

The Palo Alto *VOTER*

The LWV of Palo Alto

November 2009

Phyllis Cassel, President ; Mary Alice Thornton Membership;
Karen Sundback & Relly Davidson, *VOTER* Editors; Phone: (650) 327-9148; <http://www.lwvpaloalto.org>



Vol.
XXIV
No. IV

Ending the Death Penalty- How to Make Change on the Local Level

Tuesday, November 17, 7 – 9 pm
Congregation Beth Am, room - Beit Kallah
26790 Arastradero Road, Los Altos

Speakers- Judy Kerr, *Spokesperson of California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty*
Natasha Minsker, *Death Penalty Policy Director of the ACLU of Northern California*

For more information on speakers, please go to the League website at—

<http://lwvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html>



Scott Rush, a 23-year-old, faces the death penalty in Indonesia.

We are cosponsoring this meeting with the ACLU of Northern California to learn about the effort of a large coalition to abolish the death penalty in Santa Clara County. We are being asked to sign a resolution to further that cause.

The LWVUS supports the abolition of the death penalty. This is a straightforward, powerful, vertical position that can be used by any local League.

Here are some frequently asked questions about the costs of California's death penalty. Many people are surprised to learn that it costs more to sentence someone to execution than permanent imprisonment, also known as life without parole.

- 1) Does it cost more to sentence someone to execution than to sentence them to permanent imprisonment?
- 2) Why do death penalty cases cost more?
- 3) How much more does a death penalty case cost?
- 4) How much money could we save if everyone sentenced to execution were sentenced to permanent imprisonment instead?
- 5) Why do people stay on death row for so long? If we "speed up" the death penalty, won't that make the death penalty cheaper?

These questions and more will be answered at the meeting on November 17, 7-9 pm, at Congregation Beth Am.

See you there -- Doris Petersen



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. Deadline is the first Friday after the first Wednesday of each month.

President's Message

Greetings Everyone!

As I write this letter LWV Palo Alto is busy with civic engagement. We are registering people to vote, holding Pro and Con meetings on the business license tax and presenting two candidates forums. If you did not go to a candidate forum you may still see it by tuning into Channel 27 or going online to <http://www.communitymediacenter.net/>. You have the LWV Palo Alto VOTERS GUIDE and you can seek the latest changes about the candidates at www.SmartVoter.org before you vote. Oh, you have already voted by mail?

The LWV California is busy advocating for effective implementation of the legislative redistricting process. Details are now being finalized. You may apply for a place on the redistricting commission starting in Jan. or Feb. At the same time LWVC is participating in discussions about reforming the CA budget process. Should we have a constitutional convention? What are the implications of a constitutional convention? How else could we implement changes to the budget process? Come to the LWVC Regional Workshop here in Palo Alto at Avenidas on October 24 and get the latest update from Linda Craig on what our LWVC is doing.

Reform of the health care system is the front burner issue at LWVUS. The League is advocating that our health care system:

1. Provide universal coverage for all Americans, **and include a public option.**
2. Control health care costs.
3. Improve safety and quality of care.
4. Ensure transparency in plans and coverage.
5. Provide adequate financing.

Keep lobbying our congressmembers. Anna Eshoo and Barbara Boxer need support and Dianne Feinstein wants something "like" a public option. Maybe a co-op will work? Please keep pressuring her for a true public option. Complicated, life changing, legislation like Health Care Reform takes time. Please stay alert and keep up the pressure. Everyone deserves good health care.

Thank you all for your good work.

Phyllis Cassel

Save The Date

Tuesday, December 8,
2009 at 11:30 am to
1:30 pm

Location to be announced

Winter Lunch
Speaker: Dr. Prudence
Carter PhD
Department of Education,
Stanford University

We have asked Dr. Carter to speak on her most recent work, a book tentatively titled, *The Paradoxes of Opportunity: Race, Culture, and Boundaries in 'Good Schools'*, which documents a cross-national study of desegregated and majority-minority high schools in the United States and South Africa, and examines how school practices can either facilitate or diminish academic and social divides in education.

