

## SCRIPT FOR VCA TALK

### INTRO AND LEAGUE INFO

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm a member of the League of Women Voters of Napa County. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today about the Voters Choice Act. As you may know, the League of Women Voters was formed by women in 1920, six months before the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was passed giving women the vote. Its purpose was to register women to vote and also to educate women about ballot issues. This purpose is extended to all people today. The League now accepts members of any gender who are at least 16 years old. From the beginning, the League has been an advocate for social change, and was influential in changing child labor laws and enhancing the rights of women. US and state Leagues have spent 98 years developing social policy positions that all local Leagues depend on. *[Brochures]*

### VOTING HISTORY

*(All figures based on available data and may change)*

#### California

In 2016, more Californians voted in the general election than ever before recorded. About 14.6 million people voted, or about 75% of registered voters (meaning that 14.6% or 2.8 million registered voters did not decide to vote).

But presidential elections always get better turnout. The turnout statewide in 2014's midterm primary election was 25% of registered voters; for the general election, turnout was only 42% of registered voters, an all-time low, ranking California as number 44 in the nation for voter turnout. From 2008 to 2014 in the state, primary election turnout declined by 33%, general election turnout, 37%. While data show that 36% of California voters just weren't interested in politics, 32% gave time and schedule constraints as a reason for not voting. The Voter's Choice Act helps to address this last problem.

#### Napa County

Napa County's voting record is good: In November 2016, 63,255 ballots were cast, or 82% of registered voters, making the county one of the highest counties for voting participation. This was up from 2014, when 75% of registered voters voted. (In 2016, Marin County had the state's highest turnout, with 89% of registered voters casting ballots.)

### THE VOTER'S CHOICE ACT

#### Purposes of the Act

SB 450, called the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) was enacted by the California Legislature in 2016 to help increase citizen participation in voting. The main purposes of the act are to mail every voter a ballot (voting increases dramatically when voting by mail), reach out to underserved communities, expand early voting, and enable voters to avoid scheduling conflicts by being able to cast their ballots with more flexibility.

Data has shown that certain groups are less likely to register and vote: youth 18 to 34 years of age, language minorities, people with disabilities, those with low incomes, and some seniors. One of the

VCA's goals is to reach out to these underserved communities and increase their participation. In Napa County, we have two language minorities: 32% Latinos, who live throughout the county, and 7% Asian-Pacific Islanders, who live mostly in American Canyon, including a large Filipino population.

### **Pilot County**

Napa County is one of five counties trying out the new VCA system. Two urban counties: Sacramento and San Mateo, and three rural counties: Madera, Nevada, and Napa. All are in Northern California. In 2020, other counties may opt to move to the Voter's Choice Act, which is not yet mandatory. The VCA requires that all ballots be received by mail, i.e., you no can no longer get your ballot at a polling place. This transition is easy in Napa County, because 90% of voters already receive their ballot by mail.

Returning your ballot has become easier as well, at least in some respects.

- You can drop your ballot, in the signed and dated green ballot envelope, in the mail box. What's new is that you must pay postage, which may require more than one stamp (an optional budgetary decision).
- You can drop your green envelope in a secure drop box meant only for ballots. Twenty-nine days before each election, just when ballots are mailed, a total of 7 drop boxes will be located in central locations in each main town or city: 2 in Napa and 1 each in American Canyon, Yountville, St. Helena, Angwin, and Calistoga. *[VCA handout for specific locations]* All will be located outside, available 24/7. No postage will be required; all ballots will go directly to the Registrar's Office. Just like the post office, you may use any drop box location in the county.
- You can also drop your completed ballot at a vote center.

### **Vote Centers**

Over the past decade, polling places in Napa County have gradually been replaced by "help centers," which have been open on election day to help people with voting issues. Now these help centers will be replaced with state-of-the-art vote centers.

- Two of them will be in American Canyon and Napa, and one each will be in Yountville, St. Helena, Angwin, and Calistoga. *[VCA handout for locations]*
- Three vote centers will be open a total of 11 days including election day, in American Canyon, Napa, and St. Helena—which includes two weekends and a holiday. The 5 other centers will be open 4 days including election day—which includes one weekend. *[VCA handout for specific times]*

The vote centers are meant to serve many voting needs.

- **Replacement ballot.** Because of a new California voter registration database, you can find out whether you (1) are registered to vote, (2) received a ballot, or (3) have voted. A vote center worker will help you either register and vote or get a replacement ballot and vote.
- **Language assistance.** Workers will be on hand who speak English and Spanish or Filipino/Tagalog.
- **Use a ballot-marking device.** Those who have trouble voting on a paper ballot may use electronic assistance.

## **VOTER REGISTRATION**

### **Relaxed Registration Deadline**

The Voter's Choice Act makes it possible to register or reregister to vote after the typical registration deadline of 14 days before an election. Now, you can go to any vote center—open 11 days or 4 days including election day—and register to vote. You must also vote in person at the same time.

