

News and views from the League of Women
Voters of Alameda

LEAGUE OF WOMEN
VOTERS OF ALAMEDA



VOTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Anne Spanier – Co-President

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Alice Fried – Co-President

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Message from Anne:

It has been exactly 4 years since my last stint as co-president ended and much has changed since 2011. The Alameda League has steadily gained new members in spite of losing members who have retired from volunteer activities due to declining health or simply moved away. Our net gain has mirrored the attractiveness of Alameda as a destination for new residents. Whether a coincidence or not this demographic shift has netted us a number of talented and energetic new members. Our Annual June Meeting was a testament to this influx of talent. All of our elected offices, our board positions and portfolios were filled. Most important is that most of our committees are already staffed and Alice Fried, co-president has already begun some early planning for fall. With Leagues throughout the country suffering from a membership deficit, Alameda has definitely found the key to a thriving organization.

Our annual fundraiser, Meet Your Public Officials, held in April under the direction of new member Deborah Wright, led us to the most successful MYPO ever. The committee Deborah assembled, Alice Fried, Ruth Dixon-Mueller, Doris Gee, Jon Spangler and Juelle Ann Boyer to name a few put in a professional job worthy of a big city League. The success of this fundraiser has really energized our group. You may see a few new fun and exciting fundraisers in the coming year.

In this age of rapid fire communication, Leagues across the country are working hard to use new media to get their message out to the public. Our transformation began a few years ago thanks to Jeff Cambra, Jon Spangler, and Mike Williams who led us through mail chimp, electronic Voter and PayPal. We have streamlined the Voter with Mari Clark, upgraded our

website with new member Lisa Yap, and instituted a method to pay dues online thanks to Mike. Communication has become such a complex issue that we just recently installed a new member from Massachusetts, Georgia Derr as head of our newly organized communication portfolio. This is real progress.

Our financial house is in order thanks to the due diligence of Ted Frey, Marian Breitbart, Juelle Ann Boyer, Li Volin and others on that committee. A few years ago our League became a 501c3 which conjoined our educational funds with our dues to make them tax deductible. Thanks to our hard working team who spent hours with the IRS this effort paid off for our members.

Ruth Dixon-Mueller just seems to find new members everywhere. Her efforts and her predecessor's Gayle Thomas, have not only raised our membership to 127 members as of June, but have also filled program venues in Alameda almost monthly. Gayle promises an exciting year of programs and Ruth continues with "Hot Topics" at the public library on a Saturday afternoon (see your calendar). Recent topics of note were Understanding Ballot Measures chaired by Dorothy Fullerton and Open Primary and Ranked Choice Voting chaired by Anne Spanier.

It is exciting to see this League grow over the years since coming to my first annual meeting and speaking up about a now forgotten topic only to be made VP of programs on the spot. Today we are a vital organization filled with engaged members who are carrying out the work of Making Democracy Work and making new friends as well! This coming year will be filled with interesting events and I urge you to read your Voter and not miss a thing.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Wednesday July 8 - Communications Committee

9:15 am 348 Tideway, Alameda

Friday July 10 - Friday Dinner

5:30 pm The first Friday in July is the day before the 4th of July, so this no-host social gathering will be the following Friday at Pork House at 2201D, South Shore Center, Alameda. Please confirm no later than Friday the 10th by 12:00 noon: Connie Slattery-Hanna connie.hanna@comcast.net. All members and guests welcome.

Saturday, August 1 - LWVA Board retreat

9:00 am - 3:00 p.m., First Congregational Church Fellowship Hall, 1912 Central Ave. All LWVA members welcome. This is our major planning session for next year. If you'd like to attend, contact Alice Fried alicefried89@gmail.com or Anne Spanier annespanierleague@att.net

Monday, August 24 - Book Club

3 pm Applebee's The next Book selection is The Source by James Michener. It was written in 1965, and is an historical novel telling of the development of Israel through the ages. Michener uses the family of Ur to develop its themes.

Monday, September 21 - Fall Open Membership Meeting

7-9 PM at Alameda Hospital, Conference Room A (third floor) This is a chance for members to get together and to hear from the new co-presidents about plans for the year.

Thursdays Sept. 17, Oct. 15, and Nov. 19 Board Meetings

7-9 pm. Alameda Hospital Conference Room C. All members welcome.

Saturdays Sept. 26, Oct. 24, and Nov. 28 Hot Topics political discussions

2-4 pm, Alameda Free Library, Family Study Room

Reservations (limit 12 persons): dixonmueller@yahoo.com

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Ruth Dixon-Mueller – Chairperson

dixonmueller@yahoo.com

2015 Membership Directory: The printed version was distributed to attendees at the June Annual Meeting and mailed to everyone else on our list. If you did not receive one or wish to make any changes, please contact membership@LWVAlameda.org. This will be the only print copy produced for the year. Updated Excel lists will be sent to you via email every few months. Note that the Directory is for our internal use only. We have 127 members as of mid-June!

