



President: Nancy Bickel

March 2004

Editor: Jean Safir

ANNUAL COMMUNITY LUNCHEON

Tuesday, April 27, 2004

ROBERT REICH: "Taking Back Politics"

Robert B. Reich, who served as Secretary of Labor in the Clinton Administration, will address our Fifth Annual Community Luncheon on **Tuesday, April 27, at the Doubletree Hotel**, on the Berkeley Marina (formerly the Radisson Hotel.)

Robert Reich is University Professor at Brandeis University and is founder and contributor to the new journal, "The American Prospect." His most recent book is "The Future of Success;" earlier best sellers were "Locked in the Cabinet" and "The Work of Nations," now translated into 22 languages. Reich is a frequent commentator on the job market and labor issues on radio and television.

This promises to be a lively and timely event. **Please reserve early**, as we will surely fill up when the invitations are sent out on April 1.

- Karen Nelson and Ruth Ganong

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UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE: How Do We Get There?

Health care is not only a frontline issue in the 2004 elections; it is also our issue. The California League decided at the last convention to emphasize it and is preparing a strategy and materials on the problems and solutions, to help educate our members and our communities.

Join us on **March 22, 6:30 pm**, in a **program on universal health care**: what are the options? how do we attain our goals? Once more, we will meet in the **Berkeley Central Library on Kittredge Street, at Shattuck, in the third floor meeting room**. (To avoid parking fees, call the office to arrange car pooling or to get a ride.)

In November, 2003, LWVUS President, *Kay Maxwell*, wrote to members of the US Senate, urging them to vote against HRI, the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act. She was concerned about "a comparative cost adjustment program" which would undermine the universality and security of Medicare, and the bill's failure to address cost containment measures on prescription drugs. Ms. Maxwell pointed out that the League has supported the concept of universal access to quality health care for over a decade, since concluding a

(Continued on page 2)

Letter from the President

Dear Folks,

League of Women Voters of the United States has issued the final "Call to Convention", scheduled from June 12-15, 2004 in Washington, D.C.

National Conventions are exciting and instructive -- an intense course in what the League is about.

Expect to be up early and retiring late, attending caucuses, meetings and trainings of various kinds.

There is often a famous political speaker and outstanding politically relevant entertainment.

Leaguers from different parts of the country often get together to campaign for a new study on some topic or to urge the National League to take some particular action.

As I write, the LWVBAE has not yet decided if we will push for a new national study or action. We will have discussed this at our "Program Planning" meeting on Thursday, February 26, 4-6, in the League office. If you have a pet project that you would like the League to tackle, or want to see what's in the hopper, come to that meeting.

And let me know if you'd like to be considered as a delegate to National Convention.

The League generally pays for registration and part or even all of the cost of hotel and airfare, depending on how many delegates go and the requests of those who wish to attend. So if you'd like to go, but aren't sure you can spend the money, please talk it over with me.

LWVBAE generally gives preference to those who would like to be more active in the coming year, serving on the board or in a responsible off-board position. In this way, the "investment" returns multifold to the benefit of the League.

Pass this on to anyone you think might be interested.

I hope to hear from you: 510-526-4055.

Nancy Bickel, President

SPEAKER SERIES

Thursday, March 11, noon to 2 pm
Albany Public Library, Edith Stone
Room,
1247 Marin Avenue at Masonic

For information about the Alameda County Health Department Vector Control services, please join us on March 11. David James, environmental health specialist and vector biologist, will speak on how the county will help you protect yourself from rats and their mites, mosquitoes, and more.

The public is always welcome at our Speaker Series meetings, so please invite a friend to join you. You may bring lunch; juice will be served.

Here are the tentative dates and subjects for upcoming events:

- April 8 - City Parks
- May 13- Public Libraries

- *Doris Mendell*

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(Health Care: Continued from page 1)

three-year study on the subject in 1993.

Back in April, 2003, the State League sent out a "call to action" to support two bills: SB 921, Sheila Kuehl's "Health Care for All Californians Act," and SB 2, John Burton's employment-based health care plan, which passed. Unfortunately, Kuehl's bill, which uses a "single payer" model, will take a lot of education and work to move it forward. We helped lay the groundwork, however, with passage of SB 2, an LWVC-supported bill establishing a landmark project that analyzed nine options for expanding health coverage and gave the legislators information they could use to resolve the current crisis.

The Berkeley Central Library has a good elevator, the room is spacious and comfortable, and it is easy to hear the speakers. Come and bring your friends, your questions and your ideas.

- *Lois Brubeck*, Program V.P.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS UPDATES

A slide show of the magnificent **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge** was given at the **December meeting** by Marcia Johnson, a member of Great Old Broads for Wilderness (www.greatoldbroads.org), following a delicious pot-luck dinner hosted by *Eva Bansner*. (Thanks for all you do, *Eva!*)

National League (LWVUS) has been active in opposing oil drilling in the ANWR, the 19.3 million-acre Alaskan wilderness established to preserve diverse and unique wildlife, natural resources and recreational values.

