

The Palo Alto *VOTER*

The League of Women Voters of Palo Alto
December/January 2010-2011

Vol. XXV
No. V



Winter Luncheon

The Honorable Ira Ruskin, Assemblyman

The 2010 Election: Beyond the numbers, what happened & what's next

Saturday, December 4, 2010, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Garden Court Hotel, 520 Cowper Street, Palo Alto - free valet parking

Ira Ruskin's Biography

Ira Ruskin was elected to the Assembly in 2004, representing the twenty-first district, encompassing much of Silicon Valley, including the Almaden Valley of San Jose, Atherton, East Palo Alto, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Menlo Park, Monte Sereno, Palo Alto, Portola Valley, Redwood City, San Carlos and Woodside.

In his first term, Assembly member Ruskin was one of five freshmen members to chair a standing committee, the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials. During his first session, Assembly member Ruskin introduced bills to establish greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in California, modeled on the Kyoto Protocol, and to promote the use of alternatively fueled vehicles.

In 2006, the Speaker of the Assembly named



Inside the State Capitol

Winter Luncheon Schedule

11:30 - Meet and Greet—
No Host Wine Bar

Noon - Lunch
Starter: Bruchetta Tipica
Entrée: Insalata Pollo
Arrosto or
Vegetarian
Dessert: Apple Tarts
Coffee & Tea

12:45 Speaker: Assembly member Ira Ruskin

Please register by Thursday, December 2, 2010.
Cost for lunch is \$30.00/person

Make your check payable to the LWV Palo Alto
Indicate if you want a vegetarian entree
953 Industrial Ave. Ste 113
Palo Alto, CA 94303

You may phone in your reservation with the number attending and menu choice, and pay at the door. (650) 327-9148 ■

Ira Ruskin—continued on page 4



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 Monday after the first Tuesday of each month.

President's Message

Greetings Everyone,

Comics such as John Stewart say that they have no trouble writing their scripts. Politicians write it for them.

This week I have read the first draft of the overdue Palo Alto Housing Element. The vision statement for the housing element did not mention housing. Neither did most of the goals. And right in the middle is a program that reads, "Amend the zoning code to emphasize and create zoning incentives that encourage the development of smaller size and affordable housing units, including units for seniors that minimize housing impacts on schools and other public facilities. I can see John Stewart dressing up kids as adults with wrinkles and writing 60 rather than 6 years on a housing application. I can see this city encouraging more small housing units for lots of good reasons especially if they are not restricted to certain people by age or special circumstances. I understand that Palo Alto schools are pressured for space and we are fortunate to have an excellent school system paid mostly by property and parcel taxes. I know additional children do not bring additional money to the schools. But to write it into our Housing Element that we will somehow approve units based upon a determination that the units will not impact schools means that we are coding discrimination against children into our housing element and zoning code. It is better to zone for more small units to help the environment, to keep the mass of buildings smaller, to provide units for small households, and to keep the cost of units down. By the way, seniors also have a heavy use on public facilities. The second draft of the Housing Element is improved and the commission agrees that it needs to rewrite its Vision statement. My hope is that the Housing Element recognizes that all people need housing which is maintained in good condition and that the neighborhoods in which the housing is located provide services and welcoming spaces.

I hope to see you at the Winter Luncheon at 11:30 am on December 4.

Phyllis ■



LWVUS Study - The Federal Role in Public Education

In January we will begin our national study on the Federal Role in Public Education that was approved by the LWVUS Convention in June, 2010.

Why are we doing this study? Since the passage of the Equal Rights amendment, the War on Poverty, and Brown vs. the Board of Education the federal government has been increasingly involved in funding educational improvements. In 2000 the reauthorization of the National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NEASA) was expanded to include accountability measures and renamed No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

What made the federal government become concerned and

Education—continued on page 6

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

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The VOTER is online at www.lwvpaloalto.org

Events page



Program Planning
Saturday, January 22, 2011,
9 am – noon

Alice Smith's House

(please see Membership Handbook for address)

Directions: Southwest on Arastradero, after El Camino Real, third left on Los Palos Ave (just after the fire station on the right), and right on Los Palos Circle.

