

The VOTER

LEAGUE of WOMEN VOTERS
of BERKELEY, ALBANY
and EMERYVILLE



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President: Nancy Bickel

October, 2001

Editor: Jean Safir

Letter from the President

Finding common ground for building a stronger community

The tragedies of September 11, 2001 have had and will have many consequences in our private and public lives. If anyone close to you died or lost loved family or friends, we extend our deep condolences.

In our role as League members, we will be watching and trying to address some of the public consequences of these terrorist attacks.

As I write, a few days after the attacks, one of the unfortunate consequences is that some people are expressing hatred and threats against residents and citizens they identify as Arabs or Moslems.

This rise in publicly expressed suspicion and distrust of certain "foreigners" — and the consequent fear and anxiety felt by some of our fellow citizens and residents — means that our Community Conversation on Confronting Racism is even more important. However, it also means that we will need more time for planning, so that we are sure that we address the issues appropriately and effectively.

We want to be sure that we have reached out to and invited as many of the people and groups in our three cities who may be affected by racism and stereotypes about race as we possibly can. We wish not only to confront racism, but, as the second half of the meeting title states, begin to find "common ground for building a stronger community."

In order to do so, we are postponing the workshop planned for October 6. A future date will be set shortly. Please let me know your suggestions and thoughts on this topic. You can send an e-mail to LWVBAE@pacbell.net. You can also leave a message on the office telephone at 843-8824.

- Nancy Bickel, President

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BOARD ACTION - SEPT. 5, 2001

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV): The Board voted to actively support the Berkeley City Council's placing a measure on the March 2002 ballot that embodies the League position on Instant Runoff Voting[†]

Annual Luncheon: Very successful! Net profit to date: over \$6,900! Thank you to Joyce Jackson and her hard-working committee!

Community Conversation on Racism: Locale moved to Rosa Parks School. Call Lois Brubeck with outreach suggestions.

— Jane Barrett, Board Secretary

GOVERNMENT IS PUBLIC BUSINESS

The League of Women Voters of Oakland is sponsoring a public workshop on the California Brown Act, which requires open government deliberations. Learn how to use this law to pave the way for informed civic participation and gain a better understanding of the "open meeting" requirement.

This three-hour workshop will feature California First Amendment Coalition General Counsel Terry Francke, who wrote the book on open government.

The date is **Saturday, October 13**, from 9:30 to 1:00 pm, the place is **Merritt College, Student Lounge in Building R** and the cost is \$35, including lunch. Checks should be made payable to LWVO and sent to:

The Brown Act Workshop c/o LWVO
1305 Franklin St., Suite 311
Oakland, CA 94612-3222

FALL MEETING APPLAUDS COUNTY REGISTRAR

Bradley Clark, Alameda County Registrar of Voters, gave a thoughtful and information packed talk to the 55 members who attended the fall general meeting and lunch on September 15. Clark welcomes increased participation by the League as observers or poll workers.

Voting practices and systems were approved unanimously as an issue for emphasis. This will mean an expanded effort to inform voters and to make sure every vote counts and a strong lobbying effort to get Instant Runoff Voting adopted in our cities. Tom and Jane Coulter were introduced as our new treasurer(s).

SPECIAL EVENT FOR NEW AND PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

Saturday, November 3, 10:00 am to noon LWVBAE Office, 1414 University Avenue

The Membership Committee invites those interested to meet a few League leaders and discuss our goals and activities this year by attending a gathering at the League office on November 3, from 10 AM until noon.

Access to our upstairs office, Suite D, is by the parking lot entrance to Andronico's store, between University Ave and Addison Street, a few doors west of Sacramento Street. Ring the bell for LWV and we will buzz the door open. One door enters at the staircase; the other door is at the elevator.

Bring your questions! Invite a few friends who may be interested in joining the League to come with you. Please let us know that you will attend by phoning (843-8824) and leaving a message at the League office by October 29.

- *Ginette Polak*, Membership Director

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDY — CONSENSUS UNITS —

**Wednesday, October 24, 10-12 noon at
League Office, and Thursday, October 25,
7-9 pm, 1520 Holly Street**

Background: Our local college, Vista, is a branch of the Peralta Community College District, one of 72 such districts around the state, serving about 1.6 million students. Peralta, with a headcount of about 28,000 students, has four sites: College of Alameda, Laney College (Oakland), Merritt College (Oakland) and Vista Community College (Berkeley).

Of these, only Vista has never had a permanent campus, and, indeed, breaking the Vista impasse was a prime motive for taking up the League study in the first place, back in the spring of 1999.