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

OFFICERS

President
Phyllis Cassel
president@lwvpaloalto.org

1st Vice Pres., Action & Transportation
Irene Sampson

2nd Vice Pres., Program Planning
Doris Petersen

Secretary
Ellen Forbes

Treasurer
Karen Douglas

Director, Membership & LAT
Mary Alice Thornton
Membership@lwvpaloalto.org

Director, Candidates Forums

Pat Bendigkeit

Director, Speakers Bureau
Sara Whitehead

Director, League A Thon
Veronica Tincher

Directors, VOTER Editors
Karen Sundback
Relly Davidson
lwvpaoffice@gmail.com

Director, Membership
Virginia Pirrotta

Director, Publicity
Betty Gerard

OFF-BOARD CHAIRS

Housing
Sally Probst
Jeff Rensch

Health Care
Geri Stewart

Community Organizations & Relations
Diane Rolfe

Co-Membership, Action Tree
Nancy Olson

Webmaster
Karen Sundback

Housing: Community Liaison
Janet Owens

Juvenile Justice
Relly Davidson

VOTER Mailing
Vivian Blomenkamp

Education
Nan Prince

New Voices
Sandy Eakins

Budget Committee Chair
Marianne Dieckmann

Voter Registration, Voter Distribution
Liza Taft

Nominating Committee
Alice Smith, Chair
Rosalie Lefkowitz
Luise Maier

The VOTER is online at www.lwvpaloalto.org

Implementing Instant Runoff Voting: A County-wide Issue of Emphasis

A majority of the Leagues in the County have approved the implementation of Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) for County elections—a county-wide issue of emphasis for action for the coming League year. LWV Santa Clara County Council has ratified that decision. We are now looking for people who want to help with this action.

IRV provides for the election of a majority winner in a single election without the need for a separate runoff election. Instead of voting for only one candidate, voters would rank the candidates in the order of their preference, i.e. first choice, second choice, etc. Ballots would be tallied by first choices, and if one candidate gets a majority, that candidate wins. Otherwise, the lowest vote-getter would be eliminated, and all the ballots recounted according to their highest remaining choice. This process would be repeated until someone gets a majority, thus winning.

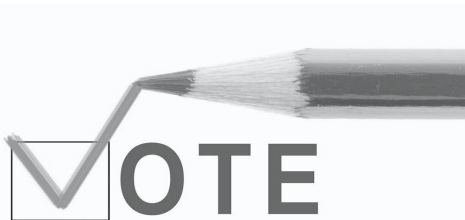
The use of IRV would save the County money, as County races would only appear on the ballot in November, instead of both June and November. The bigger impact would be on campaign finance, as candidates would not have to raise money for an expensive runoff election.

In addition, experience elsewhere with IRV shows that campaigns tend to be less negative and more focused on issues.

The County amended its charter in 1998 to allow for the use of IRV once the equipment could handle it, but now that we do have such equipment, the Board of Supervisors hasn't taken any action to implement the use of IRV.

We will be lobbying the Board of Supervisors to implement IRV, as they are authorized to do by section 208 of the County Charter. They would need to instruct the Registrar of Voters to proceed with the implementation as specified in the existing contract the County has with Sequoia Voting Systems.

We plan to meet with the Supervisors individually in the fall. An IRV Implementation Action Committee has already been established. If you would like to participate in these meetings, or help in the planning, send an email to lwvscc-irv_subscribe@yahoo.com and indicate to which League you belong. If you don't have access to email, call Steve Chessin at 650-962-8412.



Tuesday, November 3, 2009

LWVC Regional Workshop

**Saturday Oct 24, 9:30 to 2:30 at
Avenidas, 450 Bryant St, Palo Alto.**

Program: *Redistricting and Constitution Reform and How Leagues Are Using the Media to Communicate with the Public.*

\$25.00 advanced registration; \$30.00 at the door. To register, go to the LWCC web site or call our office 327-9148 and leave a message.

Action -- YES

This past month has seen most of League's attention focused on Voters Service activities, but we have not forgotten other important issues. Contacting the Governor urging him to sign AB 30 to enable 17-year-olds to be registered to vote (which he did sign!), continuing to "lobby" for health care reform, and supporting the Eden workforce family housing project on Alma Street are among our actions on the advocacy side of League's mission.

Irene Sampson, Action Chair
Contact Irene Sampson for more details.

Meet Diana Steeples Our Newest Honorary Member

Submitted by Doris Petersen



Like so many long-time members, Diana joined the League in Claremont when her son was a toddler.

This was an opportunity for so many at-home mothers to meet

with others and share common interest in governmental policies—with babysitting provided. A few fellow members living in Glendora decided to form a new local League in their town, electing Diana as their first president.

