



League of Women Voters Beach Cities

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The Beach Voter



LWVC CONVENTION

MAY 13, 2011

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Below are excerpts taken from Janis R. Hirohama's Presidents Report

In my convention speech four years ago, I noted that the tone of public discourse had coarsened and degenerated, there was a widespread lack of trust in government, and the issues facing us, such as climate change, immigration, and civil liberties in a post-9/11 world, had become ever more complex. If possible, that is even truer today. Extreme political partisanship seems to be the new normal. Incivility in public discourse seems to be more often applauded than chastised; shouting all too often substitutes for discussion. People are quick to impugn the motives, the intelligence, and even the patriotism of those who disagree with them. Those thorny issues such as climate change are still with us, joined by problems such as the prolonged recession that was only beginning to set in four years ago.

I said back then that the League has a unique and valuable role to play in this environment. That we stand for integrity, accountability, and informed decision-making. That our name is the gold standard when it comes to good government, voting, and elections. And that we provide a safe forum for civil discourse and for fair and open debate on issues of public concern. Today, I strongly believe that the need for what the League provides is greater than ever.

The work that we do in the League is, in a sense, deeply subversive, and I mean that in the best possible sense. Why? Because by informing and educating the public we are providing people with knowledge, and the ability to make informed choices. Our insistence that voters need to be informed about the issues and candidates they are voting on threatens those who would prefer an ignorant and compliant public. By encouraging people to exercise their right to vote and removing barriers to participation, we are putting power in the hands of the people, because a vote gives you a voice. It is an instrument of change. That is why those in power, throughout history and around the world, have jealously guarded the right to vote, reserving that privilege for certain groups or classes of people, and excluding others. By taking principled action on our public policy positions and fighting for open and accountable government, we make ourselves an irritant to the powers-that-be, to those who operate behind closed doors, to those who take a more expedient or cynical approach. So perhaps it is not surprising that people might look with suspicion at the League and what we do.

I'd like to share with you a bit of personal history. Let me start by telling you about my middle name. My full name is Janis Renko Hirohama. Some of you may have noticed that I always use my middle initial of "R" in my League work. The ballot measure arguments I've signed on the League's behalf, our letters

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The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Any person of voting age, male or female, may become a League member.

The League affirms our belief in our commitment to diversity and pluralism. There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the League on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin or disability. The League recognizes that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision making.

The Beach Voter

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supporting or opposing legislation, my op-ed articles — on all of them my name appears as “Janis R. Hirohama.” My name came from my maternal grandfather. His name was Ayaka Takahash. On May 1, 1960, a month before I was born, he wrote this letter from Los Angeles to my parents, who were then living in Japan. “Replying to your recent request for Japanese names for the baby to be welcomed very soon, I would suggest the following name for a girl: Ren-ko. Ren means a person of stern (spotless) integrity or a person of pure heart and clean hands. Ren-ko makes a very, very good girl’s name.” When I was younger, I didn’t like having a middle name that was so hard to pronounce, and that seemed so unusual and “foreign.” But I came to embrace it. Now, I see my middle name of “Renko” as a legacy from my grandfather. I use it not only because it is a reminder of my Japanese heritage and my family’s history, but also because the meaning of the name is an aspiration to live up to, although I am all too aware of the times when I fail to do so.

But my middle name is not my only legacy from my grandfather. My grandparents’ grave marker one at Evergreen Cemetery, in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, has an inscription on the back, in Japanese. There is my grandfather’s name, Takahash Ayaka. The first sentence says: “A native of the prefecture of Ehime, the city of Matsuyama, the town of Takahama.” The second sentence reads: “Arrived in America in November 1903.” The third sentence says: “Naturalized on August 5, 1954.” This is what my grandfather wanted as his epitaph: the place where he was born, the year he immigrated to America, and the day he became a United States citizen. As you can tell, he was a man who deeply loved America. America, however, didn’t always love him back.

Some of you may remember me mentioning my grandfather in my speech at the 2007 League convention. I described how he came to this country in 1903, but could not be naturalized because of the discriminatory law that classified Japanese immigrants as aliens ineligible for citizenship.” I noted that it was not until 50 years after my grandfather’s arrival in America that the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 repealed that law and allowed my grandfather, at last, to become an American citizen at the age of 72. I marveled that I could become the president of the League of Women Voters of California — I, the granddaughter of California residents who in 1920 were so despised and disenfranchised that they could not become citizens, could not vote, could not own land, and could not marry Caucasians.

My grandfather was very aware that he was barred by law from becoming a citizen. In a statement that he wrote for his application to the Justice Department for a certificate of alien registration, he wrote: “I owe too much to this country to be disloyal. Therefore I have always thought and acted as an American Citizen (although I have never acted legally in the capacity of a citizen because I know that I am discriminated to that privilege by law). I may not be able to be classed as the best citizen; however I am inclined to believe that I am pretty well qualified to be called ‘a good citizen.’ The only difference between those good citizens of European nationals and myself is the possession of one sheet of Naturalization Paper.” He wrote that statement in 1941.

