



# The VOTER

*Newsletter of the League of Women Voters, San Bernardino Area*

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Jill Vassilakos-Long, Co-President

In the late 1800's, voter turnout in America ranged from 65 - 80%. Rich, poor, educated and illiterate men cast their votes. (In most states, women did not yet have the vote.) Ten states had turnouts of more than 90% ! But then voting began to decline. By 1920, less than half of the people who were eligible to vote actually voted. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries voter turnout has continued to decline.

### **Why?**

In the elections of the 1800s, there was a stirring lead-up to the election. Campaigns included bonfires, barbecues, parades, torchlight rallies and passionate speeches. There were no barriers to voting. Election Day was usually a holiday and on Election Day voters could pick up a ballot at their local party headquarters (it might be marked with a donkey or an elephant to assist the illiterate) and drop it into the ballot box. There were immediate and tangible rewards for voting. The big-wigs at party headquarters knew who voted, and those who voted might get a little gift (often cash) or even a job as a reward for their loyalty.

Beyond all of that, "Political matters were not complex, intangible and remote, but simple, concrete and directly related to the concerns of daily life." (Paul Kleppner, [Who Voted?, 1982](#)) Voters perceived the differences between the parties as large; more than 20% of voters were actively involved in campaigning, and the races were often close, with the presidency changing hands in every election between 1876 and 1896.

The many changes in our society: campaigns conducted through radio and television instead of in-person rallies, the requirement for voter pre-registration, the wealth and variety of entertainment options, the migration of the U.S. population out of small towns where social ties reinforced voting behavior...all of these, as well as voter cynicism, ballot measure complexity, and a simple lack of time, have contributed to the decline in voting.

### **What can we do?**

The League of Women Voters of the San Bernardino Area is working on a variety of fronts. We're focusing on using social media to increase voter excitement, provide more direct communication with voters, and provide information to voters. We're working on training for in-person presentations to help voters navigate some of the more complex issues on our ballot.

To provide information to help voters, we're developing a "speakers bureau" composed of LWVSB members who are willing to participate in training to speak on Pros and Cons.

We are going to continue with our SmartVoter (now called Voters' Edge) website to provide a clearinghouse for candidate campaign information (the rule is that candidates must write about their own plans, and not mention any other candidate.)

We're encouraging members to post to whatever social media groups they are a part of to encourage people to vote. For instance, I'm in a Facebook group and I'm going to post this: (*See next page*)

“There have been times when a single vote decided the outcome of an election. In New York’s 36<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, a Democrat won with 20,685 votes to the Republican’s 20,684, but that was in 1910. Closer to home, in a 1979 run-off election, Robert McBay and Jack Strickler each received 1,284 votes for the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward seat on San Bernardino’s City Council. A single vote would have been the 1,285<sup>th</sup> vote for one of them and would have determined the result of the race.

The deadline for registering to vote in the California Primary Election is May 23, 2016. You can register on-line at <http://registertovote.ca.gov>

Do you feel that one vote would not have enough impact? You could:

- Write a letter to the editor to persuade others to your point of view
- Go to your neighborhood association meeting and speak in favor of the position you hold
- Put up a yard sign for the candidate or proposition you want to win
- Call the campaign headquarters for the candidate or proposition you favor and ask how you can help. They might ask you to walk neighborhoods, speaking to people in the community.
- Donate money to campaign for the candidate or proposition you believe in.

If you feel that one vote does not have enough impact – find a way to do more! This is your community. Our local elections will have an impact on your life. Let your voice be heard—VOTE!”

Do you have other ideas for helping the voters in our communities? Send them in (and volunteer) by emailing Jill [jvlong@csusb.edu](mailto:jvlong@csusb.edu) and Gloria [glorand@juno.com](mailto:glorand@juno.com)

The election is coming! It’s so exciting. Here’s to working together to help our communities participate in the June election.

*Jill Vassilakos-Long*

#### **CITIZENS OF ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS COMING UP**

**May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2-4 P.M. at the Elks Lodge, 2055 Elks Drive, San Bernardino**

Nominations are being accepted for Citizens of Achievement. Just a reminder that LWVSB encompasses all communities from Fontana to Yucaipa and from the San Bernardino County line to the mountain areas. A successful nominee is an individual or group of individuals working collectively to make a difference in their community. If the nominee makes a difference as part of his/her job, the work must be exemplary, going above and beyond the call of duty.

Nominations are due by March 25<sup>th</sup>. Nomination forms and instructions are available on-line at [lwvsanbernardino.ca.lwvnet.org](http://lwvsanbernardino.ca.lwvnet.org). Or you can contact Gloria or Jill for printed forms.

Information is being sent to several of the organizations in the communities; if you belong to an organization, please check to find out if they have received the information.

#### **Your Last Chance**

Plan to attend a Community Engagement meeting about the proposals by the citizens committee appointed by the San Bernardino City Council to study the current (46 page) charter. The meeting will be held at **Urbita Elementary School, Cafeteria, 771 South J Street, at 6:30 on Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>**. This is the last of 7 meetings held on the topic. You will be able to find out about the new (not revised) charter that is in the process of being proposed. There are still questions to be answered and community input to be considered.