Come at 9 am for an excellent brunch provided by the Board and enjoy lively discussions on California, Bay Area, County and Palo Alto issues. What are the hot issues in Palo Alto? What would you like to see the League do next year? There are tough decisions, such as:

Do you think that we should restudy our Baylands position? This has been proposed.

The Housing Element and Stanford Hospital Expansion plan should be complete this spring; the comprehensive plan will not.

Our abbreviated positions are on our web site at <http://www.lwvpaloalto.org/Advocacy.html>

This meeting provides a good summary of what we have done as we talk about what we want to do next.

Please come. Phyllis Cassel, President ■



Bay Area League Day
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
Saturday January 29, 2011,
9 am – 2:10 pm

MetroCenter, 101 Eighth Street, Oakland

League of Women Voters Bay Area presents Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Taking it to the Next Level featuring a keynote address by Dan Reicher, Director of Energy and Climate Initiatives at Google. There will be three panels of regional and state experts on what government is doing, what science is doing and what you can do to reduce your carbon footprint and Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

Cost: In advance: \$30 (\$20 without lunch); at the door \$35 (\$25 without lunch). To register please write a check payable to "LWVBA" and mail with your name and any guest names to LWVBA, 1611 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 300, Oakland, CA 94612. Registration is also available online through January 20 via PayPal at www.lwvbayarea.org. For more details, call (510) 839-1608 or check the League website—<http://lwvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html>



GREAT DECISIONS—GREAT DISCUSSIONS

The Foreign Policy Association has announced the titles for discussion in the 2011 Great Decisions program:

- Rebuilding Haiti
- U.S. National Security
- Horn of Africa
- Responding to the Financial Crisis
- Germany Ascendant
- Sanctions and Nonproliferation
- The Caucasus
- Global Governance

The Great Decisions briefing book provides balanced material on each topic for weekly discussions in February and March. There is background material and resource guides for furthering education on these foreign policy issues. Plan to come, to learn, to discuss these difficult, and intriguing topics. Contact Nancy Olson or the League office (650) 327-9148 if you would like to order a book for 2011. Books are delivered in January and the eight weekly discussions begin in February. (Books are \$20 each when received in January.)

Submitted by Nancy Olson ■

Ira Ruskin's Biography

*Ira Ruskin—
continued from page 1*

Assembly member Ruskin Chair of the Assembly Budget Sub-Committee on Natural Resources. In addition to his role as chair of the Budget Sub-Committee on Natural Resources, Assembly member Ruskin co-chairs the Joint Legislative Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education. He also serves on the Higher Education, Transportation, and Labor & Employment Committees, as well as the Joint Committee on Emergency Services and Homeland Security, and the Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care.

Since joining the legislature, Mr. Ruskin has been recognized for his environmental and legislative leadership by organizations including Sierra Club California, the California Product Stewardship Council, Environment California, the California Animal Association, CORE Environmental Foundation, and the California League of Conservation Voters. He received the Chancellor's Distinguished Service Award in May 2010 for key legislation and leadership in support of California Community Colleges. He also has been honored by Bay Area groups, including the South Bay Labor Council and the San Jose/Silicon Valley Chapter of the NAACP.

Prior to his election to the Assembly, Mr. Ruskin had been elected to three terms as a member of the Redwood City Council, serving as mayor from 1999-2001. In his work on the city council, Mr. Ruskin played a critical role in the development of the current San Mateo County emergency medical response system, which has resulted in quicker and more uniform response times throughout the county. He also worked to prevent elder abuse by requiring police officers to visit nursing facilities as well as to provide stable funding for battered women's shelters.

