

The League of Women Voters of San Francisco



V O T E R

Legislative Interview with Leland Yee

Part of the off season work of the LWV is to interview elected officials about topics important to the LWV of California. The LWVSF asked for members to be involved in helping to interview elected officials. LWVSF member Edwin Lord and president of the North San Mateo League Marie Baldesseri interviewed Leland Yee, Assemblyman for the 12th district, on January 21, 2005.

1. QUESTION: How do you think California will balance revenue and expenses in the 2005-06 budget? Do you see a need for increasing revenues? Do you support annual review of taxes as a way of improving tax equity and avoiding more difficult cuts in spending? If you think that there should be cuts, what three areas do you think would provide the most suitable source of savings in state spending?

ANSWER: Assemblyman Yee said, "The State of California is about \$10 billion short; revenues are up, the shortfall is less than expected, and the deficit is manageable." He disagrees with the Governor's budget proposals because he says the Governor wants to address the deficit by cutting services for the poor and borrowing money. Assemblyman Yee said, "It's okay to borrow when necessary, but denying education means kids will lose future prospects and ultimately become a bur-

den to society." In addition, he says the Governor's proposal to decrease the pay of home health workers will force people into nursing homes, hence becoming a greater financial burden on the community.



Speaker pro Tempore Leland Yee presides over the California State Assembly.

"The Governor's solution will hurt people," said Assemblyman Yee. The Assemblyman said he believes the humane solution is to raise taxes. An increase on the 10%-11% upper income tax bracket would increase state revenues by \$2.9 billion. He also said that all companies doing business in California should pay business taxes in California because loopholes in the tax structure need to be closed.

2. QUESTION: What should the legislature do to ensure that all Californians have access to health care?

ANSWER: Assemblyman Yee said that California must provide healthcare for low-income and no-income people. Assemblyman Yee said the major issue is how to cover all of those California residents living without healthcare.

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Letter From the President

By: Jennifer Waggoner

The 2004 national election process had a number of problems, and the National League of Women Voters made a statement calling for investigation of irregularities. With this in mind, LWVSF invited Linda Tullett, Deputy Director for the San Francisco Department of Elections (DOE), to provide the San Francisco League board of directors with a local perspective on our City's voting system.

Despite the challenges of implementing a new voting method, Ranked Choice Voting, the conventional wisdom is that San Francisco's election system is doing well (keep in mind that the City held five elections between October 2003 and November 2004). One indicator of success is that, of approximately 15,000 provisional ballots, only 1,800 were not counted (either because the voter was registered outside San Francisco or was not registered at all). The DOE keeps a detailed database of all issues raised, whether reported by an inspector, poll worker, citizen, or other source. The city's budget crisis delayed full analysis of this issues database, but the project is back on track now and LWVSF hopes to hear the results soon, outlining "problem" areas to improve for the next election.

The DOE also has built up its technical staff, allowing it to better verify the voter rolls, update its communication plan, and understand statistics on past elections to identify trends in poor voter turnout, invalid ballots, and other areas which may benefit from voter education. For the November 2004 election, the DOE gave grants to local organizations to promote voter education and to recruit poll workers (LWVSF was a recipient of an \$11,700 grant). These partnerships were such a success that the DOE plans to spend the first half of 2005 approaching these organizations and inviting others to form a coordinated effort to support informed and active citizen participation in elections. The LWVSF strongly supports these efforts and is excited to be actively involved in the DOE coalition building. I encourage interested League members to get involved by contacting our office or by making a donation to support these efforts.

Here are some other interesting updates we received in this meeting:

*Voter registration at the Department of Motor Vehicles has been automated, which should make the process faster. The Department of Elections will work with the DMV to resolve problems at the counter (staff need training in voter registration, the process for handling forms needs to be defined and monitored, etc.). The DMV also hopes to re-design the registration form so that problems with fields being overlooked or incorrectly marked will be reduced.

*The LWVSF requested that the DOE create a voter registration "look-up" feature on its website, similar to the polling place look-up currently on smartvoter.org. A San Francisco resident could then go to the DOE website to learn if they are currently registered to vote in the City and in which precinct. The League will continue to request this service for voters because it is the most frequent request the LWVSF gets during election season.

*Candidate education will be improved in the coming election (there were some problems with candidates being unable to provide correct information about Ranked Choice Voting, for example). The LWVSF hopes to attend the candidate brown-bag training session and provide materials to potential and confirmed candidates about the election process, as well as about the League.