She soon became a member of our Palo Alto League after she moved here, and took a job with the City of Palo Alto to develop services for senior adults. It became apparent to the City that a senior center was needed, and Diana was recruited to join a group to develop what became Avenidas. At Avenidas Diana held a number of management positions in program development and public relations. She also was active in the League during that time, participating in many local and national studies.

Diana became more active in our League upon her retirement, and served on the Board of Directors for many years, and for much of that time was the publicity director. In 2001-02 she was co-president with Nancy Olson and Doris Petersen. We were known as the OOPs (the Office Of the President).

Several years ago Diana received the Lifetime Achievement Award for her service to our community.



Board in Brief-September Minutes

Submitted by Relly Davidson

- approved using the Samuel Taylor fund for award money for Ed. Committee-sponsored PAUSD high school essay contest.
- ratified EAC action on: co-sponsorship of Fair Elections meeting; support for Q&A session on Foothill-DeAnza non-candidates; letter to the editor re: lack of public discussion of Foothill-DeAnza issues; questions for PA City Council candidates
- passed a motion to take no position on the PA City Business License Tax
- Voters Service Updates: heard reports on plans for candidates events; pros and cons; Smart Voter and Voters Guide; registration, and publicity for election events
- heard reports on next steps in the Strategic Plan which include a technical committee; membership, and how to leverage the state budget crisis
- discussed plans for LWVC Regional Workshops on Oct. 24
- heard about a hoped-for national study spearheaded by Doris on “The Federal Role in Education”
- updates: Environment Committee is looking into composting issues; responding to requests for support for health care legislation public option proposal; meeting about the Fair Elections Act

Board in Brief—October Minutes

Submitted by Ellen Forbes

At its “October” board meeting, held on September 30, the LWVPA board:

- * got an update on the status of the Smart Voter (online) and Voters Guide (printed) versions of information about the 14 city council candidates, as well as the pro and con arguments to the city’s ballot measure for a business license tax
- * learned of LWVPA’s fall voter registration efforts
- * heard that our home page, <http://www.lwvpaloalto.org>, now includes a link called “November Election” which goes directly to the Voters Guide, as well as links from “Action Now” to the LWVC and LWVUS action pages
- * got a briefing on the work of our new Membership Recruitment and Retention Task Force and received nametags to identify ourselves at general meetings
- * gave Phyllis approval to follow up on a request to assist, along with several other local Leagues, in an upcoming bylaws election for SEIU
- * learned that at the Oct. 24 Regional League Workshops, Linda Craig will lead the discussion on a possible constitutional convention
- * began a process of reviewing the membership handbook.
- * celebrated the lifetime award presented to Diana Steeples at Channing House.

Thank you!

October VOTER Mailing. We would like to thank the following people for making the assembly and delivery of the October VOTER possible:

Patty "Cattie" Peck, Mary Cooper, Jean Colby, Janet Owens, Janet Creelman, Isabel Arabian, Geri Stewart, Carol Stevens, Vivian Blomenkamp.

Submitted by Relly Davidson & Karen Sundback
The Palo Alto VOTER Editors

Candidates Forums. Our two great candidates forums were made successful by the hard work of our volunteers. *A big thank you to all:*

Moderators-Ellen Smith and Irene Sampson; Question sorters- Alice Smith, Arthur Keller and Evan Lurie; Time Keeper- Pat Saffir; Greeters/question collectors- Marcia Allen, Viv Blomenkamp, Barbara Bowden, Stan & Mary Cottrell, Litsie Indergand, Bernice Loeb, Lee Sendelbeck; Outreach for co-sponsorships- Diane Rolfe; Obtaining JLS site & lots of other support- Karen Sundback; Distributing Voters Guide in the libraries and other community locations- Liza Taft

Voters Guide Mailing -And, a big thank you to the crew for getting the Voters Guide to our members and the community: Phyllis Cassel, Ellen Forbes, Lety Liberman, Virginia Schulz.

Submitted by Chairs Pat Bendigkeit, Mary Alice Thornton & Veronica Tincher

Voter registration. Thanks to the help of Isabelle Arabian, Vivian Blomenkamp, Phyllis Cassel, Nancy Neff, Alice Smith, Ellen Smith and Geri Stewart, we were able to register new voters at Lytton Gardens, Gunn High School and Palo Alto Commons.

Registration forms for new-resident packets were provided both at the Moldaw Family Residences and the Palo Alto Family YMCA.

None of this could have happened without the help of people at the locations. Again, many thanks to all that helped and I hope to see you in the spring when we do this again.

