

# The Palo Alto VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Palo Alto

March 2011

Vol. XXV  
No. VII



## Waste in the Baylands & Other Issues

Tuesday, March 22, 7-9pm

Lucie Stern, 1305 Middlefield Road,  
Palo Alto, Community Meeting Room

**Speakers: Phil Bobel, Manager,  
Environmental Compliance,  
Palo Alto Public Works Department &  
Walt Hays, Environmental Activist  
Speakers on Airport and Flood Control  
Issues to be confirmed.**



Water Treatment Plant and Proposed Digester  
located just to the right of this photo.

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#USCA9475

Two projects in the Baylands aim to address the problem of waste:

- The first is to modernize our Regional Water Quality Control Plant which was built during the time of the Great Depression and has been in constant operation since that time. Update plans are due next year.
- The second is a proposed digester to convert yard wastes and food wastes into energy. The digester is planned to be located on dedicated park land and needs voter approval to proceed. As a result, expect to see this on the November ballot as the *Green Energy and Compost Initiative*.

### Wastewater Long Range Facilities Planning

The Water Quality Control Plant has been in operation since 1934, and its old equipment combined with new regulations require improvements. The Long Range Facilities Plan will map out these changes, focusing on biosolids treatment and disposal, waste-to-energy technologies, minimizing energy use, major pipeline repairs, recycled water treatment, carbon footprint impacts, and the best alternatives for modernization.

### *The Green Energy and Compost Initiative*

The Palo Alto Landfill is scheduled to close in 2012. The closing will end the current composting operation there and the city will have to haul yard and food waste to locations outside the city, probably as far as Gilroy .

Palo Alto currently incinerates its sewage sludge, at a cost of \$800,000 a year, generating gas emissions and leaving a residue of toxic ash, which must be transported elsewhere for disposal. The *Green Energy and Compost Initiative* proposes a Dry Anaerobic Digester to continue handling yard and food waste and sewage sludge locally in a closed facility which would convert these wastes by biological measures into compost and energy.

The proposed ballot measure would allow Palo Alto citizens to vote on amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Baylands Master Plan to allow building a facility on 10 acres of the existing 126-acre landfill. A city ordinance requires a vote of the people to undedicate this 10-acre parcel from parkland.

Please check online calendar for updates-  
<http://lwvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html>

Please join us to find out more.■



*The League is a broadly based, nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and involved participation in government through voters service, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

*The League welcomes articles. Please submit them to: [lwvpaoffice@gmail.com](mailto:lwvpaoffice@gmail.com). Deadline is the first Monday after the first Tuesday of each month.*



# President's Message

Dear Palo Alto League Member,

As my time as president has progressed, one question keeps surfacing. Do we need to take a stand on this issue or that? Why should we take a stand just because we have a position? Why not do a public meeting, some education, let the public make up their own minds? Do we not do our best work when we educate the public? The question came up again at our program planning meeting last month.

Our League decides to study an issue. We complete the study and take a position. What is next? Do we educate the public to make up their own minds? Or do we ask the public to join us; to agree with us? Well, of course, that depends. Most positions are phrased in general terms. Most issues are very specific. (Please note that our Voter Service work is always written in neutral language.) So we reeducate ourselves and others on the narrower issue. Are there conflicting positions? Do we have both people and financial resources? If we want to support or oppose the issue then do we take action? And what action?

So our League decides to support, oppose or stay neutral on an issue for which we have completed a study and have a position. If we stay neutral we educate on the general subject. The critical question in my opinion is do we take a stand to support or oppose an issue upon which we have completed a study. At that point we are asking people to stand with us based on our study. At that point we can join others collecting petitions, writing letters, holding coffees and meetings, attending and speaking at the early study sessions, etc. We are trying to win the issue as we see the issue. In my opinion if we only educate we are not asking others to move the issue forward as we advocate. In my opinion we are not as effective if we do not take a position on issues for which we have clear stands. We are not asking others to do as we would do. What do you think?

See you at our information meetings on issues in the Baylands.

Phyllis■

# Congratulations!

Our very own Veronica Tincher and Jan Fenwich have been selected as two of seven recipients of Avenida's 2011 Lifetimes of Achievement Awards.