The League of Women Voters of San Francisco will continue to work with the Department of Elections moving forward, as a community based organization dedicated to education. The City's budgetary crisis may endanger the city's voter education programs if no public support or interest is expressed to the Mayor's Office of Finance and Legislative Affairs. The League will be attending a stakeholders meeting to voice concerns about funding cutbacks in the field of voter education.



Fundraising: Making the League's Work Possible

The League of Women Voters of San Francisco works to strengthen our democracy by sharing fair and objective information with voters and encouraging all City residents to participate in community decision-making. For eight decades, the League has been a trusted resource. The League reaches people in many ways - SmartVoter, the Pros and Cons Guide, televised issue forums, Candidate Forums, the Speakers' Bureau, and the Target Neighborhood Project, to name just a few. The need for our services has never been greater.

We are a volunteer-driven, non-profit organization, and our work is made possible because many people and organizations share their time, talent, and treasure to support us. Here is a "snapshot" of how the League's mission is supported.

Membership Dues

The LWVSF is a membership organization, and the dues paid each year by loyal supporters are a cornerstone of our budget. In 2004-2005, membership dues have totaled just over \$9,000. Thank you!

Grants

In the "off season" between elections, a significant focus of the League shifts to seeking grant support. This work includes researching potential funders, building relationships with foundations and philanthropic organizations, and writing grant proposals. We are enormously grateful to the following organizations and members have given significant support to the League for civic participation efforts this year:

San Francisco Foundation \$15,000

City of San Francisco, Department of Elections (for RCV, District 2) \$11,700

David B. Gold Foundation \$10,000

Mary Jane Brinton \$10,000

Walter & Elise Haas Fund \$7,750

Seven Springs Foundation \$5,000

Suzanne Stassevitch \$1,500

Lisa & Douglas Goldman Fund \$1,000

Argosy Foundation \$250

Margaret Keon \$500

Kristin Chu \$500

Special recognition goes to League members Tom O'Donnell and SFSU intern Wendy Weber and Program Director Virginia Grandi who have worked tirelessly to help the League pursue grant opportunities. If you know of any possibilities, or you work for a company that has a matching gifts program, please contact the LWVSF.

Annual Holiday Appeal

The League is most grateful for all of the wonderful support that was given by members during the annual holiday appeal. The LWVSF raised \$2,350 for the Annual Fund and \$3,500 for the Education Fund. Thank you!

This fundraising report continues on page 7.



Ranked Choice Voting

Assessing San Francisco's Much-Watched Experiment in Democracy

By: Jody Sanford

San Francisco basked in the national spotlight last November as the first large American city to select candidates using the "ranked choice voting" system, sometimes referred to as "instant runoff." The ranked choice voting method has the effect of eliminating runoff elections, which can cost the City up to \$3 million and traditionally yield low turnout.

In the new system, the voter ranks his or her three top choices. If one candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote, he or she wins. If not, the lowest vote-getter is eliminated from the race; the second choices on those ballots are redistributed to other candidates. The process continues until one candidate wins the majority of remaining votes. This method was used to elect candidates in seven San Francisco supervisorial districts, including District 5 in which 21 people vied for the top job.



League volunteers Elisabeth Flemming, Mohammed Katanani, and Marilyn Chase at Fleet Week distributing materials including RCV brochures 10/2004. Photo: V Grandi

How Did it Go?

The San Francisco Department of Elections conducted extensive outreach in outreach to prepare voters for the change, using meetings, mailers, and advertising in multiple languages (the League of Women Voters of San Francisco received a \$11,700 grant to educate voters in District 2). By most accounts, this effort seemed to result in minimal election day confusion. A challenge developed immediately following the election, when the software designed to tabulate the results was overwhelmed by voter turnout, requiring a computer programming adjustment. This problem was quickly corrected.

Three months after election day, experts and advocates are weighing in about the system's effectiveness. A recent poll by San Francisco State University indicates that 87 percent of voters understood the City's new ranked-choice voting method, and 61 percent preferred it to the old runoff system. "The majority of voters appear to have made the transition to ranked-choice voting with little problem," said the survey, commissioned by the City and prepared by the university's Public Research Institute. The survey was conducted in

several languages and included input from 2,847 voters.

However, a poll commissioned by the Chinese American Voters Education Committee found that Chinese-speaking voters reported more difficulty understanding the new ranked-choice ballots and that they more frequently than other groups failed to take advantage of the opportunity to vote for a second and third choice. Of 2,108 voters interviewed, 71 percent of white voters and 74 percent of Latino voters classified the voting method as easy. Yet, just 49 percent of Chinese-speaking voters said it was easy and 39 percent said it was difficult. The poll did not ask if voters intentionally chose not to select second and third choice candidates.