Proponents of oil drilling cite the need for energy security as justification for drilling in this pristine environment. Last year the Senate voted to remove language from its Budget resolution that would have allowed oil drilling in the Refuge. The House then added to the energy bill a provision for drilling, but it was later removed. While the energy bill contains many provisions of concern to the League, the exclusion of oil drilling in ANWR from the bill is a significant victory! The League remains watchful for attempts by supporters of oil drilling to gain access to ANWR through other legislative means. Join the League's Grassroots Lobby Corps at <http://www.capwiz.com/lwv/mlm/> to keep updated on this and other important issues.

In January, Susan C. Strong spoke to the Environmental Concerns meeting about "**Mainstreaming our Messages NOW!**," an introduction to using effective metaphors when lobbying, educating and taking action.

Founder of The Metaphor Project, Susan has worked as a public educator and writer for the last 20 years, leading many workshops in the Bay Area on issues of peace, the environment and sustainability. She is co-founder of the "Who's Counting?" project and former Senior Research Associate at The Center for Economic Conversion.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS MEETING: Recycling in the 21st Century

In Berkeley, on an average day, about 21 tons of would-be trash is unloaded into a facility half the size of a football field. Nine people work all day sorting the mountains of refuse into marketable materials.

At our next meeting, **Monday, March 8, 2004, Martin Bourque**, the **Executive Director of the Ecology Center** will talk to us about "Recycling in the 21st Century." The meeting will be at **1340 Arch St.** (corner of Rose), home of *Eva Bansner*, at **7:30 p.m.**

Modern recycling caught on around the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970. Most early efforts were drop-off stations for paper, cans, and bottles. Without city subsidies, proceeds could not cover expenses; programs were volunteer-run to divert waste, not to make a profit.

In 1973, the Berkeley Ecology Center became one of the first community groups to do curbside pick-ups, beginning with a monthly newspaper collection. *Beth Schickele*, the founder of the LWVBAE Environmental Concerns Committee, helped obtain a grant in 1975 for a publicly funded demonstration program for curbside pick up in Berkeley. This led eventually to a citywide recycling program. In 2003, the Ecology Center celebrated the 30th anniversary of one of the longest-running curbside programs in the country.

For more information, contact *Carol Stone* at 549-0959 or seastone11@hotmail.com.

(Updates, continued)

For more information about "Mainstreaming in a Nutshell," log on to www.metaphorproject.org.

-Gail Schickele

STATE BUDGET CRISIS CALLS FOR MAJOR REFORMS

The State budget is the single most important policy statement of the governor and legislature, according to **Fred Kelly of the Planning & Conservation League**. He addressed several hundred members of the League of Women Voters at the LWV Bay Area symposium on Friday, January 30, focusing on state and local finance.

Kelly also told us that California is expected to add 500,000 more residents every year for the foreseeable future, with huge demographic changes -- "younger and browner." Even so, a growing economy alone won't enable the State to emerge from the current fiscal deficit; we need real structural change.

Most of the budget is predetermined before any governor starts putting a budget together. This is partly because of obligated payments for bonds approved by the voters over the years. Another problem is the two-thirds vote required to pass a budget, resulting in the minority party counting for twice as much as the majority party, according to Kelly. Other problems include our over-dependence on income tax, which causes wide volatility in the size of the general fund.

The tax credit system, Kelly pointed out, is out of control, with special interests protecting their special benefits, and there is no place in the budget to find these tax credits; they are simply "off the table." There will be major borrowing, whether or not the governor's bond on the ballot passes, but we also need major cutting and increased taxes.

The next speaker was **John Russo, Oakland City Attorney**, who told us that local governments are in budget crisis because the State is using local property taxes to pay its bills. Proposition 13 (in 1978) gave the State the power to allocate property taxes -- an unanticipated time bomb. Local government politicians won't vote for

housing because housing development won't ever pay for itself and it won't win votes in the next election. Local governments need guaranteed revenue sources; otherwise, local government will become irrelevant.

Keith Carson, Alameda County Supervisor, pointed out that since 1993, the State has been taking local property taxes, and this has had an especially profound impact on counties and special districts. Our inability to know what our budget limits will be, what our resources will be, causes great instability and uncertainty for local governments, especially given the growth and demographic changes in local populations throughout the State. LWV needs to help the public understand these issues.

Loni Hancock, Assembly member, serves on the Budget Committee and is Chair of the Select Committee on the Education Gap. She spoke about the 2/3 vote required to pass a budget, which is a recipe for gridlock, not for democracy. She expressed appreciation for LWV support for Proposition 56 on the March ballot. Without those changes, State legislators cannot be held accountable for failure to enact a timely budget. Proposition 13 reform is also needed, according to Hancock, to get business property to help share the tax burden. LWV could play a key role, if we would ratchet up our advocacy efforts and work more closely with state and local legislators.

