

# The Palo Alto *VOTER*

The LWV of Palo Alto

March 2010

Phyllis Cassel, President ; Mary Alice Thornton Membership;  
Karen Sundback & Relly Davidson, *VOTER* Editors; Phone: (650) 327-9148; <http://www.lwypaloalto.org>



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January 11, 2010, U.S. Supreme Court

## OUTRAGE TO CAMPAIGN FINANCE CHANGES

In the *Citizens United v. FEC* ruling, the Supreme Court declared that the government may not ban political spending by corporations in candidate elections. The 5-to-4 decision is a sharp departure in controlling corporations' influence in politics. Justice Kennedy, writing for the majority, said it was a vindication of the First Amendment's most basic free speech principle—that the government has no business regulating political speech. He declared, incredibly, "The appearance of influence or access will not cause the electorate to lose faith in our democracy."



The following is a statement by Mary G. Wilson, national president of the League of Women Voters on the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*. The League filed an *amicus* brief in this case.

*(campaign finance continued on page 6)*

## FAIR ELECTIONS ACT IS FIRST STEP FROM ABYSS

The Fair Elections Act, which will appear as Proposition 15 on the June 2010 Ballot, is a response to various campaign abuses both in California and in the nation. It would establish a voluntary pilot project for the election of the California secretary of state in 2014 and 2018. Candidates for that office would be allowed to qualify for public financing if they agreed to spending prohibitions and to raise a large number of \$5 contributions from California. The system would be funded by raising fees on California lobbyists, lobbyist employers and lobbying firms to \$350 per year. The measure repeals a Prop 34 prohibition on public funding of campaigns.



The League of Women Voters supports this ballot initiative. In her editorial in the August 22, 2009 issue of the *Sacramento Bee*, Janis R. Hirohama, president of the League of Women Voters of California, says the following about the Fair Elections Act.

"Our current campaign finance system forces even the most well-intentioned elected officials to spend far too much of their time raising money from wealthy private donors and corporate interests, to the detriment of good

*(fair elections continued on page 6)*



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: [lwypaoffice@gmail.com](mailto:lwypaoffice@gmail.com). Deadline is the first Friday after the first Wednesday of each month.

# President's Message

Thirty people participated in our Program Planning meeting last month. This critical meeting provides a base for what we do over the next year or so. Thank you everyone for participating. Thank you Alice Smith for hosting us. Last month we participated in several education meetings but we are also acting on our positions. Three events of note:

- ◆ Your Board approved support of the Palo Alto Unified School District parcel tax, and has signed the ballot statement. Our position is based upon the LWVC position that supports a comprehensive education system that meets the needs of individual students.
- ◆ The LWV Santa Clara County Council has decided to join the Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. This decision is based on a LWVUS position that supports abolition of the death penalty. The coalition is asking the District Attorney to request permanent incarceration rather than the death penalty, and has signed a petition to be sent to the DA.
- ◆ The LWVC has become a co-chair of The California Clean Money Campaign to support Proposition 15, which is voluntary public financing of the secretary of state races in 2014 and 2018. Our League will be working with the mid-peninsula working group of the Campaign in this endeavor. Additional details are in this Voter.

League studies and educates ourselves and others. Taking a stand is the next step towards making the changes we seek. Please join us as we work towards a better community for all.

Phyllis Cassel, President ✨



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*The VOTER is online at [www.lwvpaloalto.org](http://www.lwvpaloalto.org)*



## Public Education (K-12): What Are Our Major Problems and Possible Solutions?

Wednesday, February 24, at 7:30 pm

Campbell Community Center, Roosevelt Room,  
One West Campbell Avenue on the corner of Campbell  
and Winchester Avenues.

Speakers: Charles Weis, County Superintendent of Education, Santa Clara County, and Ellen Wheeler, Member, Board of Trustees, Mt. View - Whisman School District.

Charles Weis became Santa Clara County Superintendent of Schools in July 2008, and immediately took an active role in education and community issues and organizations in Santa Clara County and the Bay Area.