Positions emerging from our Vista study, adopted in September 2000, have allowed us to speak vigorously on behalf of the college, advocating for a fair share of District resources and pressing for the construction of a new campus worthy of the Vista community. The passage of a \$153 million bond measure, Measure E, in November, 2000, has brought our dream within reach (For more about the Vista-to-be, come to the Speakers Series meeting Oct. 11 at the Albany Library, 12-2).

Our study also informed us about a series of problems in the management and financing of the Peralta District as a whole, but many of these were not of the District's own making. These would require legislative and administrative changes at the State level to correct. As a result, we were led to ask the State league to undertake a study of the entire community college system. Much to our delight, the May, 2001, State convention agreed, and we will undoubtedly be reporting back on what

we find in the months to come.

Peralta District Consensus: In the meantime, we have looked at operations and priorities that the Peralta District can act on without State intervention. Some of the problems we saw are already under review by the Trustees and Administrators of the District. Our discussion and consensus will allow us to support the reform efforts currently under way and also to encourage change in those areas where the District has been slow to act.

Consensus Question #1: How could the Peralta Community College District supplement the funding it receives from State sources to accomplish its mission?

You are probably aware that, six weeks before the fall term began, Governor Davis cut \$126 million from the community college allocation in the 2001-2002 budget. This move, announced just 6 weeks before the fall term began, will take about \$3 million from the Peralta District.

Community colleges have been strapped for cash for years. Most of their funding, like that of the K-12 system, is based on student enrollment and attendance. In addition to this base funding, community colleges are supposed to receive 11% of Prop 98 funds the State collects. This money was originally to be a supplement, but now comprises around 75% of funding and has rarely amounted to the full 11% written into law.

As a result, even without the recent cuts, community colleges throughout the state are always looking elsewhere for money. Peralta's search has led to staff training agreements with private companies and ongoing partnerships with public agencies, such as the Oakland Fire and Police Academies. Like many other districts, Peralta has also recruited out of state and international students, who pay higher tuition, because the State does not subsidize them.

Consensus question #2 :How could the Peralta Community College District improve its fiscal management?

Peralta's finances today are not as precarious as they were in the 1980s, when they required a State appointed overseer to restore fiscal health. The state requires a 3% reserve, and the District's budget shows a 7% reserve even after some poaching to make up for the Governor's last-minute cuts.

The trustees' money management style, however, remains a source of sharp criticism from the press and the faculty. A state audit of the 1999-2000 budget found the District out of compliance with the "50% rule," which requires that at least half of State funds be spent for classroom expenses (largely faculty salaries). An audit of year 2000-2001 has been requested by Assemblywoman Dion Aroner to certify the legitimacy of trustee travel expenses.

Newspaper stories in the spring of 2001 highlighted expensive Board trips to far-off places (China, South Africa) in quest of increased enrollment of foreign students. These students pay \$150 a credit, rather than \$11 that residents pay, but their tuition moneys are not subject to the 50% rule. These added funds are supposed to cover the real cost of classroom space, labs, library books, faculty and student support personnel. Since the extra costs do not show up as a separate budget item, there is no way to verify that the added students make money for the District. The indirect costs to the District of having its chief administrative officer and members of the Board unavailable to tend to immediate District concerns for weeks at a time are not identified either.

The trustees are also being questioned about their oversight of contracts between the District and external suppliers. In the spring of 2001, for example, a \$4 million no-bid contract with a computer installation firm came before the Board with very skimpy notice and no hard numbers in the contract. Under criticism, the

Board rolled over an existing contract with the firm for a much smaller sum, but their casual attitude about spelling out contracts limits continues.

One area of money management that the District has recently addressed is improving the clarity and accessibility of budget documents, and the tying of budget categories to program goals. This effort, although incomplete, has already made financial information much easier to grasp for members of the Peralta community as well as the cities they serve.

Consensus question 3: How could the Peralta Community College District expand its outreach into the community and publicize its mission and the quality of its programs more effectively?

Perhaps one reason the expenses of Board travel generates so much criticism is that the District has only just begun to reach out to the communities that support it. In the last two years it has mailed invitations to every graduating high school senior in the District, and created an "Ambassador's Corps" of currently enrolled Peralta students who go to District high schools to talk about their own personal experiences and the programs available in the colleges. Representatives of the colleges are beginning to work with high school college counselors and with high school faculty to coordinate academic programs and standards.

For young students straight out of high school, there are, nevertheless, some drawbacks to Peralta's offerings. The current cramped quarters at Vista, the difficulty of reaching Merritt or Alameda by public transportation, and the skimpy campus life seem a high price to pay for the cheap tuition. Peralta's present student body is older, close to the statewide average of 32. Busy adults, with lives and responsibilities beyond school, they tend not to stay on campus after class. They do not partake of the kind of student life attractive

to the 18- or 19-year olds who enter most 4-year institutions as freshmen straight out of high school.