The next year, he, his wife and children were among the 110,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry sent to internment camps. Remarkably, he emerged from camp in 1945 with his faith in America, and democracy, unshaken. He started over, going into the hotel business. He called his first hotel The Washington, and the next was called the Lincoln Hotel. He became a U.S. citizen when finally allowed to do so. He diligently exercised his hard-won right to vote. So, in my own family history I have seen the shameful depths to which our country can sink, but also the promise of the American dream and the power of belief in democracy.

My legacy from my grandfather includes not only my name, but his story. It is his story that inspires me so, In my own family history I have seen the shameful depths to which our country can sink, but also the promise of the American dream and the power of belief in democracy. My legacy from my grandfather includes not only my name, but his story. It is his story that inspires me. I value the privilege of citizenship because it was once denied to members of my family. I believe in the power of the vote, because I know that without a vote, you don’t have a voice. I believe that a healthy democracy is the best protection against injustice and tyranny. That is why I am passionate about the work that the League of Women Voters does, and about what we stand for.

League of Women Voters of California® Convention 2011 - May 13 to 15 “Grow the Future”

Four delegates of the League of Women Voters of the Beach Cities journeyed to Ventura to take part in the biennial LWVC Convention 2011. Program Director Jan Nathanson, Social Policy Director Harriet Chase, Smart Voter Director Janelle Freeman, and member Wendy Phillips, who is a LWVC Program Director for Water, joined 164 other delegates from throughout the state to decide on the LWVC's Program and budget, and to elect a new board of directors.

After two days of workshops and caucusing (more on these below), the convention climaxed on the third day with the discussion and approval of the positions and programs for the next year. The board recommended programs all passed without contention. These included retention of all existing LWVC positions, no new study but an update study on the Initiative & Referendum Process, and adoption of three programs for Education and Advocacy: Redistricting Implementation; State and Local Finances, including education about the financing of education; and Initiative and Referendum: Community Education.

There was a lot of passion expressed on both sides of the four not-recommended items, three for concurrence on new or modified positions and one for advocacy and education. Unlike the board recommended items, these proposals required 60% of the delegates' votes for adoption. Only one and a half received that level for approval. Not approved were the Concurrence of the LWVC Criminal Justice System Position, the Education and Advocacy for SB 810 (Leno) Single-payer health care coverage – both of which fell just a few votes short of the 60%, and the second part of the Concurrence of the LWVC Election System Position.

Only a small modification was approved for the Election Systems position. It now reads (with the added phrase underlined): “Support election systems for executive and other single seat offices, both at the state and local levels, that require the winner to receive a majority of the votes as long as the majority is achieved using a voting method such as Instant Runoff Voting, rather than a second, separate run off election.”

By concurrence, the following amendment was added to the LWVC Juvenile Justice/ Dependency Position : “Emphasis should be placed on diversion and rehabilitation consistent with public safety. Recognition should be given of the need to treat juveniles differently from adults because juvenile cognitive, developmental and behavioral maturity is in the formative stage.”

The approved budget, which passed easily, did not include an increase in PMP (per member payment, or state dues). The 2011-2012 budget totaled \$745,000 when combined LWVC with the LWVCEF, a 30% decrease from last year's budget reflecting decreases in contributions and grants. The slate nominated by the LWVC nominating committee was not challenged, and a new board of directors was unanimously elected.

In addition to the plenary sessions where the business was conducted, there were over two dozen workshops and caucuses on League issues and policy concerns that started as early as 7:15 am and ran as late as 11:00 pm. The Beach Cities delegates spread themselves out over the meeting rooms and noted some highlights.

Water – Myths and Misperceptions; led by Wendy Phillips, Lottie Fox (LWVC Natural Resources Director), and Roberta Borgonovo; showed that, even early in the morning, many leaguers across the state are concerned about our water situation, and that even well informed water advocates held different beliefs on the roles of agriculture and urban areas in the problems and solutions for our state's water resources. *Contact Wendy if you want to know more.*

Convention report continued on next page

The Federal Role in Public Education: Making it Local featured Dr. Picus, of USC, who gave a comprehensive overview of the topic. Consensus questions are being sent to enable us to engage in discussions and consensus meetings in the Fall. *Contact Harriet and Jan for more information.*

There were a number of workshops on Voters Services. There were a number of thought provoking discussions on how we could reach the less-likely voters. Representatives of a number organizations, including the Library Association and a Community College, described how they use the Easy Voter Guide in their educational programs in collaboration with the League. *Contact Jan or Janelle for more information.*

The late night Adopting a California Criminal Justice Position by Concurrence caucus featured a video from State Senator Loni Hancock, chair of the Public Safety Committee, asking the LWV to become involved in the state prisons issue, which we cannot do without a position.

Some special speakers inspired and educated us. Our LWVUS President, Elizabeth MacNamera, called for making sure that the 2012 election serves the voters. Fiona Ma, State Assembly Speaker Pro Tem, spoke about the need to get more women elected to office, and the state budget problems. Prof. Beverly Kelley of California Lutheran University educated us on the California women who led the women's suffrage movement that led to women receiving the right to vote in California in 1911.

