activities.

I would dearly love to connect with members for whom encouraging participation through voting is an interest. 2016 is an election year and the League will have much important, non-partisan, work to do. Please find me at lwvpaloalto.org/contact under Voter Service Coordinator.

Jeannie Lythcott

Voter Registration Activities Past and Present

In April, we had a very successful Voter Registration activity at Palo Alto High School. We registered 31 students.

I wish to thank **Ellen Forbes, Jean MacDonell, Jean Lythcott, Mary Alice Thornton, Pat Saffir** and **Joyce Tavrow** for their help. We also had the help of Palo Alto High students, **Mary McNamara, Clara de Martel** and **Emma Chiu** and teacher, **William Hall**.

On **Thursday, August 20**, and **Thursday, September 17**, we will be helping the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters register New Citizens at the Heritage Theater in Campbell. There are usually two ceremonies and possibly a third each day. We will know more closer to the day. Six people are needed for each session. If there are seats available, we have been able to attend and it is very moving to see the responses of the new citizens.

After the ceremony, we help register the new citizens. The first session starts at 9 am and the second at 1 pm. If there is a third, it will start at 3 pm.



National Voter Registration Day is **Tuesday, September 22**. We will be registering voters at the Palo Alto Veterans Hospital as we have in the past.

Please let me know if you are interested in helping with any of these activities.

Liza Taft



Advocacy Report by Phyllis Cassel

LWV Palo Alto

Buena Vista Mobile Home Park LWVPA is delighted that the city and county have committed \$14.5 million dollars each to fund the purchase of Buena Vista Mobile Home Park. This is a significant contribution towards the purchase of the park. There are, however, many more steps before a successful preservation of this site is completed.

LWV California

“Make It Fair Coalition” and SCA 5 The LWVC announced last month that it is pleased to support Senate Constitutional Amendment 5, (SCA 5), the Property Tax Fairness Amendment, as amended June 9, 2015, and that LWVC has joined the *Make It Fair Coalition* which proposes a constitutional amendment to change Proposition 13. SCA 5 (Hancock and Mitchell) will eliminate inequities in the existing constitutional provisions governing property taxes for commercial and industrial property. It proposes requiring commercial property to be assessed at fair market value.

After Proposition 13 passed, the Legislature created a loophole for commercial property so that no reassessment occurs at the time of a sale unless 50 percent of the ownership changes. This has allowed businesses to structure ownership changes to avoid reassessment. The result is that since 1978 the fraction of revenue coming from taxation of commercial property has declined from 45 percent to 28 percent of total property tax revenues. It is estimated that if commercial property were taxed at full market value, the increased revenue statewide from property taxes would be about \$9 billion per year.

Responding to a call for action from LWVC, LWVPA sent a letter of support to Senator Jerry Hill who is a member of the Senate Governance and Finance Committee. SCA 5, as an amendment to the constitution, must be passed by the voters, however, a 2/3 positive vote in both houses of the legislature will place the issue on the ballot without having to gather signatures and a vote could come as early as next June.

[SCA 5 letter of support to Senate Governance and Finance Committee](#)

Senate Bill 32 [Take Action Now](#) You can take action now on [SB 32 \(Pavley\)](#) that will lower the target for California’s greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. You can help further California’s commitment to reducing the impact of climate change by [urging your state senator to support this important bill](#).



Senate Bill 350 The League also supports the concept of [SB 350 \(de León\)](#), a bill to increase the use of renewable energy sources, reduce petroleum use, and increase energy efficiency in buildings by 2030.

LWV of the US

Several wins at the Supreme Court

Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission Upheld In a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court handed a [big victory to citizen-led democracy](#). The [Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Redistricting Commission](#) decision ruled that Arizona’s independent redistricting commission set up by voters is constitutional. The League of Women Voters of the U.S. joined with other concerned organizations in [an amicus brief](#) in this case, arguing that the Court had already ruled that excessive partisan gerrymandering is unconstitutional. The Leagues of Women Voters of Arizona and Illinois also joined amicus briefs in this case. California has a similar redistricting commission which could have been adversely effected if the decision had not been upheld.

Affordable Care Act The Supreme Court issued a 5-4 win for Affordable Health Care . The League joined an amicus brief in the King v. Burwell case arguing that the tax subsidies are essential to women’s health and the ACA’s continued viability.