The District has started to devote more attention to the quality of student life, but it is only beginning to resolve the question of student input into college decision-making. As of academic year 2000-2001, two student trustees were seated on the Board, rather than the previous single one.

While their votes are only advisory, they do act as a conduit for issues that affect student life. Students also address the Board in their own voice, directly, both as individuals and through the representatives of their student government organizations. But finding the appropriate balance to serve the differing needs of widely varied student populations requires ongoing feedback from students and support service providers and has not been done on a regular basis.

Consensus question 4: How could the District increase accountability to the community?

The Board provides ample information about enrollment, course offerings and student services, but news about the way it transacts its own business has been much harder to come by. California's "Sunshine laws" (the Brown Act and its amendments) require 72 hours notice before public meetings are held.

While the Board usually obeys the letter of the law, notices for a special Monday night meeting may appear only the previous Friday afternoon and only in central administrative locations that community members are unlikely to see. Agendas for important decisions are sometimes skimpy in the extreme. The Board's regular bi-weekly Tuesday meetings are public and televised, but by the time a Board decision comes up for a vote, the public's opportunity to affect policy is minimal.

kept up-to-date. As of September 5, two weeks into the new term, the web site still featured student trustees from the last academic year. Board meeting announcements are routinely out of date and offer no agendas. The most current Board minutes date back to June. Board members are pictured and identified by Trustee area, but no District area map is available, either on the web or in the public relations office. Community members must call in and ask which trustee represents them.

The difficulty of tracking Board actions is compounded by a wrinkle in the State Education Code. Under this proviso, an incumbent for a K-14 school board position (including Community College Boards and County Boards of Education) need not appear on the ballot at all, if no formal opponent has filed for candidacy. The incumbent is considered to have been appointed and not elected. In the November 2000 election, when four trustee seats were up for renewal, three seats were not listed on the ballot. Under the present regulation, trustees may continue to serve indefinitely, with no voter validation.

There have been repeated requests over the last two years, from students and community members, for the establishment of community Advisory Committees at each campus, to keep communication open and on-going between the colleges and the wider community. Especially now that Measure E construction projects will affect every site, it is important to share news, discuss potential problems, negotiate disruptions of service, and ensure that the contracted repairs or construction are designed with the interests of the users in mind. To date, no such committees have been put in place.

Consensus question 5: How could the Peralta Community College District improve student access to college courses and services?

The District also has a web site, but it is not

Peralta is an urban district, but not all its campuses are equally accessible. Laney and Vista are on BART lines, but Alameda and Merritt require a car or a good deal of time on the infrequent buses.

During the summer of 2001, when Laney College was closed for repairs, a very successful shuttle bus ferried students from one campus to another. Everyone would like to continue the bus service even though Laney has reopened, but it is one of many “extras” made vulnerable by the Governor’s budget cuts.

About two-thirds of Peralta students take class outside the 9-5 time frame, in the evenings and on Saturdays. The District has begun to staff necessary student services — libraries, counselors, employment and financial aid offices — to serve these students appropriately, but the upcoming budget struggles put them at risk.

Consensus question 6: How could the District better assist entering high school graduates in need of remedial classes to increase their success rate at Peralta?

The demand for greater rigor and accountability from every level of public education has led to much more frequent testing and a high school exit exam required for graduation beginning with the class of 2004. In the meantime, 60% of entering freshmen at Cal State Hayward cannot pass entering placement exams in college-level reading, writing and math skills, although they are admitted automatically because they are in the top 20% of their high-school graduating class.

Legislators no longer allow the 4-year State universities to offer remedial courses, so under-prepared students can only turn to the community colleges to learn the necessary skills. Peralta, like districts throughout the state, has bridge programs on every campus to help students find their way. It is just beginning to work with high school counselors to develop better study habits.

Peralta’s outreach programs are designed to attract younger students, but the retention rate

for all students, which is of great interest to State evaluators, is not encouraging. Only 52% of all students enrolling in the fall semesters from 1993 to 1999 as new students continued on into the spring semester.

The District is just instituting a new Student Success Project, but it is too soon to track results. This year, Vista has begun offering concurrent enrollment courses for serious students who can take college-level courses (and earn college credit) while they are still in high school.

Consensus question 7: How can the District maintain its commitment to provide strong programs for lifelong learning at each campus?

Community Colleges, by charter, have a three-fold mission: (1) to provide basic lower-division college courses to those students who will transfer to 4 year institutions; (2) to provide education and AA degrees for students in a variety of technical and licensed fields (such as auto mechanics, international business, cosmetology); (3) to create opportunities for personal enrichment and lifelong learning to all members of the community. Many university graduates have first come to grips with the challenges of the “information age” in community college computer labs.