Veronica wears many hats, but her 52 years of League service have been extraordinary. We awarded her a Lifetime Membership in May of 2009, and she hasn't slowed down one bit.

She has held every position imaginable, including President, but her mentoring of younger members has been especially outstanding by making our League better and stronger through the years. Her tireless work on behalf of New Voices demonstrates her commitment to young people as citizens of our democracy's future.

Another of our members, Jan Fenwick, is being duly recognized for her dedicated community efforts in environmental organizations such as the Purissima Hills Water District, the Peninsula Conservation Center and Environmental Volunteers, Community School of Music and Arts and the Foothill-De Anza

Congratulations-continued on page 5

## LWV of Palo Alto: Officers, Directors, Chairpersons, (650) 327-9148

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*The VOTER is online at [www.lwvpaloalto.org](http://www.lwvpaloalto.org)*

## Events Column



### The Federal Role in Education

Saturday, February 26, 9:30-noon  
Congregational Church  
400 West Campbell Avenue, Campbell

We have an exciting preview speaker - Peg Hill, co-chair of our national study! What do we want from you? Bring an open mind and your interest in education. We will need both of those things as we move forward with our study.

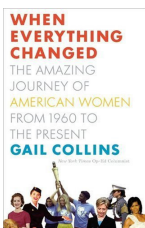
Questions: Contact Ellen Wheeler (650) 967-8743 Chairperson, Education Committee, LWV of Santa Clara County and Membership Director and Education Committee Co-Chair LWV LA-MV ■

### Women's Rights and Leadership across the Asia-Pacific Region

Speaker: Anasuya Sengupta, Regional Director for Asia/Oceania, Global Fund for Women.  
Wednesday, March 16, 7:30-9pm.

Los Altos Youth Center, 1 South San Antonio Rd., Los Altos.

LWV members and friends are invited to a World Affairs Council Program. Free Admission. For information, call Carol Stevens [\(650\) 494-0757](tel:6504940757) ■



### LWV Palo Alto Book Group

Friday, April 1, 10am-noon  
Rosalie Lefkowitz's house

We are reading *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* by Gail Collins.

*When Everything Changed* reminds us of both how much everything has changed for American women in the last 50 years and just how little. Collins writes skillfully about the "olden" days when a glamour career for a woman was to be a stewardess and when the reason most women went to college was to get a "Mrs."

Gail Collins was the Editorial Page editor for the New York Times from 2001-2007—the first woman to have held that position. She currently writes a column for the Times' Op-Ed page twice weekly. The book is available in paperback.

Come, join us for coffee and a lively discussion. ■

## Women's History Month: March 2011

From the U.S. Census Bureau:  
"National Women's History Month dates back to March 8, 1857, when women from New York City factories staged a protest over working conditions. International Women's Day was first observed in 1909, but it wasn't until 1981 that Congress established National Women's History Week to be commemorated the second week of March. In 1987, Congress expanded the week to a month. Every year since, Congress has passed a resolution for Women's History Month, and the President has issued a proclamation." ■



### Legacy Lasting Eight Decades

Do you ever wonder what your legacy will be? For Mrs. Warren Smith, who founded the League of Women Voters of Massapequa in New York in 1931, it was a lineage of female movers and shakers.

It all began at the Massapequa League Conference "Power of Women in Politics." *The Nassau Daily Review* reported on the conference on Friday, October 9, 1931:

"That women are powerful factors in the political field, and that they hold in their votes as yet unrealized possibilities, was demonstrated when a group of speakers of varying political faiths but with this idea in common, met on the non-partisan platform of the League of Women Voters at a meeting sponsored by the league of the second assembly district..."