Membership Meeting: Our new co-presidents Anne and Alice are planning to hold a general membership meeting to open the League's "Fall Season" in September. Watch for information in your Sept. Voter! This is a great opportunity to meet other League members, to hear from Alice, Anne and the Committee Chairs about their plans for the year, and to join with us in making it all work.

Interested in Volunteering? The Membership Committee encourages everyone, and especially new members, to learn about the opportunities for volunteering with the League and for sharing your skills and interests with us. Contact membership@LWVAlameda.org and we'll send you an Activities Checklist to fill out, or talk to me (Ruth) at [510-865-2439](tel:510-865-2439). I'll be around most of the summer and am happy to meet for coffee with new and ongoing members any time!

"Hot Topics in the Library" Sat. June 27 2-4 pm. A "full house" (13 people, including two members of Alameda's Open Government Commission) considered the question, "How Transparent is Alameda's Government?" Facilitated by JuelleAnn Boyer, the group discussed transparency issues such as meeting notifications, access to agendas and to records and documents, and citizen participation on boards and commissions as well as the roles of the City Council, commissions and boards, and citizens in ensuring transparency.

For complete texts of key local and state laws, Google *City of Alameda Sunshine Ordinance*; *State of California Brown Act* [open meetings]; and *State of California Public Records Act*. LWVA's Action Committee will address some of these transparency issues in the coming year. Contact Robby Kiley at kriley7@comcast.net if you'd like to participate.

Hot Topics at the Library will continue in Sept.-Nov, fourth Saturdays. Let the Membership Chair know if you'd like to facilitate a policy discussion of your choice in a friendly, small group setting!

IDEAS FROM OUR MEMBERS

HOW DO MEASURES GET ON THE BALLOT?

The history and politics of California ballot measures is not well understood. Recently, Dorothy Fullerton, Voter Service Chair, conducted an informative workshop on the ins and outs of the Initiative process at the League's latest community activity "Hot Topics." Here is a recap of the presentation.

Citizen participation in the election process has been popular throughout American history first used in Massachusetts in the late eighteenth century. In 1893 California granted citizens the right to propose new laws through initiatives in all counties. Today the initiative process is available in 24 of the 50 states but primarily in the west.

So let's begin with a few definitions and some terminology. A ballot "measure or proposition" is placed on a ballot and is a proposal for either a constitutional amendment or a statute. Usually a simple majority of the vote is required and the legislature or Governor has no further say on the proposed measure. Most "propositions" are crafted

by the legislature, and are designated as such. There is no signature gathering in this process. Other “propositions” are a result of citizen petitions. In all 24 states supporters must collect signatures based on the percentage of the votes cast in the last gubernatorial election. In California a constitutional amendment requires 8 percent and the state law (statute) requires 5 percent. Since 2000 citizen sponsored measures, such as the free range hen proposal, account for 28 percent of the new proposals. Citizens can also repeal an existing law through a voter “referendum.” These are rare and account for only 3 percent of ballot measures since 2000.

To propose a citizen Initiative the text must first be reviewed by the Attorney General’s office with a submission fee whereupon the initiative is given a title and a brief summary. It is next sent to the Legislative Analyst’s office for a determination of fiscal impact should the measure pass. This must be completed in 25 days. Signature gathering can begin and must be completed in 150 days. At this point the Secretary of State verifies the signatures and, if adequate, posts to the Secretary of State’s Website the Proposition language including its sponsors, arguments for and against and rebuttals. This process must be completed 131 days before the election. The California League of Women Voters uses this information to develop the Easy Voter Guide which is distributed in English, Spanish and several Asian languages.

There are several important distinctions among the ballot measures that voters should consider. A constitutional measure writes new language into the state constitution that is extremely difficult to rescind once enacted. A state’s constitution should be a document outlining its core values and principles; it is worth noting California’s constitution is eight times the length of the US constitution and is full of unwieldy technical issues. Many must be litigated for constitutionality. A case in point is Proposition 8 which banned same sex marriage. A simpler approach is the statute which can be direct or indirect. Direct statutes are citizen sponsored as previously described. An indirect proposition is citizen inspired, occasionally by powerful interests and given to the legislature to place on the ballot.