Since his arrival in Santa Clara County, Dr. Weis has served on the Executive Committee of the Gateways Cradle to Career Education and Workforce Partnership, the Board of Directors of the Silicon Valley Education Foundation and Joint Venture Silicon Valley, the Juvenile Justice Systems Collaborative, Kids in Common, Children's Agenda Vision Council, 6th District PTA, the Santa Clara County Education Coalition Board, and the San Jose/Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce and its Education Committee. Currently, Dr. Weis is President of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).

Ellen Wheeler is Chairperson of the Education Committee for the League of Women Voters of Santa Clara County. She has been a member of the LWV, Los Altos-Mountain View for eight years. Ellen is also a member of the Education Committee for the LWV California. Additionally, Ellen is one of the committee members working on, and advocating for, a League study on the Federal Role in Education.

Ellen's short-term and long-term background is in education and the law. She's currently serving her second term as a school board member in Mountain View-Whisman School District, is a credentialed teacher, and is a proud graduate of Santa Clara University School of Law.

This meeting, sponsored by the LWV of Southwest Santa Clara Valley, representing the communities of Campbell, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, and Saratoga, will provide an opportunity for the public to ask written questions. For more information, call 408-356-4460.\*



## Prop 15 Fair Elections Speaker & Volunteer Trainings

Monday, March 1, 1-2 pm  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto,  
Fireside Room  
505 E. Charleston Road, Palo Alto

- \* Learn the details of Proposition 15, the California Fair Elections Act.
- \* See how well public financing has worked in other states.
- \* Hone your message in support of Fair Elections.

With Nancy Neff, Palo Alto Coordinator for California Fair Elections Campaign and member of LWV-Palo Alto.  
RSVP: [paloalto-info@caclean.org](mailto:paloalto-info@caclean.org)

Saturday, March 6  
Speaker & Volunteer Training  
with Trent Lange, Statewide Campaign Chair.  
Time & place TBA.

See [www.yesfairelections.org/events](http://www.yesfairelections.org/events) \*



## Peninsula Chapter of the World Affairs Council

Wednesday, March 3  
Refreshments: 7 pm; Program: 7:30-9 pm  
Los Altos Youth Center  
1 South San Antonio Rd., Los Altos.

LWV members and friends are invited to a World Affairs Council lecture, *Nuclear Power Without Nuclear Proliferation* with Scott Sagan, former Director of the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University

Admission is free. \*



## Prop 15 Campaign Kickoff

Saturday, March 27, 4-6 pm  
First Unitarian Church of San Jose  
160 N. First St, San Jose

Come to the South Bay campaign kickoff for Prop 15, the California Fair Elections Act! Join Assemblymember Ira Ruskin, former Assembly Speaker Sally Lieber, other elected officials, and campaign chair Trent Lange so you can help pass Fair Elections that money can't buy!

Please RSVP at [www.yesfairelections.org/events](http://www.yesfairelections.org/events). \*

## Adapting to Climate Change: Preparing Palo Alto for Inevitable Impacts

Tuesday, March 16, 2010 , 7 - 9 pm  
Lucie Stern, Community Room

**Free admission—Doors open at 6:45 p.m.**  
**Climate change is happening.** We must do everything possible to minimize its severity by reducing our use of fossil fuels, but we also should begin preparing ourselves for the changes ahead. In Palo Alto we can expect an increased risk of flooding, water shortages and wildfires in our foothills.

**How can we prepare for these impacts?**  
**Former Mayor Peter Drekmeier** will identify some of the challenges ahead and measures we can take to reduce the local impacts of climate change.

Following Peter's talk, attendees will be invited to divide into small groups to discuss the issues presented.

**Sponsor:** Community Environmental Action Partnership (CEAP) ✨



## Action - Yes

LWVUS has been busy speaking out in favor of strong **Health Care** legislation and asking local League members not to give up the fight.

**Climate Change** has also been in the League spotlight, with a delegation from LWVUS attending the Copenhagen summit, continuing action at the national level and urging local Leagues to keep up the pressure against proposals to weaken the Clean Air Act.

LWVUS President, Mary Wilson, spoke to a House Committee urging fast action on legislation to mitigate the negative consequences of the recent Supreme Court decision allowing unlimited corporate spending on federal campaigns.

At the state level, LWVC is one of the lead groups working with the **Fair Elections** Campaign to pass Prop. 15 in June. LWVPA has voted to support the campaign and promote member involvement in action and education about this issue.

