

Democratic Club of the Conejo Valley

Newsletter - December 2009

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Events Calendar - See Below for Details

December 5, Saturday, 1 PM - Democratic Women's Council Holiday Boutique. Lake Sherwod

December 6, Sunday, 2 PM - California Fair Elections Act Ventura County Grassroots Organizing Meeting, Camarillo

December 9, Wednesday 6:30 PM - Democratic Club of the Conejo Valley Holiday Potluck and Elections Meeting - Thousand Oaks

Upcoming Meetings & Events

DECEMBER MEETING - HOLIDAY POTLUCK - WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9

December 9, 6:30 PM --- our usual Wednesday General Meeting at the Thousand Oaks Main Library
Our December meeting is our traditional potluck holiday party and officer election.

Please plan on coming and using your vote to make your voice heard in the club. Potluck dishes should be based on the following last name initials:

- A-E Appetizers
- F-J Salads
- K-O Main Courses
- P-T Desserts
- U-Z Drinks

Or whatever you feel like bringing

We look forward to seeing you!!

DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S COUNCIL HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE - DECEMBER, 5

The Democratic Women's Council is having their annual Holiday Boutique Saturday Dec. 5th from 1-5pm at Lake Sherwood. Funds go to raise money for their scholarship fund. RSVP: 805 495-1515.

CALIFORNIA FAIR ELECTIONS ACT - GRASSROOTS PLANNING MEETING - SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

The California legislature has passed and Governor Schwarzenegger has just signed Assembly Bill 583 which places the CALIFORNIA FAIR ELECTIONS ACT on the California June 2010 ballot.

The CALIFORNIA FAIR ELECTIONS ACT is a pilot program for the Secretary of State elections in 2014 and 2018 and puts California on the path for PUBLICLY FINANCED ELECTIONS which are already in place and working in various forms in five states.

Ventura and Santa Barbara County grassroots activists, community leaders and average citizens like you will be meeting to strategize and form a local grassroots campaign to support FAIR ELECTIONS. We will be joined by members of the existing campaign team.

Place: Mira Vista Senior Complex Clubhouse, 2700 E. Ponderosa Drive , Camarillo . Directions at bottom of this email.

Date: Sunday, December 6, at 2PM

Contact/RSVP: Jay Kapitz, interim coordinator, to RSVP or request more information: j_kapitz@yahoo.com or 818-889-1039. Day of event issues - call Bob Holtz at 805-312-2397.

Why you should attend this meeting:

Get politicians out of the fundraising game and back to solving California's problems. Ensure elected officials are accountable to voters, not donors. Open up the political process so the best candidates, not just the wealthiest candidates can pursue elected office. 63% of the public supports the idea of FAIR ELECTIONS!

Website for More Information: www.yesfairelections.org/

PLEASE ATTEND THIS MEETING OR CONTACT JAY TO GET INVOLVED!!

From the 101 heading North - off at Lewis Road, left at bottom of ramp, right on Arneil Road, right on Ponderosa Drive and after about ½ mile, turn right into Mira Vista Senior Complex (before Temple Ave).

From the 101 heading South - off at Lewis Road, right at bottom of ramp, right at Arneil Road, right on Ponderosa Drive and after about ½ mile, turn right into Mira Vista Senior Complex (before Temple Ave).

All visitors should park near the entrance on the wall side and walk to the clubhouse which is straight ahead from entrance.

Articles

Dems' Manna Donations Exceed 1800 Pounds for 2009 - Carol Keavney

Mike Matthews, Executive Director of Manna Conejo Valley Food Bank, accepted 125 pounds of food and personal products collected by the Democratic Club of the Conejo Valley (DCCV) and the Democratic Women's Council of the Conejo Valley (DWCCV) from Carol Keavney, who serves as a Vice President in both organizations. As the fourth Manna collection this year, the November food drives bring 2009 donations to 1840 pounds of food and personal products (paper goods, cleaning and hygiene).

Membership Drive - Mary Freed

DCCV membership dues are due in January 2010 so bring your checkbook or go to our website & pay online. If you bring your checkbook you can also buy wonderful Democratic Club receipt books at \$10 each. They are good holiday/

hostess gifts.

Thank you to all the club members who have tabled & registered voters. In November Joan Edwards, Howard Belger, Sylvia Navarro, Saria, Kraft, & Mary Freed got a warm welcome from all of the out of town Democrats who stopped by our Oaks Mall table to say "thank you for being out here."

Eye On the Issues - Sue Gunther

EYE ON THE ISSUES, the TV show sponsored by the Conejo Democrats will premiere at a new day and time, every Wednesday night at 6:00 p.m. on Channel 25. Our December show will be about Veteran's Issues, featuring guests Jim and Jane Bright, from the Evan Ashcraft Foundation, named in honor of their son, Evan, who died in the Iraq War in 2003. Jim and Jane have endeavored to carry on Evan's wish to help others and work through their foundation to help returning veterans deal with the crippling effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury. Our third guest will be Steve Crandall, a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

The panel will discuss issues facing veterans, including healthcare and mental health, and also touch on hot-button issues such as Afghanistan and the draft. This will be a show you won't want to miss, so please tune in at our new day and time! Thanks as usual to David Atkins, our wonderful host, and Jody and Teri for their help in producing the show.