A long standing controversy concerns the beneficiaries; the wealthy contributors or the average citizens. While there are many variables that seem to tilt toward the wealthy, most existing research finds that overall the majority interests are best served by the initiative process. Recent estimates suggest that having an initiative process in place makes the state 18-19 percent more likely to adopt policies favored by the majority.

While the initiative process encourages citizen participation, there are opportunities for influence by special interests. One concern is the process of gathering signatures for a measure. Small grassroots organization usually must rely on volunteers while well-financed organizations such as insurance, tobacco, oil and large manufacturers can afford to pay professionals who are able to gain signatures more quickly. Attempts to ban paying signature gathers have failed in California although California does require residency and training for signature gatherers. Additionally, recent court decisions have held that those who propose ballot measures must be named in the document published by the Secretary of state.

Another technique used to confuse voters are long and densely worded propositions. However, voters often vote no if they are tired or confused or both. Initiative sponsors have also targeted measures for primary election ballots where there

is low voter turnout and greater likelihood to pass a measure with a smaller number of supporters. Because signatures needed are based on previous elections, California now has a very low threshold for signatures needed to qualify for the ballot. This relative ease spurs those with issues to place their favorite cause on the ballot. To counteract this strategy the legislature recently passed a law that requires ballot measures to be placed on the November election rather than the June primary. The expectation is that November 2016, a presidential election, will have a very high number of ballot measures.

Are citizens sufficiently informed about the measure when casting their vote? Research shows that overall they are not. Voters rely on many sources and cues such as endorsements from trusted civic leaders, civic minded groups, industry support, and trusted media or newspapers. Nevertheless, citizens are highly supportive of “direct democracy” and prefer its results more favorably than that of legislative action.

Some suggestions from the LWV of Alameda in evaluating ballot propositions:

1. Does the measure clearly identify one issue that you agree with and can answer yes or no? Or is it confusing, citing more than one outcome and thus something that should be legislatively reviewed for clarity.
2. Who are the sponsors of this measure? Where is the money coming from? Check Map light’s VOTERS’ EDGE, website for this information. Who are the opponents and what do they say?
3. Will this measure require new sources of revenue? Does it earmark, restrict or obligate government revenues. Does it mandate a government program without sources of revenue?
4. Is it a constitutional amendment? Should it be? Would a statute be more reasonable?

Be wary of distortion tactics and commercials that rely on imagery but give no factual information. Beware of half truths. In fact it is wise to be skeptical of last minute “hit pieces.

The League of Women Voters urges citizens to become informed about ballot measures. They have a real impact on our lives.

Anne Spanier

ANNUAL MEETING

On Saturday June 13, 43 members of LWVA plus guest speaker Liz Warmerdam gathered at Cardinal Point Retirement Community for the 2015 Annual Meeting and luncheon. Opening the program, Ms. Warmerdam offered us her "Perspectives on the City of Alameda" as newly appointed Interim City Manager, particularly on the new developments at Alameda Point, the City Budget, and the need to create new channels for communicating with the public.

LWVA co-president Felice Zensius called the meeting to order at 12:45 pm, followed by a membership credentials report, appointment of a parliamentarian, adoption of the agenda, and approval of minutes of Annual Meeting of 2014 (see your 2015 Annual Meeting Kit pages 1-4). Seven former LWVA presidents were introduced (Lena Tam, Karen Butter, Lynn Groh, Kate Quick, Anne Spanier, Alice Huie, Joan Narahara). Following co-president Kate Quick's comments on the State of the League, Felice presented her with a tribute and plaque from the members honoring Kate's many years of service to LWVA.

Marian Breitbart presented the Treasurer's report and Ted Frey presented the report from the Budget Committee. Ted noted that our outlook for the current fiscal year is very favorable. The MYPO fundraiser exceeded budgeted income by \$2,500, thanks to the hard work of Deborah Wright and her team. In addition we have exceeded our budgeted income in dues, contributions and other fundraising for total revenues of \$17,000. Expenses fell short of the budgeted amount, particularly per-member payments to the national and state Leagues and room rentals. Higher revenues and lower costs has led to an anticipated surplus of \$3,800 compared with a budgeted loss of the same amount (2015 Annual Meeting Kit pages 5-8). All page references are to Annual Meeting Kit.

Board-recommended changes to the LWVA bylaws last amended in 2011 were adopted (pages 8-12), as were the recommended changes to LWVA's positions on various local issues (pages 16-18). Positions of the County Council of the Alameda County Leagues (pages 19-21) were supported as written.

The slate of officers, directors and elected Nominating Committee members for 2015-2016 proposed by the 2014-2015 Nominating Committee was approved, with no nominations from the floor. Officers elected: Alice Fried and Anne Spanier, Co-Presidents; Anne McKereghan, Secretary, Marian Breitbart, Treasurer. Seven additional members were elected to the Board, with others to follow (see complete list on page 22).