Marriage Equality Elizabeth MacNamara, President of the LWVUS, expressed the League’s joy at the Supreme Court decision allowing marriage of two people no matter their gender identity, a win for equal rights.

To link to the **BLUE HIGHLIGHTED** websites in the VOTER, you need to read this in a PDF format on a computer. Go to our website at www.lwvpaloalto.org/VOTER.html or email lwvpaoffice@gmail.com to start receiving the VOTER as a PDF via email.

LWVC State Convention Reports

A Treasure Trove of Information - Ellen Forbes

LWVC has posted a treasure trove of information from this year's three-day San Diego Convention.

At <https://lwvc.wordpress.com/> you can access the presentations, PowerPoint slides, handouts from the workshops and speakers, slides from each plenary session, and a list of award winners. From the "The Future of Voter Service in California" to "The Rhino in the Room" (under "Building a More 'Leaderful' League"), you can get it all with a couple of clicks.

One workshop I attended, **Democracy in Dialogue: Empowering Our Communities Through Civil Civic Engagement**, was especially relevant for these politically polarized times. Four different Leagues, including one from out of state, gave their own takes on Civil Discourse, a core element of democracy. This is a brief summary of the workshop, but the full set of PowerPoint slides are at <https://lwvc.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/lwvc-cd-wksp-051615v12-final-wo-notes.pdf>.

A New Take on Pros and Cons by LWV San Diego The presenters described an effective and fun new way to do Pros & Cons - gather at bars for 'Sips + Civility.' The intent is for attendees to DISCUSS ballot measures. They borrowed their plan's etiquette section from **IVN.us**, which was new to me. The Independent Voter Network, IVN.us actively encourages constructive dialogue by providing unfiltered political news and policy analysis from independent writer/contributors across the political spectrum.

Creating Common Ground for Civility in San Luis Obispo by LWV of San Luis Obispo County Just days ago, on July 7, the SLO League rolled out its Civil Discourse campaign with a resolution from their County Board of Supervisors—the same supervisors who had sought their help and funded much of their League's two-year study on Civil Discourse. LWV-SLO has produced a free brochure called "Civil Discourse in the Public Arena" and created attractive "I ♥ Civil Discourse" buttons.

Creating Democracy Hubs with Academic Institutions by LWV of North County San Diego This League worked closely with university students, the San Diego Deliberation Network, and the Kettering Foundation. Kettering believes that "When citizens deliberate about an issue and when a community has a habit of asking citizens to make choices... **[c]itizens take ownership of problems. They talk about what they can do, not what others ought to do.**"

Training Washington State Communities for Civility by LWV of Washington and Dumas & Associates, Inc. The Washington state League says this of civility: "**Being civil does not mean being silent. It does not mean avoiding contentious public issues. On the contrary, healthy**

disagreement is central to a robust, flourishing democracy." Their study and presentation dealt with the role of emotion in civil dialogue, the process of de-escalation by design, and the concept of "transpartisanship."

Drafting and Enforcing Local Legislation - Joyce Tavrow

I was privileged to attend the 2015 CA State League Convention as a League delegate. One workshop I went to was called "Analyzing Local Legislation" presented by Raul Macias, American Civil Liberties Union of California.

The workshop was designed to help Leaguers draft desired legislation. A Power Point presentation walked us through eight steps to achieve this goal. Full details are available at this link: <https://lwvc.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/locallegislationpresentation.pdf>

In my years of experience with the League, I have found that the League is much more likely to support or oppose proposed legislation than it is to initiate new legislation. However, it is wise to have guidelines to follow if we do decide to propose new legislation.

As I listened to the presentation, it occurred to me that in addition to crafting new legislation, another wise use of League members' limited time and resources would be to make sure that previously passed legislation is enforced. Some examples of laws or ordinances currently on the books come to mind.

Lynn Rosenstock, a Palo Alto League member, asked me if I could do anything at the Convention to enforce the analysis of Rape Test Kits, assembled for each person who sought medical attention after a rape, for clues to the victimizer with a follow-up by our local safety officers. In most states, thousands of those kits are stored with no investigative examination of them.