What Next?

For now, Ranked Choice Voting appears here to stay in San Francisco, where it is expected to be the method used to select supervisors in even-numbered districts in 2006 as well in some city-wide races. "I think ranked-choice voting really went well, everything was pretty smooth," said John Arntz, who was in charge of implementing the new system. What's certain is that cities from Seattle to Los Angeles to Berkeley are closely watching San Francisco's experience to see if Ranked Choice Voting is the wave of the future. "San Francisco is a closely watched experiment in electoral reform and local democracy," said Rich DeLeon, a political science professor at San Francisco State University.

SAVE THE DATE:

Thursday, March 31st, the LWVSF, International Museum of Women, and the World Affairs Council present:

Meet Author Cokie Roberts

The Parc Ballroom
Renaissance Parc 55 Hotel, 55 Cyril Magnin St.
San Francisco, 6PM

Look for postcards and email announcements.



Aaron Peskin Becomes New Board President

On January 8, Aaron Peskin was selected unanimously by his peers to serve as president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Peskin represents District 3, encompassing North Beach and Chinatown. He replaces outgoing board president and former mayoral candidate Matt Gonzalez, who recently left the board to start a law firm.



Aaron Peskin

Peskin was sworn in with six other supervisors who were elected or reelected in November 2004: Ross Mirkarimi, Michela Alioto-Pier, Sean Elsbernd, Tom Ammiano, Gerardo Sandoval, and Jake McGoldrick. All were selected with the city's new Ranked Choice Voting system.

Peskin was originally elected to the board in 2000. His current term as supervisor ends in 2009. He is a member of the Transportation Authority and Rules Committee, and is chair of the Government Audits & Oversight Committee. He is also Representative on the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), on the Disaster Council, and on the Local Agency Formation Commission.

In addition to addressing San Francisco's unprecedented \$97 million budget deficit, Peskin has established early several priorities:

- *merging the supervisors' finance and budget committees

- *forming a Government Audits and Oversight Committee that will coordinate with the city controller and the board's budget analyst "to thwart corruption, improprieties and ineffectiveness in city government"

- *eliminating the "legislative week" which gives supervisors one week per month off from public meetings

Contact Board President Peskin at (415) 554-7450 or Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org.

My Experience as an Election Observer By: *Suzanne Stassevitch*

For the November 2004 elections, the San Francisco Department of Elections asked the LWVSF to be part of an election observer team. Board member Suzanne Stassevitch volunteered for this important task. Here is her perspective on the experience.

A week before the November 2, 2004, election I went to the Department of Elections to train to become an Election Observer, representing the LWVSF. This was important to us, as we wanted to see how things were going and know how people understood the new voting method, Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). Election Observers can witness the entire voting process. Ranked Choice Voting attracted observers from all over the globe as many were curious how voters would understand and use the new system.

Election Observer training reviews the roles and responsibilities of an Election Observer, the election process, polling place procedures, voting equipment, counting and certification of the ballots, and Ranked Choice Voting. During a tour of the Department it was a hive of activity, with rooms and rooms filled with absentee ballots to be certified and sorted by polling place; voters taking advantage of Early Voting lined up to cast their ballots. The public is invited to watch the vote count through windows at the Department of Elections headquarters in City Hall.

On Election Day I visited 3 or 4 polling places in each of the districts where voters were going to use Ranked Choice ballots for the first time. The polling places are a great opportunity to see democracy in action, people with a common purpose casting their votes. In the polling places I visited, Ranked Choice Voting was going smoothly and poll workers made an effort to check for understanding with each voter about the Ranked Choice ballot. Poll workers and voters were pleased to have a League representative working as an Election Observer at the polls and thanked us for our participation.

If being an elections observer interests you, the League would love to know! We are already shaping up our Voter Services team for the November 2005 election. Please contact Virginia at (415) 989-8683 or email sfvoter@mindspring.com.



Leland Yee interview continued from page 1...

He believes the State of California should not be solely a health broker but should be in the market itself. "The State is large enough to leverage its ability to influence the market because of the number of people to be covered. We must continue with the Healthy Kids and Healthy Families programs." Mr. Yee's objective is to provide health care access to everyone using an umbrella approach. Employers/corporations and the taxpayers would be involved in the payment process. He says the counties/cities involved, along with small businesses to provide health care for all Californians. Preventative care, treatment for diseases, and emergency room care costs would be controlled by using an economy of scale formula. He says counties/cities have a moral obligation to provide health care; however, the taxpayers should not be burdened with all the health care costs for the uninsured.

3. QUESTION: Do you think that reform of any of the following is desirable? If not, why not? If yes, what should the legislature do?