### **Preregistration**

A new state law makes it possible for 16- and 17-year-olds to register to vote. It is hoped that this will instill interest in voting when they turn 18. These teens may preregister to vote in the same manner as other registrations, but they will not show up in the state's database. Nor will they be notified that they have registered until they turn 18.

### **Registration History**

**California.** In November 2016, out of 23.7 million eligible voters in California, 19.4 million citizens were registered to vote, or 78% of eligible voters. That means that 4.3 million eligible voters, or 22%, did not register to vote. (As of 2016, 39.2 million people were reported to be living in California, of which 15.5 million residents were not eligible to vote, or 39%.)

**Napa County.** Napa County's statistics are slightly better. Out of the 93,704 residents living in Napa County who were eligible to vote as of January 2, 2018, registrations were 75,105, or 80%. That leaves 18,599 residents, or 20% of the population who can potentially register to vote. (Population in Napa County in 2017–2018 was 136,484, leaving 42,780 residents not eligible to vote, or 31%.)

## **VOTE CENTER STAFFING**

The Registrar of Voters is seeking paid workers to work various paid shifts at the vote centers. The work spans three weeks before and on election days. If you're interested but unsure, you may want to apply and learn more in the telephone interview before making a decision. [*Vote Center Workers brochure*]

## **TWO NEW LAWS**

### **Motor Voter Program**

As of April 16, 2018, the Motor Voter Program (AB 1461) went into effect. The DMV can automatically register qualified applicants to vote, unless a person opts out of registration. Motor Voter kicks in when applying for or renewing a driver's license or ID card, on line or in person.

### **Signatures and Voting**

When the Registrar of Voters office receives your ballot, the first thing they do is compare the signature on the green envelope containing your ballot with the signature on file. If it is not recognizable, your ballot may be thrown out! You would only be notified of the problem and asked to reregister—after the election. Until now. A new law, enacted in March 2018 changes that. Signature will still be compared, but voters will now be notified of the problem and given an opportunity to fix it—before the election is over. In 2016, it is estimated that 45,000 were not counted because of mismatched signatures.

## **PRIMARY ELECTION INFO (Optional)**

### **Primary Election Forums**

Please take our flyer for the two election forums being held before the primary election. Save the dates for April 25th in St. Helena and May 2nd in Napa. *[Event flyer]*

Two candidates will debate in the race for District 3's board of supervisor's seat: incumbent Diane Dillon and Cio Perez. The two initiative measures will be discussed by a panel of proponents and opponents. They are Measure C, the Watershed and Oak Woodland Protection Measure, and Measure D, the Heliport Measure. We'll also tell you about Regional Measure C and the five state propositions on the ballot.

### **Midterm Elections**

During the midterms, the states elect their top government officials. You'll see candidates running for governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and secretary of state, among others. These offices are held for four years, so our next chance to vote for them will be in 2022. Our forums won't be covering the candidates running for state office during the midterm elections. *[Voters Edge bookmark for information on local and state races]*

### **Primary Election Ballot**

- Except for the District 3 race (*see above*), local incumbents are unopposed, and include district attorney, sheriff-coroner, Napa County superintendent of schools, and District 1 board of supervisors.
- Mike Thompson, incumbent for District 1, US representative, has three candidates running against him. He was unable to attend either of our forums, so no debate could happen. If there is a runoff, the top two candidates will be asked to debate in the fall. This federal seat is elected every two years.
- California assemblywoman for CA District 4, Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, also runs every two years, this year unopposed. She will be speaking at our annual meeting in Napa on June 23, to which you are all invited. *[Sign-up sheet for League info]*

### **General Election Ballot**

- Local races, such as school board, city council members, and mayors, will take place in the fall in time for the general election.
- You can also expect a large number of state propositions.

Watch for information about candidate forums and pros and cons on the propositions, to be held in the fall.

### **Top-Two Candidate System**

Every state has different laws governing their elections. In 2010, California passed a constitutional amendment (Proposition 14) that made all races except for US president/vice president decided by popular vote, regardless of party affiliation. If a candidate wins 51% of the vote in the primary election, she or he wins the race; there is no run-off election. Otherwise, the top-two winners in a candidate race run against each other in the general election. When you see a party affiliation beside a candidate's name, it's for information only. In California, you will see many Democrats running against each other. For example, Kamala Harris ran against Loretta Sanchez in 2016's US senate race;

both are Democrats. All voters, regardless of party affiliation, choose between these candidates. This is a huge change from elections that were formerly driven by political parties.

**Materials for your talk**

- League brochures
- Election forums flyers
- Voter's Edge bookmarks
- VCA handouts (2-sided)
- Vote Center Worker brochures
- Sign-up sheet for interest in League programs (name & email) *(List goes to Kim)*
- Report on League Activity Form (send report to Ingrid)

*Contact Ingrid Swenson (Napa/AmCan) or Robyn Orsini (UpValley) for materials. See roster for phones/emails.*