Betty Yee, member of State Board of Equalization, pointed out that in a term-limited legislature, putting an annual budget together causes increasing reliance on lobbyists, and increasing strains on our education system and health and human services systems. Proposition 57, the 15 billion dollar bond act, would not help the State's economy to recover, in spite of its name.

When we talk about the budget crisis, we usually focus on cuts, but we should focus on
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(**State Budget Crisis**, continued from page 4)

revenue. California has 1/5 of the nation's billionaires and a higher rate of millionaires than any other state in the nation, according to Yee. Legislators have given tax credits to businesses to create jobs, but we don't know if the jobs were created. Yee would like to see a broader sales tax base to include selected services, such as labor charges for auto service; this could raise \$750,000 per year in taxes. Another example: reform Proposition 13 regulations to reassess commercial property regularly and to capture taxes on current values when commercial property changes hands.

Peter Schrag, journalist, was the moderator of the afternoon panel. He commented that some people think that if only we could get our spending levels back to what they were some years ago, all of our budget problems would be solved, but this idea ignores the increases in tax cuts and tax credits that have been enacted and the constant growth in population. We know from former Governor Wilson's actions that tax increases do not hurt business growth; in the early 90's, big growth followed a tax increase.

Anne Henderson, LWVC State and Local Finance Co-Chair, stated that support for Proposition 56 (on the March ballot) is probably the most useful thing the League could do in the current crisis. The League has worked on State and local finance issues for years; we speak for the public interest, so people do listen.

Fred Silva, Senior Advisor, Public Policy Institute, pointed out that the State does not have a balanced budget requirement. In the 1930's, California sometimes ran a 25% deficit and kept rolling it forward. Proposition 58 would impose discipline: the State would not be able to borrow from outside government to finance a deficit. Look for more changes on the November ballot.

Lenny Goldberg, Public Interest Advocate and consultant, expressed pessimism because, with "safe seat" reapportionment, legislators' positions have become more polarized,. The Governor gave Californians a 4 billion dollar tax

break and then declared a fiscal emergency. We need broad coalitions to pass effective reforms. We now tax new commercial expansion at full market value, which is a disincentive to new growth, especially in areas like east Oakland, while existing commercial property pays less than its fair share, thanks to Proposition 13. We are also imposing an increasing tax burden on a shrinking pool of working people, in order to pay for the service needs of a growing low-income population.

- *Jean Safir*, Editor

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HANCOCK URGES LEAGUE ACTIVISM

Without a decent budget resolution, our human services, higher education and transportation services will be devastated, according to Assemblywoman Loni Hancock. She addressed these issues and more during a "Legislative Interview" conducted by nine representatives of Leagues in her district (#14). Over the long term, she said, we have to discuss taxes, including reassessment of commercial property.

"It is time to organize, to speak out." She urged the League to learn to use the media more effectively, to "put a human face" on proposed cuts. If there is a public outcry on any issue, she said, the governor will listen. She also pointed out that California is one of only three states that require a 2/3 vote of the legislators in order to pass a budget.

Hancock will carry a bill on clean money in political campaigns, proposing to reduce the campaign spending limit for an assembly seat from \$400,000 to \$150,000. She urged the League to educate the public on this, since half to two-thirds of what is now raised for campaigns comes from Sacramento-based lobbyists and this definitely limits who gets heard.

-*Jean Safir*

CALENDAR

February

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26 Thurs. 4-6 pm Program Planning LWVBAE Office Brubeck, 526-5139

March

2 Tues. 7am - 8pm --- CALIFORNIA PRIMARY ELECTION --- Watts, 525-6614

5 Friday Noon VOTER Deadline for April issue jeansafir@att.net Safir, 524-9088

8 Mon. 2-4 pm Education Committee LWVBAE Office Lynch, 527-2173

8 Mon. 7:30 pm Environmental Concerns 1340 Arch St.(Bansner) Stone, 549-0959

11 Thurs. Noon Speaker Series Albany Public Library,
1247 Marin Avenue, at Masonic Mendell, 843-8824

11 Thurs. 6 - 8 pm Board Meeting LWVBAE Office Bickel, 526-4055

18 Thurs. 7:30 pm Action Committee 1419 Grant (Watts) Brubeck, 526-5139

22 Mon. 6:30-8:30p Universal Access to Health Care Berkeley Central Library, 3rd Floor
Kittredge St. at Shattuck Ave. Brubeck, 526-5139

April

27 Tues. Noon ANNUAL COMMUNITY LUNCHEON K. Nelson, 525-1673
Doubletree Hotel, Berkeley Marina



March 2004

IT'S EASY TO JOIN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Just fill in the blanks below, clip and mail this information to us with your check for annual dues made out to: \$55

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Berkeley, CA 94702-1509

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel. Day: _____ Eve: _____

Fax: _____ E-Mail: _____

Joining the local level makes you a member at all levels: LWVBAE, Bay Area, State and National. Dues and contributions to the League are not tax deductible. Contributions to the LWVB Foundation are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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