*redistricting

*term limits

*Proposition 13 provisions concerning reassessment of commercial property

ANSWER:

Redistricting - Assemblyman Yee is not a supporter of the Governor's idea on redistricting. The Governor said redistricting is required since no districts changed parties in the last election. The Assemblyman believes that is not a good reason to redistrict.

Term limits - Assemblyman Yee supports term limits. He said he wouldn't have his job in the Legislature without them. However, he believes the length of time permitted to serve in the legislature is not long enough to fully maximize one's abilities. He said it takes one term to learn the job, and that there are not many mentors in the legislature (due to term limits) to help new members learn. Staff members survive when legislators change by changing their legislative office jobs.

Therefore the staff and the lobbyists - not the elected - become the powerful. The Assemblyman feels term limits need to be tweaked, but generally supports them.

Proposition 13 - He said he's "willing to take a look at it." Assemblyman Yee said the State needs to evaluate how to assess commercial property taxes. The need to be fair to everyone.

4. QUESTION: What are the major issues that you see the Legislature must deal with in 2005? What are your personal priorities?

ANSWER:

1. Reform healthcare; universal healthcare is needed.

2. Prescription drugs: Exorbitant costs cause people to forgo buying necessary medications as prescribed by their physicians. The Assemblyman is promoting a bill that will enable the people of California to buy drugs at a more affordable price from Canada.

3. As Speaker Pro-Tem, Assemblyman Yee participates in meetings on the Bay Bridge replacement project. He opposes the Governor's changes to the Bay Bridge design. He suggests they go back to the original design, the self-anchor suspension bridge. The Governor wants the concrete skyway, because it is less expensive. However Assemblyman Yee said that the original design is already complete and all permits are approved. If a switch is made to the concrete skyway design, much more work needs to be done. Only 10% of the concrete skyway design has been completed and most of the permits have not even been approved, especially the environmental permits. The time delay in getting all the permits approved for the concrete skyway design outweighs any benefit of its adoption. How to pay for the bridge replacement is in question now. Some believe the Bay Area should pay all of the increased costs, but the Assemblyman disagrees. He feels the Bay Area should not have to solely bare the burden of the increased reconstruction cost. The majority of Northern California dollars have gone to Southern California in order to fix their roads and bridges. Now it's time for both Southern and Northern California to work together to replace the Bay Bridge.

4. Children's Services: Assemblyman Yee is proud of the following accomplishments: Child Prostitution Bill, Violent Video Bill, and Immigration Slave Labor Bill. He is currently working with the Mayor of San Francisco on mental health issues for children and the homeless.



Fundraising article, continued from page 3

Volunteer Support

The ultimate foundation of the League is people. The Voter Services program has been supported by hundreds of volunteer hours from dozens of League members. Volunteers staff information tables at community events, prepare ballot summaries for the Pros and Cons Guide, speak to community groups, moderate televised discussions, work in the



Candidate Forum Chair Gail Schickele and son Train at the holiday party. Gail was the Candidate Forum Chair, overseeing 9 forums!

office, and do anything and everything to bring more voters into the process. Thank you to all the volunteers who have shared their time in 2004 and 2005. A huge thanks goes to Adele Fasick who has brilliantly spearheaded the Voters Services program for some time. Board member Suzanne Stassevitch will be taking on the challenge in 2005!



Member Jo Anne Heywood Miller and Jolinda Sim, Chair of Ranked Choice Voting, at holiday party. Jolinda shows her certificate of appreciation.



LWVSF President Jennifer Waggoner, Marvin Ramirez of El Reportero and Voter Service Chair Adele Fasick at the Board of Education Candidate Forum 10/02/04.

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cordially invite you to the League's **85th Birthday Celebration**

DEMOCRACY DINNER

Friday, April 22, 2005

**The Fairmont Hotel
170 South Market Street, San Jose**

6:30 p.m. - No Host Reception and Silent Auction

7:30 p.m. - Dinner and Program

Ambassador Nancy Soderberg
Keynote Speaker

Global Challenges, Global Realities
VP for Multilateral Affairs for
International Crisis Group

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren
Master of Ceremonies

CA Senator Joe Simitian
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Mail your payment and
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April 12, 2005

to:LWV San Jose/Santa Clara, P. O. Box 5374,
San Jose, CA 95150



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The election is over, but November 2005 is just around the corner. We have many opportunities for members to get informed, get involved and get moving! Volunteers are needed in the following areas:

Membership Committee

The membership committee is looking for people to get actively involved to recruit, retain and edutain (entertain and educate) League members. The committee will put together a series of membership events this spring, summer and fall, including membership breakfasts, guest speakers, and more.