The Audacity of K Street - Jon Balkind

1. A Play On Words

This article's title is a play on words on President Obama's last book "The Audacity of Hope". It reflects my concern that many of the same financial, corporate and other well organized interests who in the immediate past have stymied legislation this country has needed (and sponsored others the country hasn't needed) are continuing to do so under his administration.

As you know, these interests typically torpedo legislation by 1) diluting initial proposals as they go through the legislative process and 2) by making sure that whatever remains serves them first and the American people second (the recent 'credit card reform' act where variable rate cards are exempted from newly instituted credit card rate caps is a current example that this still continues unabated).

For a President who has peddled hope and change to the American people, having to achieve meaningful accomplishments through such a process is a recipe for disaster.

2. Some Underlying Beliefs And Observations

While the focus of the 2008 election campaign was on the disastrous policies of the previous eight years, I believe that a more significant issue for our country is the increasingly institutionalized corruption (see the second quote below for a definition of corruption) within our economic, political and governmental processes. I don't need to list for you the numerous symptoms that have thus far resulted from this (36,000 K street lobbyists, a GINI index of inequality close to Brazil and unlike Brazil going in the wrong direction, etc.). My fear is that if this continues to accelerate, there will come a time where the constitutional stability of our country will give way.

This excerpt from Machiavelli's "Discourses" describes what I worryingly believe might ultimately be the dilemma this country will face if we continue down the road that we are now taking;

"...corruption and the inability to live a free life arises from the inequality that exists in a city [remember in Machiavelli's time we're talking about Italian city-states] ... if one [a leader of a republic or a prince] wishes to return the city to a state of equality, he will have to use drastic measures that few know how to or wish to use."

And here is his description of a state's political processes when it has reached a condition of full corruption;

"...only the most powerful were proposing laws, not in the name of common liberty, but rather for their own power, and no one spoke against these men because they feared them. In such a way, the people were deceived or forced into decreeing their own ruin."

As I said, this is a road I fear we're traveling down now but fortunately we're not close to being near the end of that road yet. Still this would be a good time for our country to push for institutional reform before our constitutional stability begins to weaken.

3. My Concern With The Obama Administration

Shortly after the election, Helen Thomas was asked what her main concern was with Obama and her answer was "courage". So far I think she's been right.

Here's a guy who has inspired the American people but instead of mobilizing them in areas such as health care, he immediately aligns himself with the very 'economic royalists' that FDR used to criticize. So for example, this has forced him to take a proven effective alternative like single payer health care off the table simply because he believes he needs to work with those entrenched interests who currently benefit from our broken system. And no doubt, the result will be a convoluted and less than optimum product that may or may not work.

Even more importantly so far, there are no signs that Obama intends to advocate institutional reforms designed to take away the kind of inordinate influence that K street lobbyists and their clients now possess; even though this has been the key driver in the increasing corruption of our governmental and political processes. This issue is now serious enough that it ought to at least be put on the table.

To be fair, it's still early in the Obama administration and my hope is at some point Obama will address this issue. If not, then we'll continue to see suboptimal, cumbersome 'solutions' to our pressing problems as we now are seeing in health care and energy. And that could lead to a citizenry whose disaffection will grow to the point of threatening our country's constitutional stability.

4. Recommendations

Here are some recommendations to begin to root out the increasingly institutionalized corruption of political processes:

- 1. Like judges in court cases, require legislators, legislative staff and executive staff to recuse themselves when there is an apparent personal conflict of interest. I've been dying to tell Bernie Sanders that in the case of health care reform, if recusal were now a requirement, it's likely that he would have wound up being (to quote our friend George Bush) the one of one 'decider' on this issue in the Senate.**

More seriously, in a recent Supreme Court decision, dealing with Judge Benjamin of West Virginia, the court ruled in the Massey Coal case that the judge should

have recused himself in this case because Massey had been the main financial contributor to his election campaign. Similarly if Wellpoint gives money to Max Baucus why shouldn't Baucus recuse himself on health insurance matters?

2. Begin the process for a constitutional amendment that bans private campaign financing at all levels of politics. It would have to be a constitutional amendment to take it out of the hands of the Supreme Court. And I'm sure it would take awhile. But there is precedent. I recently read that back in 1894, the Supreme Court struck down legislation that authorized the implementation of a federal income tax. There ensued a movement to make this a constitutional amendment and in 1913 the 16th amendment became the law of the land.

3. The greatest difficulty in my mind is that somehow we need to change the public's notion that government and competence are incompatible. Back in the 30's FDR enjoyed the fruits of the progressive movement which furnished many highly skilled and motivated people who went into government work. That changed with the coming of new generations whose experiences did not produce the same ideals. And frankly, the result has been a decline in the quality of government that is hard not to notice. Creation of good government academies partially funded by fee assessments on registered lobbyists might be a step in the right direction; this might be similar to fees currently being charged tobacco companies for the funding of anti-smoking programs.