Most of the Governor’s budget cuts will postpone the purchase of modern computer equipment and eliminate money for major repair and maintenance of buildings and grounds. Measure E will disrupt ordinary class scheduling at every campus. Clearly the colleges will need to relocate and revise schedules. But people who prefer not to drive at night, or cannot navigate broken sidewalks easily, have to be accommodated wherever and whenever the classes are held.

- *Helene Lecar*, Study Chair

TEN YEARS AFTER THE CONFLAGRATION

It is ten years since the fire that destroyed 3,000 homes and caused 25 deaths in Oakland and Berkeley. East Bay communities, fire departments, public utilities, the East Bay Regional Parks District, insurance companies and research institutions have studied what happened, what went wrong, and how to avoid repetition.

To share this information, a conference will be held at the Scottish Rite Center in Oakland from October 10 to 12^h. Free public events will take place at the Scottish Rite Center on the evening of Thursday, Oct 11, and at Jack London Square, Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, Merritt College and other places on Saturday, October 13.

When the Kensington Fire Protection District realized that the water flow available from hydrants near the border with Tilden Park was far from adequate, they developed a five-phase capital improvement program to address the problem. Phase I was completed this past July, and tests showed that the flow from various hydrants had either doubled or tripled. Phase II is under construction now. I will be presenting a paper on how this program was developed at the conference on the morning of Thursday, October 11.

The specific public events were still in the planning stage at press time, but they are expected to include demonstrations of fire fighting techniques, photo exhibits of past conflagrations, booths with survival information for home owners, as well as entertainments.

For up-to-date information on these public events, please check the following web site:

www.universityextension.ucdavis.edu/fire.

-Gilbert Bendix



League members Joyce Jackson, Mary Wainwright and Sherry Smith, from left to right, all members of the Luncheon planning committee

THIRD ANNUAL COMMUNITY LUNCHEON

"Take off the white gloves," said State Senator Jackie Speier in her vigorous talk before the 174 people who attended the LWVBAE third annual Community Luncheon. Senator Speier told the League to encourage women to enter politics, where they are still under-represented. She said that she did not know what bills the League supported this year, so other legislators were also likely not to know. She urged the League to support just a few issues and to speak up more emphatically and effectively in their support.

Chaired by former Albany Mayor Joyce Jackson, the planning committee included Ruth Ganong, Jo Ann Price, Karen Nelson, Sherry Smith, Beth Springston and Mary Wainwright. Winnie McLaughlin took photos that are now on view with news clippings at the League office.

- Karen Nelson

- Berkeley addresses unless otherwise indicated -

September

29 Sat. 9a-12:30p LWV Bay Area "Know Your Town" Day LWVBA,
SF Bay Model, 2100 Bridgeway, Sausalito 925-283-7093

October

3 Wed. 4-6p Board Meeting LWVBAE Office *Bickel, 848-6255*
4 Thurs. 5p Deadline for Nov. VOTER (*jeansafir@att.net*) *Safir, 524-9088*
8 Mon. 7-9p Environmental Concerns 1340 Arch Street *Bansner, 849-2154*
11 Thurs. 12-2p Speaker Series: Peralta Community Colleges
Albany Library 1247 Marin Avenue *Laurence, 526-4758*
11 Thurs. 7p Housing Action Group 1300C Shattuck Ave. *Safir, 524-9088*
13 Sat. 9:30a-1p LWV Oakland - Workshop on California Brown Act
Student Lounge, Bldg. R, Merritt College LWVO, 834-7640
15 Mon. 5:30p Education Committee T.B.A. *Saunders, 981-8072*
18 Thurs. 7p Action Committee 1419 Grant St. *Brubeck, 526-5139*
24 Wed. 10a UNIT: Community Colleges LWVBAE Office *Lecar, 549-9719*
25 Thurs. 7-9p UNIT: Community Colleges 1520 Holly St. *Lecar, 549-9719*

November

3 Sat. 10a-noon New Member Event LWVBAE Office *Polak, 841-4546*
6 Tue. 7a-7p **Election Day** in Albany & Emeryville *Watts, 525-6614*
7 Wed. 4-6p. Board Meeting LWVBAE Office *Bickel, 848-6255*
8 Thurs. 5p Deadline for Dec.-Jan VOTER (*jeansafir@att.net*) *Safir, 524-9088*
8 Thurs. 12-2p Speaker Series T.B.A. *Laurence, 526-4758*
8 Thurs. 7p Housing Action Group T.B.A. *Safir, 524-9088*

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Betty M. Cook William Merritt
Terry Doran Jay Grover
Angharad Jones