In another example, the lack of enforcement of an existing regulation resulted in the September 2010 PG&E explosion in San Bruno. Users of PG&E power paid monthly fees to the company for maintenance of their lines. That money was diverted elsewhere resulting in the loss of property owners' lives and homes. Who should have insisted that the payments be used as promised?

Palo Alto recently hired a third code enforcer to assure that an existing city ordinance dealing with the issue of noise from leaf blowers is followed. Until now, no one had been assigned to that task. These are just three examples out of many indicating utter disregard for existing rules.

Leagues at all levels might consider making compliance with present laws, regulations, and ordinances as important a role for our organization as promoting new ones.



Ellen Forbes receiving the Yellow Rose Award at the LWVC Convention

LWVUS Key Structures of Democracy



Money in Politics Review and Constitutional Amendment Study

At Convention 2014, delegates chose Key Structures of Democracy as the program for the League of Women Voters for the 2014-2016 biennium.

Three committees have been selected to collect and disseminate information on: money in politics; the process of amending the Constitution; and redistricting in the states. This ambitious undertaking will end by June 2016. As the LWVUS committees go about their work, there are things that our League can do to inform ourselves and our community about these topics that are critical for our democracy.

The timeline follows:

Spring 2015: Education materials posted periodically on the League Management website. Leagues are encouraged to use these materials for member and community meetings;

Fall 2015: Study guides and consensus questions posted for the Money in Politics Review and Constitutional Amendment Study. Leagues hold consensus meetings;

February 1, 2016: Consensus reports (electronic) from Leagues due to LWVUS, and

April 2016 National LWV Board meeting: Consensus reports and resulting position(s), if any, approved.

Information on the [Money in Politics Review](#) and [Constitutional Amendment Study](#), including scope of work, suggested readings and timelines can be found already on the League Management website, and will be updated periodically in the weekly League Update. Our League can start gathering information at the local (state) level about laws governing campaign finance and the constitutional amendment process. This is also a good time to form a local study committee or committees and begin to identify local scholars and other experts to work with the League in developing forums for community education. The key structures of democracy operate at all levels of democracy and reform is needed everywhere, not just in Washington, D.C.

In addition to including background information, the League Management website includes a Money in Politics forum where members can discuss the many issues raised by money in politics. Forums on the process of Constitutional Amendments and Redistricting will also be available in the next few months. To stay up-to-date on the latest information, subscribe to the weekly League Update by following [these directions](#). In order to make the studies successful and reflective of the views of all Leagues, we need to get prepared to participate in these all important activities.

If you are interested in getting involved please contact Phyllis Cassel or Mary Alice Thornton.

Adapted by Sue Hermsen, from an LWVUS website posting

For more information on the LWVUS Key Structures of Democracy Program join this *Webinar*:

Overview of MIP and Constitutional Amendment Studies

The Chairs of the LWVUS Money in Politics Review and Constitutional Amendment Study Committees will provide a webinar with general background on national studies and an orientation to the two current studies. Get answers regarding timeline, materials and the study process. [Sign Up Today](#). For further information contact Betsy Lawson at blawson@lww.org

New Voices in the Summer



Siena Youth Center: Nimsi Garcia and Erendira Parra, former NV students and interns, will co-lead a summer video program at Siena Youth Center for six weeks in July and August. Fabiola Rubero and Luis Cruz, graduates of the video academy at Siena last semester, will be assistants. Summer students will complete a video profile of themselves, a family member or a community member.

Menlo-Atherton: Steering Committee members need to hire a **Classroom Coordinator and a Program Assistant** ASAP. Ana Angel is beginning a PhD program at USF, and while she will continue to direct New Voices and to lead the semester-long Siena program, she will not be at M-A. Chris Lawes, our technical lead, is enjoying international success with his day job, selling pop-up planetariums, so he cannot commit to M-A next fall. Let us know if you know candidates with video skills who are excited about using them to introduce youth to civic engagement. We need more applicants!

Our **end-of-year screening** at M-A featured a lively discussion about **Identity Safety**, with participants trying to read between the lines of the students' video. A highlight was Rafael Zumarraga's mother who attended the screening with her family and who described her own experience as a student at M-A 20 years earlier. Some things have changed, but many – cliques, uneven preparation, tracking – have not. She was pleased by the video that her son helped to make.