Mr. Ruskin also played a leadership role in organizing officials from Santa Clara, San Mateo and Alameda Counties to successfully lobby the state legislature to enact landmark legislation protecting the Bay Area's water



supply and mandating that San Francisco repair the vulnerable Hetch Hetchy water delivery system. On the basis of these efforts, Mr. Ruskin was elected as first chair of the newly formed Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency (BAWSCA), which represents nearly two million residents, businesses and community organizations in the region.

Mr. Ruskin also served as a member of the San Mateo County Transportation Authority, Redwood City Education Foundation Executive board, and several other boards.

For more than twenty years, Ira Ruskin worked in the private sector as a communications consultant, providing strategic marketing materials for technology companies, non-profits and government agencies.

Mr. Ruskin received his B.A. in History from the University of California, Berkeley, and his M.A. from Stanford University in Communications.

Mr. Ruskin and his wife, Cheryl, reside in Redwood City.

Death of Irene Sampson

It is with sadness that I inform you of the death yesterday of Irene Sampson our LWVPA 1st Vice President. She died peacefully, without pain, at home and with her family after a short illness. We remember her laughter, her warmth, her kindness and her dedication to the League. She was our president from 1981 to 1983 and co-president from 1996-1997, served on the Bay Area League Board and held positions with the LWVC and completed other positions too numerous to mention here. Words of appreciation of her life will be published in our next *VOTER*. A memorial service is being planned. When we know the date and any other details we will send an e-blast and place the notice on our web site.

With sadness- Phyllis Cassel, President

New Voices for Youth is up and running. Our staff project directors, Tanuj Chopra and Ana Angel, are now heading up a civic engagement video project with La Raza students at Menlo-Atherton High School. They will be helping about 10 young people develop their stories about what goes on in their lives and their communities for content in short video productions. A new web site for New Voices is nearing completion and will go live next month. Watch for the announcement of the unveiling of the site. It will include showings of the students' videos, descriptions and photos of the program and the staff and background information about New Voices.

The steering committee for New Voices is made up of representatives of LWV Palo Alto and LWV South San Mateo County. The committee is now meeting at the LWV Palo Alto offices and welcomes new members or visitors.

*Submitted by Veronica Tincher,
New Voices Steering Committee ■*



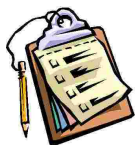
November Elections Voter Service Wrap Up

This fall, our LWV Palo Alto Voter Service team went into high energy activities. We worked in four areas, all with many volunteers helping out.

1. Voter Registration was conducted in Gunn and Paly High Schools with Liza Taft and Mary Alice Thornton serving as coordinators.
2. *Voters Guides* were mailed to members and community supporters. The mailing crew, chaired by Mary Alice Thornton, processed more than 600 copies for the mailing. Additional copies were distributed by Liza Taft to libraries and other community sites and went to the Speakers Bureau presentations. Veronica Tincher prepared the *Voters Guide* and was assisted by Trina Lovercheck and Phyllis Casel.
3. Speakers Bureau, chaired by Carol Bechtold, was staffed by Doris Petersen, Ginger Johnson, Nan Prince, Pat Saffir, Joyce Tavrow, Sally Probst and Veronica Tincher. These speakers did seven presentations in the community, two of which were open to the public. In addition, Ellen Forbes and Doris Petersen presented Pros and Cons of the California ballot measures for broadcast by the Community Media Center on public access channels and live streaming.
4. Candidates Forum, chaired by Trina Lovercheck, hosted candidates for the 14th Congressional District and 21st Assembly District. Many volunteers assisted in making this event a success.

Many thanks to all the volunteers that made these activities a success. A special thanks to Betty Gerard for arranging publicity.

Submitted by Veronica Tincher, Voter Service Coordinator ■



November Board Summary

At its November meeting, your board:

- Unanimously elected & enthusiastically welcomed its newest member, Bonnie Packer, who will serve as Membership director,
- asked Veronica Tincher to bring to the Dec. board meeting an adjusted set of candidate forum rules, after incorporating board suggestions for them, and
- thanked Phyllis and Ellen for the four LWVPA letters to the editor, explaining League stands on different ballot measures, that were recently

published in various newspapers.