Thereafter began the League of Women Voters of Massapequa and a line of women dedicated to supporting democracy. Mrs. Warren Smith's daughters joined the League as did her granddaughter, our member, Gretchen Hillard. ■



# How to Fix No Child Left Behind

*VOTER Editor's note: in his State of the Union Speech, President Obama addressed education reform, "And Race to the Top should be the approach we follow this year as we replace No Child Left Behind with a law that's more flexible and focused on what's best for our kids."*

*Ellen Wheeler's note: Renowned education researcher Richard Rothstein gave a talk titled "ESEA Reauthorization: Looking Ahead" at the California School Boards Association annual convention on Dec. 3, 2010. Below is a summary of his remarks. For a more complete description of the work of Mr. Rothstein and other like-minded education leaders go to [www.BoldApproach.org](http://www.BoldApproach.org)*

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is more commonly known to most of us as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). Signed into law with high hopes by President George W. Bush with bipartisan support, its reauthorization is complicated by politics and politicians, not to mention principled discussions of educational philosophies and goals.

As an experienced education observer Mr. Rothstein began his talk not about philosophies, but about . . .

## The politics of it all

The impact of the 2010 election will be felt in ESEA. New Speaker John Boehner was an original supporter of ESEA, while the new chair of the House Education Committee, Rep. Kline, wants to keep the federal government out of schools. Will Speaker Boehner spend political capital on ESEA reauthorization? This is further complicated by the strange alliances in education. Some Democrats and Republicans are strong supporters of accountability and testing. Others are skeptical of testing and what they see is narrowing of the curriculum. The new Senate ed. chair, Democrat Tom Harkin, strongly supports labor (teachers) and has little interest in testing. But, we may get a coalition for special education funding. However, Republicans are generally opposed to increased spending. If special education gets more funding, what programs would we cut to allow for this?

Special education funding has grown. It's now 23% of all money in education, and the number of children identified is growing (whereas other ed. funding has fallen). **We'd be much better off spending more for high quality early childhood education, says Mr. Rothstein.** (See more below.)

## Let's review what NCLB/ESEA does:

- [1] Holds schools accountable for basic skills in math and reading, and requires students to pass an annual test on them;
- [2] Reports scores by subgroups within schools, instead of just by schools (as in the past). Subgroups include Hispanic, African American, Asian, White, low economic status, and special education.
- [3] Promotes "accountability" by penalizing schools if not all subgroups of students pass the annual tests.

## Results of focus on subgroups, testing, and accountability:

- [1] Narrowing of curriculum, since what's tested (reading and math) is how a school is held accountable. What isn't tested (subgroups of reading and math, not to mention history, science, art, and music) isn't taught, or at least gets less time.
- [2] Narrowed focus on individual students that can reach "proficiency" (roughly grade level) with concomitant less attention to students who have already reached proficiency.

## "Absurd goal" of 100% proficiency by 2014 and "Closing the Achievement Gap":

This violates everything we know about psychology - to set the same challenging standard for everyone. No educator in his right mind believes we can "close" the Achievement Gap.

## Key longitudinal study on language acquisition by babies and toddlers (Hart and Risley):

**1. Children START kindergarten with huge advantages or disadvantages.** Why does Mr. Rothstein believe it's absurd to think we can close the Achievement Gap? Because kindergarteners start school with such a huge differential in normally acquired words. Betty Hart and Todd Risley tape recorded one full hour a month for 2 ½ years in 42 families, categorized as professional, working class, or welfare. By age 3 trends in amount of talk, vocabulary growth, and style of parent/child interaction were well established. Critically, children in professional homes heard 2,000 words per hour in the background, blue collar children heard 1,300 words per hour, and children in welfare homes heard 600 words per hour. Extrapolating this verbal interaction to a year, a child in a professional family would hear 11 million words while a child in a welfare family would hear just 3 million. In fact, by age 3 the

Education-continued on page 5

children from the professional families had a larger spoken vocabulary than the parents from the welfare families! These trends continue into elementary school and beyond.

**2. Children START kindergarten with huge differences in their sense of self worth and belief that they can achieve.** Another component of the Hart/Risley study spotlighted the quality of interaction between toddlers and their parents in the 3 groups of homes. 80% of the feedback to children in professional homes was positive. Working class children heard 50% positive comments. And, welfare children heard 80% negative comments.

**So, what should we be focusing on?**

Instead of punishing schools for not getting all students to proficiency, we should:

- \*Put our attention on high quality parenting and early childhood programs (beginning at or even before birth)
- \*Help every child get health, dental, and vision care (maybe at school-based health centers) so children can concentrate on their lessons, and
- \*Help students prepare for careers, not just college.