LWVPA, along with the other Leagues in Santa Clara County, has joined a coalition working to promote alternatives to the use of the **Death Penalty** in the county.

As always, real action depends on all of us. Please ask how you can get involved!

*Submitted by Irene Sampson, Action Chair ✨*



## Special Election

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

As approved by the Board of Education, a parcel tax, Measure A, will be on the ballot. This election is for all voters of the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD). All registered voters will receive a ballot—you do not need to be a permanent vote-by-mail voter. Start looking for your ballots in early April.

The Parcel Tax will be known as Ballot Measure A (not to be confused with School Bond Measure A, passed in June 2008, and also not to be confused with Palo Alto Business License Tax Measure A, defeated in November 2009.)

School year 2010-2011 is the last year of the current parcel tax (2005); it expires after six years. The new tax would also be for six years. The current tax is \$493 which will be increased by \$96 to \$589. The cost of living adjustment

(COLA) of 2%, will bring the tax to about \$589, then increasing to about \$611, \$623, \$635, \$647, and finally to \$660 in 2017-18. Each parcel will be taxed the same amount. In accordance with the California constitution, the tax authorization requires 2/3 of the vote to pass.

Parcel taxes are used to pay for District costs, such as salaries and general spending. They are used in conjunction with other funds, such as those from the state.

## SCA 6

Joe Simitian, a Democratic state senator, believes that it should only take a 55% vote to pass a parcel-tax measure, rather than a two-thirds majority vote. To that end, he has proposed California Senate Constitutional Amendment 6, which would bring about such a change. To get SCA 6 on the ballot will require a 2/3 vote of the members of both chambers of the California State Legislature.

*Submitted by Sara Whitehead ✨*

## Summary of Program Planning Meeting January 23, 2010

Each year the LWVPA chooses the topics it wants to focus on as issues for emphasis and/or study at various levels of League. We address local and county priorities every single year, and in alternating years we also express our views on upcoming (1) national and Bay Area or (2) state League priorities. This year was (1) in the cycle. The following report covers LWVPA's priorities that were determined at all this year's levels except local, which the Board will address at its next meeting.

The criteria used at our Program Planning meeting on Jan. 23 for selecting any topic for a League Issue for Emphasis or study were set forth in "The Strategy Screen" adopted at a strategic planning session:

- Any strategy adopted by LWVPA must support: Our mission; our competitive advantages including our reputation; have the human and financial resources to produce a high quality result, and it must protect our nonpartisan reputation.
- A strategy would be preferential if it would: Enhance our reputation; promote our growth; increase our visibility; provide a unique contribution, and not duplicate the work of other competent organizations.



**LWVUS.** The 30 attendees overwhelmingly supported "*The Federal Role in Public Education*" as the issue to support as a study for 2010-2012. It was chosen from among two other possibilities: "Civic Literacy in Adults as Well as Students" and "Establishing a Cabinet-Level Department of Peace."

Also, we agreed to a Bylaws change recommendation: Under section A. Voting Members . . . (3) those who have been members of the League for 50 years or more shall be [honorary] life members excused from the payment of dues.



**LWV of the Bay Area** does not want a new study. That Board had provided a list of six priorities from which we were to select two. Our top priorities from the list were:

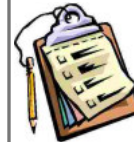
- Continue monitoring, with action as appropriate, the Joint Policy Committee (ABAG/MTC/BAAQMD/BCDC) in their guidance of regional land use, transportation and climate solutions.
- Monitor and comment on water supply issues affecting the Bay Area, issues related to Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, the Bay Area Water Forum, and EBMUDs 2040 Plan.

### Leagues of Santa Clara County

Steve Chessin of the LWV of Los Altos/Mountain View led the discussion. The consensus was to continue supporting *Instant Run-Off Voting (IRV)* as issue for emphasis, as it has been for the past year.