## CELEBRATING OUR HISTORY

by Gloria Anderson, Co-President

### **March is significant to our League because we received recognition from LWVUS as a local League on March 17, 1955.**

Our history began with an organizing meeting held in September, 1953. In December, we became a Pre-Provisional League. In January 1954, we advanced to Provisional status. Ruth Haberkorn was President during this provisional period when we did the required Know Your Town study that covered Public Welfare, Education, Recreation, Public Health and Sanitation, and The Town's Future. We were granted recognition as a local League by LWVUS on March 17, 1955, 61 years ago. This was a time when women wore hats and gloves, including League members posing for photos at teas and other special occasions, and when women were identified as Miss or Mrs.

Mrs. Harold Haberkorn (Ruth) was President. Dues were \$3.00 and the annual budget was \$205.00. There were 105 members and this was the first time we studied the City Charter. It was titled "A Study of the Charter Form of Government of the City of San Bernardino". The first annual meeting was attended by 45 of the 105 members. It was an evening meeting that lasted about two hours. Ruth's annual meeting report said that during the first year, the San Bernardino LWV had made steady growth in all areas of League work. It was a year of many "firsts"—our first Finance Drive, our first Candidates Meeting, our first Annual Membership Tea, and we participated on several occasions with other organizations in community projects. Ruth said that our provisional League status served as a time for learning policies and procedures, how to do factual studies of program items and for earning the respect of the community through the public relations each member engages in. (The first Membership Tea was held at Arrowhead Springs Hotel, attended by 86 members. The LWV President spoke on legislative action and program for LWV. The early finance drives, as some of you may remember, were done with teams of two members making personal visits to a select group of names. The May 1955 goal was to raise \$250, with 15 committee members calling on 60 names.)

Members studied two national items: World Trade Policies, chaired by Miss Jane Hall and Individual Liberties, chaired by Mrs. Philip Disch (Sibil). The League was under attack at this time for its stand on the Freedom Agenda. As the LWV history points out: "The climate of suspicion and fear which prevailed in the 50s brought attacks on the League's national commitments to international cooperation through the United Nations and to the safeguarding of our Constitutional liberties." Background material for members included several pamphlets: "Individual Liberty and Seditious Activity", "Freedom of Speech and the Press," and "The Constitution and the Loyalty Program." Voters Service consisted of sending out candidates questionnaires that were published in The Sun, registering voters, having an information booth, a candidates meeting broadcast on the radio, and a Get-Out-The-Vote drive. Local advertisers were asked to give space to the drive's slogans, and a sound truck was used. (Two members were needed to drive the sound truck – a husband-decorated car – for a two-hour stint to get out the vote. Sound equipment was rented for \$7.50.) Getting the League, its programs, and its activities before the community included 36 articles in local newspapers, two 15-minute broadcasts on world trade and a candidates meeting on local radio, a speakers' bureau, a reference file at the Arrowhead Public Library, and flyers introducing LWV to local women.

The Annual Report for 1954-55 contains some interesting tidbits. Perhaps the most surprising is the revelation that the most disheartening thing was the "eternal cry of not enough women to do the big jobs of ALL areas of LWV work, and the fact that the average age of members was 32 and that homes and small children precluded having the time to give that we could use. The proudest achievement was Voter Service, candidate meetings in particular, and the increasing acceptance of the League.

Some things have changed, of course, but we continue to carry on the work that began over 60 years ago in San Bernardino by women who believed in the League's mission, and since the 1970s we have had the help of men who believe in our mission. Here's to another 61 years of serving voters in the San Bernardino area. Thank you for your continuing support. *Gloria*

## LWV Charter Change Education

### Committee Meets

The Charter Change Education Committee appointed by the Board met recently. Committee members include: Shirley Harlan, Dotti Garcia, John Longville, Jonathan Anderson, and Betsy Starbuck. The group began planning strategy to educate voters about the proposed San Bernardino City charter, which will be on the November ballot if the City Council agrees to have it placed there, and to get registered voters out to vote.

One of the proposals is that of speakers giving presentations at community organizations. If you are interested in doing this, please let one of the committee members know. We will also need help in contacting voters about getting out to vote.

### FROM YOUR BOARD

At the Board meeting of February 6<sup>th</sup>, several of the Board members agreed to take the Smart Voter/Voter's Edge on-line training on either March 2<sup>nd</sup> or March 10<sup>th</sup> from 6-8 p.m. League of Women Voters of California is offering it. If you are interested, contact [sstone@lwvc.org](mailto:sstone@lwvc.org) or at 916-442-7215.

It was also decided to move ahead to create a training committee to provide board training for non-profit organizations. Shirley Harlan and Mary Saxon Hobbs agreed to work on this. We also discussed the possibility of parliamentary training being available.

## LWVC NEWS

Vote with the League –Yes on Prop 50 !

We support **Proposition 50** on the June 7 Ballot.

- This constitutional amendment would give each house of the Legislature clear authority to suspend, with a two-thirds vote, a member *and* withhold pay and benefits.
- Prop 50 is a straightforward way for lawmakers to hold their own colleagues accountable for breaching the public's trust.
- Such actions are highly unusual. Over the years, five senators have been expelled, and several senators accused of corruption resigned in 1985. The Assembly has never suspended or expelled a member.

Get ready for new League legislative action! Last month, League members and supporters urged their Assembly members to support **AB350 (Alejo)** which will improve the California Voting Rights Act. This bill passed the Assembly 50-25, and is starting its progress through the Senate..

Happy St. Patrick's Day to

All