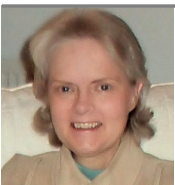
*Submitted by Ellen Wheeler, LWVC Director and chair LWV SC County Council Education Committee* ■



**Congratulations-continued from page 2** College Foundation board.

The public reception for all honorees will be a garden party at a local home on Sunday, May 15, from 3 to 5pm. The event is sponsored by Avenidas, the Palo Alto Weekly, and Palo Alto Online. Tickets can be purchased for \$75 by contacting Avenidas at [650-289-5445](tel:650-289-5445) or online at [www.avenidas.org](http://www.avenidas.org). Proceeds benefit senior programs at Avenidas.

*Submitted by Mary Alice Thornton* ■



## February 2011 Board Summary

At its February meeting, your board:

- voted to recommended to LWVC three Issues for Emphasis for 2011-2013 program:
  - \* State and Local Finances, with special attention to increasing revenue
  - \* Election Reform, especially comprehensive campaign-contribution disclosure
  - \* Advocacy supporting our Initiative and Referendum Process position
- voted to recommend the following three items as local Issues for Emphasis:
  - \* Juvenile Justice, a county position
  - \* the Baylands
  - \* Caltrain - recommend that LWVBA form a working group focusing on Caltrain
- approved Emergency Action Committee agreement to

be a community partner for a talk and panel discussion of "AB 32: The View from Europe" on February 9

- discussed plans for the Feb. 22 and March 22 meetings on the Baylands.

The board also learned that:

- League-a-thon (LAT) contributions from both members and community donors are \$4,600 over those of 2009.
- our PayPal system is working and we have received our first LAT donation through it.
- after the Jan. 31 membership roll adjustments, our total membership now stands at 277.
- on Feb. 26 there will be a countywide Education meeting in Campbell with Peg Hill, who is co-chair of our national study.
- on Jan. 10 the Palo Alto City Council honored Irene Sampson at their adjournment.

*Submitted by Ellen Forbes* ■



## Federal Health Care Reform: What Does It Mean?

Everyone is unhappy about health care, particularly health care costs, but not everyone realizes that a national health care reform bill is now the law. Research shows that many Americans don't even know that a reform bill has passed. Start by informing yourself about what is—and is not—in the bill, and then make it a point to talk to your friends and neighbors.

Some of what is included in the landmark Affordable Care Act:

- a guarantee that insurance companies can no longer discriminate based on pre-existing conditions
- an end to lifetime caps
- a requirement that insurance companies can no longer drop people when they get sick.

In addition, the bill:

- gives tax credits to small businesses for providing coverage for employees
- requires insurers to cover preventive care at no cost.

There is misinformation being circulated about the bill's effects on Medicare. Don't let the naysayers scare seniors!

- Medicare is actually being improved and strengthened.
- The Affordable Care Act attacks waste and fraud.
- The bill adds benefits for those on Medicare:
  - helps seniors stay in their homes
  - bans discrimination based on pre-existing conditions
  - provides preventive care with no co-pays.

Yes, there are taxes—but only for those with incomes over \$200,000-\$250,000. These taxes will provide for the largest investment in the health care workforce ever made. There is a huge need for primary health care providers, and the Affordable Care Act will help fill the gap by investing in education and training, and providing incentives for these desperately needed caregivers.

Finally, for those who advocate repealing the act: this is an even more costly choice than enacting it. According to the Congressional Budget Office, repealing the act would cost an estimated \$455 billion over the next 20 years.

What about California?

California is on the forefront of federal health care reform. This fall, the governor signed two bills creating the California Health Benefit Exchange. There are a number of challenges on the road to an operational exchange by 2014; the League will be active both in advocacy and community education. If you are interested in working on this issue, contact Helen Hutchison, [hhutchison@lwvc.org](mailto:hhutchison@lwvc.org).

Sign up for action alerts on the LWVC Web site. Go to [lwvc.org](http://lwvc.org) and click on "Sign up for E-News" at the upper left. On the sign-up page, choose "Action Alerts."