Submitted by Ellen Forbes & Relly Davidson ✨



## Board in Brief - January Minutes

At the January meeting, your Board:

- Approved a list of concepts and issues to be discussed at housing update unit meetings on Feb. 16 and 20.
- Voted to support the resolution from the Santa Clara County Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. Agreed that Phyllis should take our endorsement to County Council, and ask them to support it in the name of the County Leagues.
- Voted to co-sponsor the Jan. 31 forum on "Health Care: What Still Needs to be Done?"
- Membership: Mary Alice reported that the number of non-renewals is the lowest in recent years. Membership stands at 293.
- Meetings in Jan.: Program Planning Meeting at Alice Smith's, Bay Area League Day, Forum with Foothill/DeAnza Board members.
- Meetings in Feb.: unit meetings on housing, World Affairs Council.
- Action: Irene reported on two issues either currently or soon to be before City Council: the recycling/compost ordinance and AB375, "Redesigning Communities to Reduce Greenhouse Gases."
- Strategic Plan: Technical committee - Doris has sent out two messages on our new Google list, and the system seems to be a success. Budget/Constitutional Reform - Phyllis will recruit a chair.
- Essay Competition: Eight members will serve on the committee that will judge the high school students' essays, which are to be submitted via email.

Submitted by Ellen Forbes & Relly Davidson ✨

“The Supreme Court has made a tragic mistake. Their decision announced today in *Citizens United v. FEC* is constitutionally irresponsible and will surely bring about an anti-democratic revolution in how we finance elections in this country. Today, basic pillars of American democracy have been undermined – that elections should not be corrupted by vast corporate wealth and that the voters should be at the center of our democratic system.

“Justice Stevens had it right when he said, in his dissent, ‘The Court’s ruling threatens to undermine the integrity of elected institutions across the Nation. The path it has taken to reach its outcome will, I fear, do damage to this institution.’

“In creating a new constitutional right for corporations to spend unlimited amounts of their shareholder’s money to determine the outcome in candidate elections, the Court has unleashed into our elections tremendous sums of money from for-profit corporations that cannot possibly be matched in quantity by contributions from ordinary citizens. The only possible outcome of this is that big money and special interests will have an even tighter grip on our democracy.

“Congress and the President enacted campaign finance laws over a series of decades for a reason – to protect our democracy from the perverse influence of big money in our elections. In making this decision, the Court has ignored the best interests of the American public and our representative form of government.”

The League’s *amicus* brief can viewed at [http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Campaign\\_Finance\\_Reform&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=14014](http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Campaign_Finance_Reform&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=14014)

submitted by the editors & Nancy Neff ✿

public policy. At the conclusion of the legislative session this August - the very same time the fate of hundreds of bills will be decided in Sacramento - the money-raising frenzy will again kick into high gear.

“If anything positive can come from this most recent budget fiasco, it's the growing awareness by Californians of the need for structural reform in the way our government operates.

“Californians know the current campaign finance system doesn't have enough safeguards against the outside influence of special interests, and the dysfunctional budget just passed in Sacramento gives us all the more reason to do something about it. We must start by passing the California Fair Elections Act in June 2010.

“The California Fair Elections Act is based on the simple notion that elected officials should be accountable to the voters, not donors. Authored by Sen. Loni Hancock, D-Oakland, and signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the initiative would establish a voluntary pilot project that allows candidates running for California secretary of state in 2014 and 2018 to qualify for public financing if they agree to strict spending prohibitions and can show they have a broad base of support by raising a large number of \$5 contributions.

“The program would be funded primarily by fees on lobbyists, lobbying firms and lobbyist employers, with no taxpayer dollars going to candidates.

“The California Fair Elections Act represents the kind of change our state needs and voters want. It is an important first step toward breaking the toxic tie between campaign cash and public policy.

“Ultimately, by implementing a fair elections system we can help ensure that California gets a government made up of public-spirited lawmakers who are looking out for the interests of their constituents rather than the interests of their donors - in short, the government that California deserves.”

submitted by the editors & Nancy Neff ✿



**Thank you!** We would like to thank the following people for making the assembly and delivery of the February VOTER possible:  
**Janet Owens, Isabel Arabian, Geri Stewart, Barbara Bowden, Janet Creelman, Mary Cooper, Patty "Cattie" Peck** ❁



**Welcome to the League**

**Richard O. Duda  
 Tobby Kay  
 Lauren Rusk  
 Joyce Tavrow**

We are delighted to have you as members. ❁



**League-a-thon**

This year's League-a-thon is off to a great start with over \$5400 coming in response to the letters mailed in mid-January. The faithful volunteers phoned on February 1 and 2 from the atrium outside our office. We would like to thank the callers who made over 200 calls using their cell phones: **Phyllis Cassel, Ellen Forbes, Doris Petersen, Virginia Pirrotta and Sara Whitehead.** The four clerks were **Nancy Olson, Irene Sampson, Ellen Smith, and Karen Sundback.** We thank them for preparing the reminder notices for mailing.

