
JOHN GEORGE DEMOCRATIC CLUB

NEWSLETTER--August, 2016

**Two Candidate &
Ballot Measures
Endorsement
Meetings**

**August 27, 2016
10:00 AM – 2:30 PM
Dimond Library
3565 Fruitvale Ave.
Oakland**

**Oakland City Council, City
Attorney and School Board;
Berkeley City Council,
Mayor, Rent Board and
Board of Education
Plus local ballot measures**

AND(!):

**September 7, 2016
6:00 – 8:00 PM
Buttercup Grill
229 Broadway,
Oakland**

**Special districts—AC
Transit, BART, EB Parks,
EBMUD, Peralta Colleges
plus state ballot measures**

**Invited Co-sponsors (tbd): Black Women
Organized for Political Action (BWOPA),
Oakland East Bay Democratic Club, Niagara
Democratic Club.**

Preview of local races

Close of filing for all races is August 12. We do know that Mayor Tom Bates and Max Anderson in Berkeley have decided not to run for re-election. We are not aware of any other incumbents who have decided not to run for re-election, but we'll know soon. Please join us to ask some tough questions of all candidates for public office.

Oakland's Movement to Adopt Fair Rental Policies

by Kitty Kelly Epstein, PhD

In January, when I interviewed architect and Oakland Tenants Union (OTU) leader James Vann on my radio show, he expressed great frustration that for at least 20 years, the City Council had done essentially nothing to protect Oakland renters, thereby contributing to the displacement crisis gripping the city and forcing out many longtime residents who love the city and who built its industry, its art, its culture, and its uniqueness.

On February 27, James and I spoke at a meeting of the John George Democratic Club. Quoting the city's own figures: 60% of Oakland residents are renters whose average household income is about \$35,000 a year, meaning that most can afford \$700 a month in rent. However, there is nothing to rent close to that price.

During discussion, the Club passed a resolution -- joining OTU and Block by Block Organizing Network - - to seek an emergency moratorium on rent increases and evictions. The following Sunday, the action of these organizations was reported at The Oakland Post Salon's discussion on the displacement crisis. The Salon participants unanimously passed a similar resolution, and authorized a subcommittee to file a housing emergency moratorium resolution with the City Council's Rules Committee.

Some push-back was encountered at the Rules Committee meeting on March 3, until Councilmember Brooks intervened, calling on her fellow Council members to facilitate, rather than obstruct, the community's call for action. Ultimately, the community's resolution was scheduled for a full Council meeting, and Council President McElhaney's office worked to create language for the ordinance.



JGDC Co-Chair Walter Riley, James Vann (OTU), Pam Drake (Wellstone Dem Club), Kitty Kelly Epstein, Timothy Killings and Caroll Fife at the Mar. 3 Rules Committee hearing (Photo Courtesy of the Oakland Post)

In the interim, Carroll Fife organized several effective protests on behalf of renter protections and the moratorium. The combination of protest actions and 600 people showing up at City Council led to unanimous passage on April 5 of a 90-day Housing Emergency and Moratorium Ordinance.

But 90 days is only a reprieve, not a permanent solution.

The housing movement's focus then shifted to getting a strong rent initiative on the November ballot. Again there were procedural maneuvers to a) weaken the provisions and, b) pass a weaker Council ordinance rather than allowing the measure to be voted on by the residents.

Oakland residents mobilized again, and a ballot measure proposal was introduced by Council member Rebecca Kaplan working with the Protect Oakland Renters Coalition, and supported by labor unions, faith leaders, housing organizations, several small landlords, and hundreds of individual residents. The measure was approved unanimously by the Council on July 19th for placement on the November 2016 ballot.

Kaplan's Renters Protection Act has five important elements: a) places the responsibility for seeking rent increases above the Consumer Price Index on the landlord, rather than requiring the tenant to

protest large rent increases; b) extends Just Cause protection against unjust eviction to residents of buildings constructed before 1996; c) expands services to renters through the Rent Board and broadens accountability of the Rent Board; d) provides substantial relocation payments to tenants who are evicted at no fault of the tenant; and e) places the measure on the November ballot which means that it cannot be weakened by future Councils, without being resubmitted to Oakland voters.

Said James Vann after the Council's unanimous vote: "We applaud the Council's action, although it has taken a long and dedicated struggle by the majority of residents who are renters and who saw this as a fight for the soul of Oakland."