For questions or more information, contact New Voices at: nv4youth@gmail.com

*Sheila Botein, LWV South San Mateo County
Veronica Tincher, LWV Palo Alto*

LWVPA Webmaster Position Available!

Our beloved Webmaster Pat McGuire will be moving out of the area soon. We are looking for a member to take over the role of Webmaster starting in September. Are you interested in playing this critical role in communicating to our members and the public? Our web software is user-friendly and training will be provided. For more information contact Valerie Stinger.

The LWVPA Book Club

will meet on

Friday, August 21, at 10 am

to discuss:

“I Am Malala”

by Malala Yousafzai

This is the first-hand account of the girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban.

The meeting is at the home of Betty Gerard.

The LWVPA Book Club meets every two months. Non-members interested in discussing the current book are welcome.



Can't Find That Number?

Do you have your Membership Directory that was published in August of 2014? The next edition will be out in a few months, but in the meantime we want to make sure everybody has the current (dark green) copy. Please contact Ellen Forbes, Lynne Russell or Megan Fogarty if you need one.

Thank You!

Thank you to all the board and off-board members who reviewed this *VOTER*, and for the invaluable proofreading of **Ellen Forbes** and **Betty Gerard**.

Sue Hermsen, Voter Editor

Visit our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pages/League-of-Women-Voters-of-Palo-Alto/256504167760182?ref=bookmarks> - “Like us” and share with your friends. It is that simple. Then when you get a message from our page, please share that message with your friends. Help spread the word. Thanks!



It's Membership Renewal Time!

Be on the lookout for your dues renewal notice in the mail soon. Please send it in right away.



It's easy to join the LWVPA —Do it now! You will be glad you did. Joining at the local level makes you a member at all levels: National, State, Bay Area and Palo Alto. Men are encouraged to join. Dues grants are available. For more information, call the League office (650) 903-0600.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ (evening) _____ email _____

Annual membership: \$70. Additional membership, same address: \$35. Student membership: \$35. Mail check with this form to LWVPA, 3921 E. Bayshore Road, Suite 209, Palo Alto, CA 94303.

Membership dues to the LWVPA are not tax deductible.

League of Women Voters of Palo Alto
3921 E. Bayshore Road, Suite 209
Palo Alto, CA 94303
(650) 903-0600

Address Services Requested

Dated
Material

How to contact your elected officials:

UNITED STATES

President Barack Obama (202) 456-1414
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/CONTACT/>

Senator Dianne Feinstein (415) 393-0707
<http://feinstein.senate.gov> - click "email me"

Senator Barbara Boxer (415) 403-0100
<http://www.boxer.senate.gov/>

Rep. Anna Eshoo (650) 323-2984
<http://eshoo.house.gov/>

CALIFORNIA

Governor Jerry Brown (916) 445-2841
<http://gov.ca.gov/home.php>

Senator Jerry Hill (650) 212-3313
<http://sd13.senate.ca.gov/contact-us>

Assemblymember Rich Gordon (650) 691-2121
<http://asmdc.org/members/a24/>

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Supervisor Joe Simitian (650) 965-8737
joe.simitian@bos.sccgov.org

LWVC GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT

Locate your elected officials with your street address
<http://www.guidetogovernment.org/>

CALENDAR

Wed, Jul 29, 12:00 -1:15pm
Webinar on LWVUS
Money in Politics and
Constitutional Amendment
Process Program

Tues, Aug 4, 7-9:30 pm
Board Meeting
Petersen

Wed, Aug 5
VOTER deadline

Wed, Aug 19, 7-9 pm
Summer Social
Garden Court Hotel

Thur, Aug 20,
10:30-11:30 am and
1:30-2:30 pm
Naturalization Ceremonies
Heritage Theater, Campbell

Fri, Aug, 21, 10 am
Book Club
Gerard

Tues, Sep 1, 7-9:30 pm
Board Meeting
Location TBD

Wed, Sep 2
VOTER deadline

Thu, Sep 17,
10:30-11:30 am and
1:30-2:30 pm
Naturalization Ceremonies
Heritage Theater, Campbell

Tues, Sep 22
Registering Voters
Palo Alto Veterans Hospital