The board also learned that:

- LWVPA made seven presentations of the Pros & Cons of the ballot measures during this election season,
- we produced and distributed 1,800 copies of the Voters Guide, and
- our membership total has risen to 293.

Submitted by Ellen Forbes, Secretary ■

Housing Element Update

The City of Palo Alto Housing Element has progressed to a written draft and had its second hearing at the Planning and Transportation Commission is on November 10. League members have been attending preliminary meetings, reading the proposed drafts, and have made comments on the draft at the Nov 10 meeting. There are some good and bad items in the drafts that we have read. The original vision statement mentioned neighborhoods but not housing. The commission decided to rewrite it. Some of the Goals didn't mention Housing either but are still under consideration for rewording. A Goal to "Reduce the Environmental Impact of Housing" has been added with appropriate policies and programs. The programs are not written in such a way as to discourage housing. This goal fits with our environmental positions. An emphasis on the environment is to be woven into the total Comprehensive Plan update.

It appears that the housing inventory will identify enough sites that can be zoned to meet the fair share of 2860 units required by ABAG. The city is depending upon mixed use and housing over parking lots as two ways to increase the current availability of zoned land to meet the numbers requirement. The council wants increases in housing to be focused along transit nodes in the University and California Avenue area. This League has strongly pushed the city to meet the ABAG goal. How realistic this list is, is hard to evaluate but the real test will be if the city actually does the rezoning and approves projects as they are proposed. A housing element and zoning ordinance does not build housing, developers do. The city's obligation is to allow a reasonable number of units without impediments. In a similar way, a change to the state law this year will require that a minimum of one zone allow "Single Room Occupancy" housing without a conditional use permit. That recommendation has been included in the document.

The Element includes some flexibility with the 50' height limit and some emphasis on minimum density for development. Zones are usually listed as having a range of units allowed. The goal would be to place at least a minimum density in the RM 15 zone. This would encourage smaller units and will meet the needs for many small household types. We recommend a minimum number of units in other zones as well. Unfortunately one of the programs adds "minimizing housing impacts on schools" which would appear to limit housing that would attract families with children. Such a statement would appear to be discriminating against families with children. We recommend that they take this statement out. It is against

Palo Alto, State and Federal law to discriminate against families with children. Our schools do need support and encouraging a range of housing types and sizes is certainly appropriate.

Monitoring the progress of the Housing Element is one of the Palo Alto League's priorities for this 2010/2011 program year. The Element was due at the CA Department of Housing and Community Development in June of 2009. The technical document which accompanies the Housing Element will be updated with the latest available statistics in December and staff hopes that a final draft will be ready to send by the end of April.

Submitted by Phyllis Cassel, President ■

Education—continued from page 2

more involved in public schools that traditionally were the purview of states and local governments? Inequality is the answer.

- In science achievement tests in 2003, American students ranked 20th out of 40 countries.
- Large disparities remain in America between the educational achievement of White and Asian American high school students compared to Latino and African American high school students.
- American educational disparities remain linked to funding disparities. The wealthiest 10 percent of school districts in the U.S. spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent.
- The American educational system allocates more unequal inputs and produces more unequal outcomes than most other industrialized nations.
- Schools have become more segregated. School desegregation proceeded rapidly in America from the 1960s to the 1980s and then was dramatically reversed by the courts.

LWVs in most states, not all, have education positions. We have no national position that will permit us to speak to today's issues at the federal level.

We invite all who are interested in one of the most important issues of today to join an education study committee. We plan to begin meeting in January. The LWVUS study committee will begin publishing the scope and the consensus questions for the study as well as informational materials. It is much more fun learning together—you are welcome. Please come. Call Nan Prince, the Education Committee Chair or me.