Some other fun things from the convention were the local media reporting on the convention, the league brags (Beach Cities' 3 state presidents caused a bit of a buzz, as did Glendale/Burbank's getting itself classified as a 501c3 allowing all donations to be tax deductible), the view of the coastline, and the "Votes for Women" sashes reminiscent of those worn by the early suffragists. The news reports, brags, and more can be found at the state members only site: http://www.ca.lwv.org/lwvonly/conv_council/2011/index.html.

A final highlight of the convention were the tributes to outgoing LWVC President Janis Hirohama, who was complimented by the Honorable Fiona Ma for the effective way she ran the convention. The most memorable of these tributes was the serenade by a special singing group of Beach Cities Leaguers, acknowledging Janis' commendable service as president for the past four years and welcoming her back to the local league.

Submitted by Janelle Freeman, Wendy Phillips, Jan Nathanson and Harriet Chase

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Reprinted from the LWV Story Bank

Wendy Phillips, LWV Beach Cities, CA

It was decadence – the special brownies sold by the LWV Beach Cities at a fair in Manhattan Beach (California) – that first grabbed my attention. But it was enough to make me start noticing more significant ways the League impacts our communities. In my work as an engineering geologist for a state agency that regulates water quality, I was impressed by the questions asked by smart League members in San Gabriel Valley communities in the early 1990s as they carefully and insightfully studied the risks of reclaiming treated wastewaters and the potential this local resource has for stabilizing water supplies in southern California. And soon after joining the League in the mid-1990s, I was excited to be part of the League's partnership with Common Cause – as one of thousands of volunteers statewide, we helped collect enough signatures to qualify an initiative for campaign finance reform (and later took action to get the ballot measure passed)!

Since then, there have been many candidate forums and other League projects – not only do they offer opportunity for positive community impact, they also offer meaningful opportunities for developing my professional and communication skills. Most recently, as a director serving on the board for the LWV California, I am challenged and excited to work with my League colleagues to help adapt strategies to position our organization to increase its impact in state and local government.

The League continues to satisfy my passion for chocolate. My good friend, Irma Cohen (whom I met through the LWV Beach Cities), throws chocolate parties at which friends and neighbors are enticed to join the League. And I indulge in chocolate over many enjoyable meals or cups of tea with fellow League members at national, state, county, and local level - and look forward to many more.

HOW THE FEDS IMPACT OUR KIDS' EDUCATION

A panel of education experts helped us to better understand the role the federal government is playing in our schools today. The Beach Cities membership meeting held April 26th at the Redondo Beach Women's Club provided good background for the LWV national study on the Role Of Federal Government In Public Education.

The panel consisted of **Don Bran**, Ed.D, a former superintendent of Wiseburn School District, founder of the California Small School Districts Association, founder of Da Vinci Charter Schools, VP of The Cosca Group; **Tom Cox**, MBA & CPA, CFO for Da Vinci Charter Schools and Chief Business Official for the Wiseburn School District; and **Robert Farran**, MA, Director of the Southwest Special Education Local Plan Area. The discussion was moderated by Co-President Barbara Arlow.

The panel discussion started with some history of federal involvement in education funding. This started with the Land Grants and GI Bill. The involvement increased with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed in 1965. A previous reauthorization of ESEA signed in 2002 became known as "No Child Left Behind." The current administration is calling their version, "Blueprint for Reform." The most recent version is oriented more toward college and career readiness.

There are different types of federal money available to schools. All must be applied for, and they come with different levels of requirements, "strings attached." The awarding of such funds is determined by formulas. Some money is more competitive than others. The ESEA Title 1 funds are to support equity in education. ESEA Title 2 funding for teacher training is more flexible. There are also cafeteria funds and facility funds. Special Education funding comes with lot of compliance reporting requirements because it is tied to the Civil Right Act, not ESEA. The general consensus of the panel is that Special Education requirements are underfunded, and that all funding application processes should be streamlined

There was a lot of discussion about charter schools. The "Blueprint" encourages the formation of charter schools. Charter schools are exempt from almost all requirements, except those specified by law. Comments from the panel were that traditional schools also should be given more flexibility; that the competition from charter schools was good; and that the changes from this competition may lead to a school system that is better suited to the needs of a community today, a community that is no longer structured around the summer harvesting schedule. It was felt that charter schools do not pop up in areas where people are happy with the schools they have.

A lot more good information came out in the meeting. To learn more about the Federal Role in Education study and/or to get involved with the consensus process, contact Harriet Chase at harriet@beachvoter.org.

Submitted by Janelle Freeman

CALENDAR

June 21st Tuesday	7 PM	Old/New Board Meeting	Peggy Bartlett's 701 13th Street Manhattan Beach
July 12th Tuesday	7 AM To 8 PM	Special Election 36th Congressional District	Your local precinct
July 30th Saturday	9:30 AM To 2:30 PM	Popovers in Pasadena	Women's Club of Pasadena

Welcome to new member Dawn Nelson of Redondo Beach



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