Do you want to know more? Here are sites where you can find good information:

<http://www.healthcare.gov/law/introduction/index.html>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/healthreform/healthcare-overview>

<http://www.chcf.org/health-policy-office>

*submitted by Helen Hutchison, League of Women Voters of California* ■

## THANK YOU

We would like to thank the following people for making the assembly and delivery of the Dec/Jan *VOTER* possible: **Barbara Bowden, Carol Stevens, Diana Steeples, Geri Stewart, Isabel Arabian, Janet Creelman, Jean Colby, Vivian Blomenkamp, Mary Cooper & Mitzi Henderson**, organizer. Thank you **Sally Probst** and **James G. Moore** for proofreading the *VOTER*.

## THANK YOU!

On January 14, nine wonderful women gathered at our office atrium to work on a 656-piece League-a-thon mailing for getting *Facts for Voters 2011* to our members and donors. I want to thank **Julie Barney, Carol Bechtold, Phyllis Casel, Ellen Forbes, Betty Gerard, Trina Lovercheck, Bonnie Packer, Lee Sendelbeck & Veronica Tincher**.

*submitted by Mary Alice Thornton* ■

## THANK YOU!!

Many thanks to those volunteers who participated in our annual League-a-thon calling campaign to donors. Callers were **Ellen Forbes, Trina Lovercheck, Bonnie Packer, Doris Petersen, Diane Rolfe, Del Silverman, Joyce Tavrow and Veronica Tincher**. Clerks were **Nancy Olson, Arne Petersen, Ellen Smith, Karen Sundback and Liza Taft**.

*submitted by Mary Alice Thornton* ■

## CONGRATULATIONS



**Veronica Tincher & Jan Fenwick** for your 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award given by Avenidas. ■

Photo courtesy of Palo Alto Online

## New Voices for Youth Update

Our team staff, Ana Angel and Tanuj Chopra, are starting the second semester of New Voices with the La Raza students at Menlo-Atherton High. The young people are excited about their project which is a video on the traditional self-chosen separation of students by class and background on the school grounds. The project gives them an opportunity to step back and observe the situation that marginalizes students apart from the main stream. They are learning how to do interviews with students and faculty as well as acquiring technical skills in producing videos. Visit our web site: [newvoicesfor-youth.org](http://newvoicesfor-youth.org) to see photos of the students and more detail about the program. Watch for student blogs on the web site to be posted later this month.

New Voices is sponsored by LWV Palo Alto and South San Mateo County with a steering committee made up of representatives of both Leagues. New members of the steering committee are welcome. We meet monthly to plan and review the project's activities. Please let Veronica Tincher in Palo Alto or Kathleen Weisenberg in South San Mateo County know if you would like to join the group.

*Submitted by Veronica Tincher* ■

The League of Women Voters, born out of suffrage, now educates and advocates. Anyone of voting age, male or female, may become a League member.

It's easy to join the LWV —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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (evening) \_\_\_\_\_ e:mail \_\_\_\_\_

Annual Membership: \$70.00 Additional membership, same address: \$35.00

Mail check to LWV, 953 Industrial Ave., Suite 113, Palo Alto, CA 94303

Membership dues to the LWV are not tax deductible.

Men are encouraged to join.

Dues grants are available.

For information, call Membership Chair (650) 327-9148

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**CALENDAR** is constantly updated at  
<http://lwvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html>

**February**

**26 Sat** 9:30am-noon. LWV Education Study. See page 3.

**March**

- 1 Tue** 7:15 pm. Board Meeting, Veronica Tincher
- 7 Mon** Noon. VOTER deadline.
- 18 Fri** 9 am. VOTER mailing, Channing House
- 22 Tue** 7-9 pm. Baylands Current Issues. See front page.

**May**

**7 Sat** Annual meeting & brunch. TBD

**UNITED STATES**

**President Obama**.....(202) 456-1414  
Send e-mail messages to- <http://www.whitehouse.gov/CONTACT/>  
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**SANTA CLARA COUNTY**

**Supervisor Liz Kniss** .....(650) 965-8737  
Send e-mail -[liz.kniss@bos.sccgov.org](mailto:liz.kniss@bos.sccgov.org)

**LWVC GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT**

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