Submitted by Liza Taft

Great Decisions 2010

Topics for the 2010 program have been announced. This is a good opportunity for study and discussion of international issues. Great Decisions is a program created by the Foreign Policy Association. The eight-week series of discussions will be held in February and March of 2010. If you are interested in learning and discussion, please let me know so I can order a study guide for you.

The eight topics for 2010 are:

SPECIAL ENVOYS
PREVENTING GENOCIDE
GLOBAL CRIME
U.S. CHINA SECURITY RELATIONS
GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS
RUSSIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS
THE PERSIAN GULF
PEACE BUILDING AND CONFLICT
RESOLUTION

Submitted by Nancy Olson,
lwvpaoffice@gmail.com

News from New Voices for Youth-

an outreach project of the Leagues of
Palo Alto and South San Mateo County
Submitted by Sandra Eakins

This is the cusp of the new year for New Voices now that school has started. This is also an opportunity to build on the presentations that Director Anne-Marie McReynolds and her outstanding students made to both Leagues recently. The purpose of New Voices is to prepare students to develop their own voices about issues in their neighborhoods as well as their larger communities. Using new media, they learn how to make videos about their situations. Enter New Voices for Youth in your web browser and see some of their remarkable work.

Please consider joining this project. League members have much to share with youth and they have much to teach us. Questions - contact Sandy Eakins, Veronica Tincher or Betty Gerard.

The California Budget and the Economy-September 22 Talk by Stephen Levy

For the Kick-off meeting of the LWVPA, Steve Levy, the Director and senior economist of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy, gave a talk on the economy and its effect on California's budget issues. Steve started by describing the national economic situation, noting it was one year ago that the financial systems of the U. S. went into a meltdown. This precipitated drastic action by the U. S. government, propping up banks and other financial institutions, providing tax relief, and passing legislation, known as TARP, to put people back to work and slow down layoffs. The result, Steve said, was that both private and government economists now talk of "when the economy recovers, not if."

California had one of the largest real estate bubbles, and will have a depressed economy for some time, as people react to the loss of capital and the worry about the future. However, this has aggravated the California budget problem, but is not the only reason that we are in trouble. "The California budget is a mess!" Steve said. We start with a \$10 billion structural deficit, based on spending commitments and tax limitations passed by the legislature and by initiative. We are not having meaningful conversations on what California needs in order to make this a place where people want to live. Our future depends on taking advantage of the technological resources we have, and building our economy

on the innovations we have seen and need to continue to create in the future. If we do not have a high quality of life, such as affordable housing, good schools, and effective transportation, the people who we need will not come or not stay in this state. We also need to address the needs of those who do not succeed in this environment.

Steve dismissed the notion that revenue volatility is a major cause of our state budget problems. Instead, it is making assumptions that unusually good times will continue to provide high revenue on into the future, and creating long term commitments accordingly. He emphasized that the people in the audience, meaning groups like the LWV, must take the lead in resolving our situation, because the political process is frozen.

In responding to questions, Steve said the two-thirds budget rule is a big problem, but even more restrictive are laws passed by initiative that tied the hands of local government, so they can not solve problems with bond measures and local taxes even as most people affected by those actions want them. That two-thirds majority is a major hurdle for any locality. On the problems with initiatives, he said we need to have sunset rules to limit their extent, and provide the legislature with review and clarification powers.

Submitted by Arnold Petersen

The LWV Palo Alto Book Group

Next meeting: November 20, 10-noon at Irene Sampson's

Pennsylvania Avenue: Profiles in Backroom Power
By John Harwood & Gerald F. Seib (*available in paperback*)

Prizewinning journalists, John Harwood and Gerald F. Seib, show how today's Washington power game really works, through stories of people who are making a difference on Pennsylvania Avenue. These new power brokers, some of whom are rarely seen and are largely unknown, have figured out how to make their voices heard, and how to get things done, amid the complexities of today's gridlocked Washington.

Submitted by Doris Petersen

Membership Recruitment & Retention Task Force (MR&RTF)

The LWVPA Strategic Plan for 2009-2010 year includes MR&RTF. We had our first meeting on September 23 at the home of Luise Maier. Attending were Phyllis Cassel, Karen Douglas, Luise, Doris Petersen, Gini Pirrotta and Mary Alice Thornton. Nancy Olson was unable to attend that evening. We brainstormed many great ideas and have begun implementing several.