Submitted Doris Petersen, Education Committee member ■

THANK YOU

We would like to thank the following people for making the assembly and delivery of the October *VOTER* possible: **Jean Colby, Janet Owens, Mary Cooper, Vivian Blomenkamp, Geri Stewart, Barbara Bowden, Isabel Arabian, Janet Creelman, & Mitzi Henderson , organizer.**

Thank you **Sally Probst** and **James G. Moore** for proofreading the *VOTER*. ■

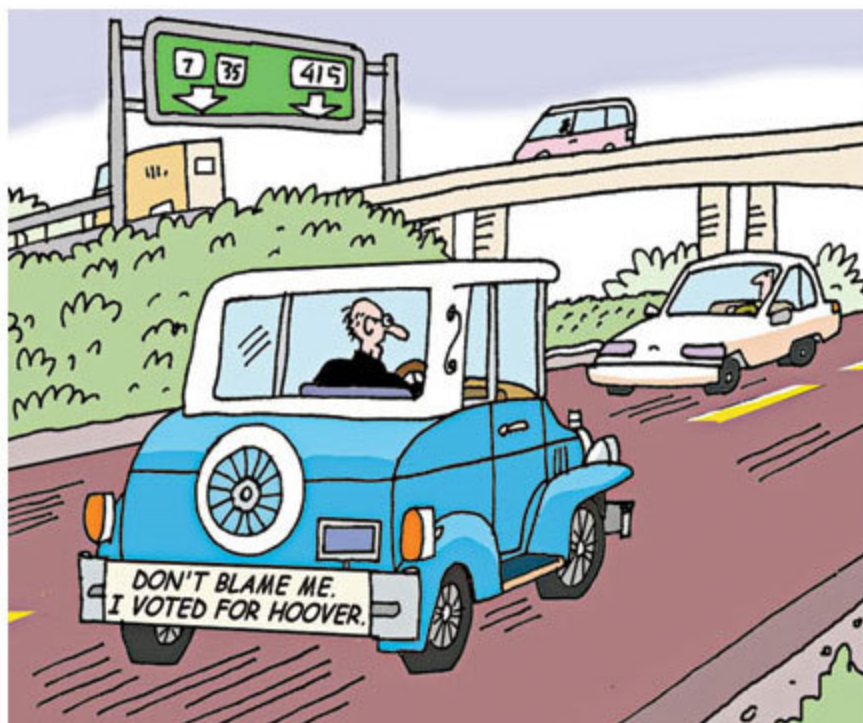
WELCOME

**Melody Lowman
Del Silverman
Carole Stein**
We are delighted to have you as members. ■

New Membership Co-chair - Bonnie Packer

The LWVPA Board of Directors extends a warm welcome to Bonnie Packer, who was elected unanimously by the League Board on November 3. Bonnie has served on the Board previously and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience with her. Bonnie's new portfolio is Membership and she has great ideas for increasing our outreach to prospective members.

Mary Alice Thornton,,
Second Vice President ■



The League of Women Voters , born out of suffrage, now educates and advocates. Anyone 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: \$70.00 Additional membership, same address: \$35.00

Mail check to LWV, 953 Industrial Ave., Suite 113, 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
(650) 327-9148

League of Women Voters of Palo Alto
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(650) 327-9148

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CALENDAR is constantly updated at
<http://lwvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html>

December

- 4 Sat 11:30am-1:30pm. Winter Luncheon. See page 1.
- 7 Tue 7:15 pm. Board Meeting, Mary Alice Thornton

January

- 4 Tue 7:15 pm. Board Meeting, atrium
- 8 Mon Noon. VOTER deadline.
- 20 Fri 9:15 am. VOTER mailing, Channing House
- 22 Sat 9am-noon. Program Planning. Alice Smith
- 29 Sat Bay Area League Day. See page 3.

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SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Supervisor Liz Kniss(650) 965-8737
Send e-mail -liz.kniss@bos.sccgov.org

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