Fundraising

The League must raise money not only for general operations, but also for the Voter Service programs for the November 2005 election. Currently we are researching potential funders, making contacts and making follow through efforts.

Voter

Do you enjoy reading this newsletter or see improvements that need to be made in the Voter? Please contribute to making the League's publication the best it can be.

Voter Registration, Information Table

Representative

Do you like getting out in the public and interacting with people? Would you like to tell people about the League and the important work we are doing? Then this is for you. We often get requests to do voter registration and represent the League at various events. If you would like to represent the LWVSF, this is for you.

Voter Services Programs for November 2005

For the November 2005 election, the League will continue the following programs. It is never too soon to think about what you will do to contribute to educating voters for the November 2005 election, when Ranked Choice Voting will be implemented city-wide.

*Pros & Cons Guide (formerly known as the Voters Guide)

*Speakers Bureau

*Smartvoter.org

*Pro/Con Discussions on Access SF, Channel 29

*Candidate Forum/Issue Forums

Please contact the office if you are interested in any of the programs mentioned above; contact us at sfvoter@mindspring.com or phone (415) 989.8683.

League of Women Voters of California Convention Information

It's a New World

May 20-22, 2005

Garden Grove - Orange County

Interested in registering?

Contact (415) 989-VOTE

The theme of this biennial convention is It's a New World. We are looking forward to an exciting and productive gathering of League members. Our theme is intended to stimulate discussion about the impact of various changes that have taken place in technology, demographics, and political policies, to name a few. We hope you will join with us as we explore these issues in workshops and with the guest speakers. We encourage all Leagues to send at least one representative to this biennial state League meeting where delegates will network and make decisions about League programs and budgetary matters for the next two years. As a grassroots organization we depend on input from every local League at the convention.

There are plenty of sightseeing opportunities in this beautiful southern California area. Disneyland is conveniently located near the Crowne Plaza Hotel. So plan to come early and stay after the convention to enjoy all the attractions in the area. On behalf of the LWV of Orange County, I am extending a warm welcome to Leagues throughout the state. I hope each League will be able to send a full complement of delegates and guests to Garden Grove in May of 2005.

Barbara Hopkins, Executive Vice President





Membership

The membership committee of the League is working on creating an event coming soon! If you would like to be on the membership committee to attract and retain members, we need your help! Additionally if you have ideas or time to give to membership events, we are also looking for help. Contact Virginia Grandi, Program Director in the League office!

The LWVSF welcomes recent new members:

- Janice Lurie
- Melanie Kaufman
- Judith Berkowitz
- Myrna Frankel
- Kelly Gasnick
- Beverly Bollman
- Kathie Piccagli
- Eva Gregoratos



Members Heather Schwartz, Jody Sanford, LWVSF President Jennifer Waggoner and Leanne Hoang at the holiday party, 12/2005.



Steven Hill, Guest Speaker, Candidate Forum Chair Gail Schickele and Phillip Lawrence at holiday party

RENEW YOUR LEAGUE MEMBERSHIP TODAY

Some members have not renewed as of February 2005. If you have not renewed, please do so today! We appreciate your continued support of the LWV! By becoming a member you automatically become a member of the LWV of the Bay Area, California and National League.

Name _____ Household Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Phone (D) _____

Email _____

Yes, I would like to renew my membership with the League.
Enclosed please find my check for \$_____.

Membership Categories (Please check one):

- * Eleanor Roosevelt \$275
- * Mary McLeod Bethune \$175
- * Carrie Chapman Catt \$125
- * Elizabeth Cady Stanton \$100
- * Regular Member \$65
- * Sliding Scale \$25-50
- * Household (for 2) \$70
- * Student \$20-65

Please make your check payable to LWVSF and mail with this form to: 582 Market St., Suite 615, San Francisco, CA 94104



Calendar

March Board Meeting

Tuesday, March 15th, 6:00 PM

Membership Event

Evening with Cokie Roberts, Author Founding Mothers

Thursday, March 31st 6:00 PM

55 Cyril Magnin Street, SF

Democracy Dinner

for the LWV-California Education Fund

Friday, April 22nd, 2005, 7:30 PM

The Fairmont Hotel, 170 South Market Street, San Jose. Keynote Speaker: Ambassador Nancy Soderberg with Master of Ceremonies Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren. Regular tickets \$150. Call us for more info.

LWV-CA Annual Convention

Thurs. May 19th to Sun. May 22nd

Annual Meeting

Save the Date

Saturday, June 18th

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