If you have ideas or suggestions please contact any member of the task force. Our next meeting is in November.

Submitted by Mary Alice Thornton

Town Hall -- Live & Online

Education Matters

Mon., Oct. 26, 7-8:30 pm
PAUSD Boardroom, 25 Churchill Ave., Palo Alto.

Join us as our moderator and PTA Council President Terry Godfrey asks School Board members Barb Mitchell & Dana Tom audience questions. Can't leave home? Watch live over the internet; go to <https://www.livemeeting.com/cc/intercalldemo/join?id=TQ3K44&role=attend&pw=InterCall> to download Microsoft Office Live (free) and view.

Before the meeting, questions can be emailed to TownHall@palaltopta.org or posed during the meeting live or via InterCall's "Q&A" tab.

This event is open to the entire community and hosted by the Palo Alto PTA Council.

Peninsula Chapter of the World Affairs Council

LWV members and friends are invited on Monday, November 23, to a program sponsored by the Peninsula Chapter of the World Affairs Council on "Afghanistan: At the Center of Regional Conflict and U.S. Strategic Interests" with Professor Thomas Johnson, Director, Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, Naval Postgraduate School. Site: Los Altos Library, 13 South San Antonio Rd., Los Altos. Refreshments: 7 pm; Program: 7:30 - 9 pm. Admission is free. For information, call Carol Stevens (650) 494-0757.

Good Morning Palo Alto

Thursday, November 5, 2009 at 8-9:30 am at All Saints' Episcopal Church Community Center, 555 Waverley, Palo Alto
Program features Don Zack, Downtown Development Coordinator for the City of Redwood City who will be speaking on *Delightful Density: Strategies for Creating Comfort, Convenience, and Choice In the Cities of the New Reality*. This breakfast meeting is sponsored by The Chamber of Commerce and the Alliance For a Livable Palo Alto (ALPA). Cost: for reservations made through the Chamber by Nov. 4: \$20 for Chamber members, \$25 for non-members \$25 for all at the door on Nov. 5
Submitted by Irene Sampson

Welcome to the League

Carol Kersten ~ Margaret Monroe ~ Kay A. Wilson

We are delighted to have you as members.

The League of Women Voters, born out of suffrage, now educates and advocates. Any citizen 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: \$68.00 Additional membership, same address: \$34.00

Mail check to LWV, 953 Industrial Ave., 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 Mary Alice Thornton (650) 327-9148

LWV of Palo Alto
953 Industrial Avenue, Suite 113
Palo Alto, CA 94303
(650) 327-9148

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 72
Palo Alto, CA

Address Services Requested

Dated Material
Please Expedite

Calendar...check for changes at
<http://lwvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html>

October

24 Sat 9:30-2:30pm. LWVC Regional Workshop
 Avenidas, 450 Bryant St., Palo Alto

November

3 Tues Election- City Council and Ballot Measure

4 Wed 7:15pm. Board Meeting

6 Fri Noon—VOTER deadline

12 Thur 12-1:30pm. Inter-League Network-South, Office
 atrium

13 Fri 9:15am.VOTER Mailing, Channing House, 8th
 floor.

17 Tues 7-9pm. Death Penalty (see page 1)

20 Fri 10-noon. Book Group. Sampson's

30 Mon LWVC Mail appeal to members

December

8 Tues Winter Luncheon

UNITED STATES

President Obama.....(202) 456-1414

Send e-mail messages to- <http://www.whitehouse.gov/CONTACT/>

Senator Feinstein.....(415) 393-0707

Send e-mail-<http://feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=ContactUS.EmailMe>

Senator Boxer.....(415) 403-0100

Send e-mail - <http://boxer.senate.gov/contact/email/policy.cfm>

Rep. Anna Eshoo.....(650) 323-2984

Send e-mail - <http://eshoo.house.gov/>

CALIFORNIA

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger(415)703-2218

Send e-mail messages via website - <http://gov.ca.gov/interact>

Senator Joe Simitian(650) 688-6384

Send e-mail messages via website-<http://www.senatorsimitian.com/main/contact>

Assemblyman Ira Ruskin(650) 691-2121

Send e-mail -<http://legplcms01.lc.ca.gov/PublicL/CMS/ContactPopup.aspx?district=AD21&>

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Supervisor Liz Kniss(650) 965-8737

Send e-mail -liz.kniss@bos.sccgov.org

LWVC GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT

Locate your elected officials with your street address

<http://www.guidetogovernment.org/>