When asked for directions to the Board from members, Lynn Groh suggested that LWVA send observers to City and County meetings to report back to the Board and Action Chair for education/advocacy. Jon Spangler suggested that LWVA expand its use of social media for communications. Mark Hamilton suggested that LWVA work more with student groups to promote registration, education, and involvement of young people. Finally, members commended Kate and Felice for their leadership over the past two years.

The meeting adjourned about 2:00 pm. Thanks to all of you who attended!

NEWS FROM OTHER LEAGUES

For the latest news from the national League visit www.lwv.org and from California visit www.lwvc.org. Bay Area League news can be found at www.lwvbayarea.org; Berkeley, Albany and Emeryville news at www.lwvbae.org; and Oakland news at www.lwvoakland.org

COMMUNICATIONS

Georgia Gates Derr – Chairperson

t.derr@comcast.net

Hello, are we communicating? Here's what you say: At LWVA's Annual Meeting on 13 June, 36 members filled out a survey prepared by our newly expanded Communications Committee chaired by Georgia Gates Derr (t.derr@comcast.net). Here's what we found:

DO YOU READ THE VOTER (monthly newsletter)?

Twenty-eight of 36 who responded read The Voter regularly (mostly the emailed version but some on the website or mailed copy); the rest do not. "I mean to but then forget about it. I truly miss it mailed," said one. [Mailing was stopped as a cost-cutting and paper-saving measure. You can order mailed copies from LWVA, PO Box 1645, Alameda CA 94501 for \$10/year.]

Eighteen prefer to receive The Voter in its current emailed format (long version); others as a short email notice with links or attachment or mailed print copy. Local League news & events are what 31 members would most like to see in The Voter, followed by national and state political updates, news from other local leagues, and letters/comments from members (10 to 15 each).

DO YOU VISIT THE WEBSITE (www.lwvAlameda.org)?

Only 11 of the 36 respondents said they visit our site every few weeks or more; the rest rarely or never. Why not? "Busy," "Time constraints," "No news—just long-standing information (out of date)." There were also complaints: "I find the layout difficult; I usually find I need to search for current events." [Your new Communications Committee is working on plans to reorganize and revitalize the website. Watch for details!]

Local League news and national and state political updates with links are what respondents most wanted to find there. "Develop a blog for members only comments." "Lots of links to relevant legislation/action." "Election results including history; questions arise as to what passed or failed when.

DO YOU VISIT LWVA ON FACEBOOK (www.facebook.com/LWVAlameda)?

Ten of 36 respondents do not use social media. Of 26 "users," 24 are on Facebook and between 10 and 15 consult Twitter, LinkedIn and/or YouTube. Only 8 of 24 Facebook users visit LWVA Facebook once or more weekly, however. Why so rarely? "Unsure if I will find items of interest." "I quit because it was a waste of time." "Not sure of the point." [These honest responses will also be taken to heart by the Communications Committee!]

Would you like to fill out the survey? Contact our new Communications Chair, Georgia Gates Derr at t.derr@comcast.net or [\(510\) 263-9075](tel:5102639075) and she'll send you one.

Comments? Ideas? Questions? Want to volunteer? Talk to Georgia!

BOOK CLUB

Felice Zensius – Chairperson

felicez@ymail.com

The next book selection is *The Source* by James Michener. It was written in 1965, and is an historical novel telling of the development of Israel through the ages. Michener uses the family of Ur to develop its themes.

We meet at 3 pm the fourth Monday of each month, although there will be no meeting in July, in the back room of Applebee's restaurant in Southshore. We read non-fiction books, preferably paperbacks, chosen by the group upon the recommendation of one of us who has read the book. Discussion is lively, interesting, and challenging. League members are encouraged to join us—no charge, of course! Contact Felice Zensius for info 510-865-4329.

Not a member of the League of Women Voters of Alameda?
A membership form is available
at http://www.alameda.ca.lwvnet.org/join_form.html

The League relies on membership dues and donations to support our educational programs, candidates forums, and advocacy. The League of Women Voters of Alameda is a 501(c)(3) organization, and your membership dues and donations are tax deductible. You can find a donation at http://www.alameda.ca.lwvnet.org/donate_form.html

Our address is PO Box 1645, Alameda CA, 94501
The VOTER editor can be reached at [510-769-6875](tel:510-769-6875)

League of Women Voters of Alameda Board of Directors 2015 – 2016

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Publicity Manager Jon Spangler	Voter Editor Mari Clark	Website Manager Lisa Yap
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