*Submitted by Veronica Tincher & Mary Alice Thornton* ❁

**New Voices for Youth**

The members of the New Voices Steering Committee have been reaching out to a number of fine youth-serving organizations including our longstanding partners in the Computer Academy at Menlo-Atherton High School and Youth Community Services. We are also undertaking recruiting for a new project director. We expect to have more information next month.

The New Voices for Youth Program gives students a voice through broadcast media to encourage their civic engagement. Sample their videos at - <http://www.newvoicesforyouth.org/videos.htm>

*Submitted by Veronica Tincher* ❁

**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: \$68.00 Additional membership, same address: \$34.00  
 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  
 Mary Alice Thornton  
 (650) 327-9148

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**Palo Alto, CA 94303**  
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<p><b>CALENDAR...</b>check for changes at  <a href="http://wvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html">http://wvpaloalto.org/Calendar.html</a></p> <p><b>February—LWV BIRTHMONTH</b></p> <p><b>16 Tue</b> 9:30-11:30 am. Unit meeting. Housing Position  <b>20 Sat</b> 9:30-11:30 am. Unit meeting. Housing Position</p> <p>For details see Feb. VOTER</p> <p><b>March—WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH</b></p> <p><b>1 Mon</b> 1 pm. Prop. 15 Fair Elections (see p 3 of this issue)  <b>3 Wed</b> 7:15 pm. Board Meeting, M.A. Thornton  <b>5 Fri</b> Noon. VOTER deadline  <b>16 Tues</b> Adapting to Climate Change (see p 4 of this issue)  <b>26 Fri</b> 10 am. Book Group, Ursula Moore's House.      Promise: Why the European Way is the Best Home      in an Insecure Age" by Steven Hill  <b>27 Sat</b> 4 pm. Prop. 15 Kickoff (see p 3 of this issue)</p>	<p><b>UNITED STATES</b></p> <p><b>President Obama</b>.....(202) 456-1414      Send e-mail messages to- <a href="http://www.whitehouse.gov/CONTACT/">http://www.whitehouse.gov/CONTACT/</a>  <b>Senator Feinstein</b>.....(415) 393-0707      Send e-mail-<a href="http://feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=ContactUS.EmailMe">http://feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=ContactUS.EmailMe</a>  <b>Senator Boxer</b>.....(415) 403-0100      Send e-mail - <a href="http://boxer.senate.gov/contact/email/policy.cfm">http://boxer.senate.gov/contact/email/policy.cfm</a>  <b>Rep. Anna Eshoo</b>.....(650) 323-2984      Send e-mail - <a href="http://eshoo.house.gov/">http://eshoo.house.gov/</a></p> <p><b>CALIFORNIA</b></p> <p><b>Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger</b> .....(415)703-2218      Send e-mail messages via website - <a href="http://gov.ca.gov/interact">http://gov.ca.gov/interact</a>  <b>Senator Joe Simitian</b> .....(650) 688-6384      Send e-mail messages via website-<a href="http://www.senatorsimitian.com/main/contact">http://www.senatorsimitian.com/main/contact</a>  <b>Assemblyman Ira Ruskin</b> .....(650) 691-2121      Send e-mail -<a href="http://legplcms01.lc.ca.gov/PublicLcms/ContactPopup.aspx?district=AD21&amp;">http://legplcms01.lc.ca.gov/PublicLcms/ContactPopup.aspx?district=AD21&amp;</a></p> <p><b>SANTA CLARA COUNTY</b></p> <p><b>Supervisor Liz Kniss</b> .....(650) 965-8737      Send e-mail -<a href="mailto:liz.kniss@bos.sccgov.org">liz.kniss@bos.sccgov.org</a></p> <p><b>LWV GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT</b></p> <p>Locate your elected officials with your street address  <a href="http://www.guidetogovernment.org/">http://www.guidetogovernment.org/</a></p>
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