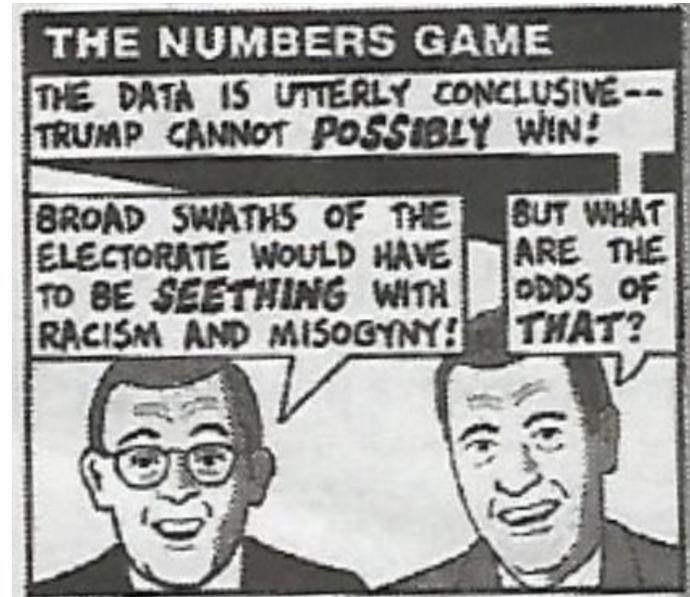
Previously, I had held the impression that lots of cities have strong renter protection. This is actually not the case. Economics "experts" started arguing against rent control some years ago, arguing that the rich would build sufficient housing if they were free from rent controls. Guess what? It doesn't work. In this unregulated period of massive wealth accumulation, the wealthy only invested in developments where they hoped to make gynomous profits, much of it in speculative investments that does not include affordable housing.

So Oakland may once again have an opportunity to join the country's leading cities by passing a strong ordinance to slow down displacement. New York has some rent control, and residents of that city have explained to me that it has not stopped gentrification, but it has helped to prevent displacement of the Black community in some (not all!) neighborhoods.

There is more to do locally: 1) Campaigning to pass this ballot measure; 2) Passing the Alameda County measure to provide \$600 million for housing at all income levels throughout the county; and

3) Lobbying our State legislators to rescind or drastically amend the Costa-Hawkins Housing Act, a California law that prevents cities from protecting renters in buildings constructed after 1995.

Kitty Kelly Epstein is a professor of education and urban studies, the host of Education Today on KPFA 94.1, and author of two books about Oakland, including *Organizing to Change a City*



Tom Tomorrow, from *Funny Times*

John George Art/Essay Award Winners

The John George Art/Essay Awards were presented at the West Oakland Library on May 21st. Elementary students were asked to "Draw a picture that shows Oakland as a healthy place to live." Middle and High School students were asked to write an essay on the topic, "Is it a good idea to ship millions of tons of coal each year through West Oakland?" The art awards were shared by Samantha Duenas Morales, Arcili Ulloa Soto,

Kaiden Brown-Hill. And the essay award went to Jorge Abundis from McClymonds High School.



Contest winners Samantha Duenas Morales, Areceli Ullo Soto, and Jorge Abundis are joined with elementary school teacher Mrs. Brooks, JGDC Co-Chair Sandra Johnson Simon, and Jumoke-Hinton Hodge, school board member representing West Oakland.

Award Winning Essay by Jorge Abundis

Save West Oakland

As a resident of West Oakland, I think that shipping tons of coal to our port for higher paying jobs is not worth the consequences of infecting the youth with disease and health conditions such as asthma. Transporting coal through the Oakland area will also poison our environment. We already have three freeways surrounding our community, and we have had residents fight against toxic dumping, pollution from the port, and diesel truck exhaust.

Oakland residents may want higher paying jobs, but by destroying the environment and ourselves, we may be destroying our purpose for easier lives by making our living conditions more unbearable. West Oakland is more valuable than polluting the

environment for additional higher-paying jobs which we can create in other ways based on the value of West Oakland's location and resources. The use of coal as an energy resource is decreasing because it is not environmentally friendly or sustainable. Coal depletes the ozone layer which can increase the rates of skin cancer, and the people who breathe this coal dust have a higher risk of getting lung cancer.

I was born in Berkeley, California, which is not far from Oakland. For the first six months of my life I was hooked up to a ventilator so I could breathe. Growing up with asthma was difficult because when I was young, I could not run or play without getting overexcited and experiencing an asthma attack. The exposure to coal could potentially cause other youth as well as the elderly to suffer from asthma, just as I did. You can get the flu shot to prevent the flu, but if we pollute our environment, how are we going to clean it up; where is the vaccine for coal?

According to an April 12, 2016 article from the Guardian.com, more than 80% of China's underground water is unsafe for drinking due to pollution. China's air is also so polluted that the citizens have to wear masks when they are outside. We should learn from China's mistakes and apply the lessons learned to the human family, starting here in Oakland.

Oakland attracted high paying jobs during both phases of construction for the Bay Bridge. I think Oakland should prioritize its resources towards improvements for West Oakland not for the destruction of its environment. By shipping coal to China, Oakland comes a participant in the further destruction of China's environment, while attracting big businesses to rejuvenate our city. I would rather West Oakland make money benefiting all its people,

not just the few who would make a couple bucks from directing coal to our West Oakland Port.



Jorge Abundis reads his essay at the No Coal in Oakland picnic following the youth awards presentation on May 21 at DeFremery Park

Oakland Bans Coal!

by Jack Lucero Fleck

After more than a year of organizing, lobbying, petitioning, researching, producing studies, going door to door in West Oakland, testifying at hearings, tabling, demonstrating, conducting street theater, singing, spreading the word with social media, sponsoring an art and essay contest (see previous article), and emphatically insisting that coal exports are not acceptable from West Oakland, the No Coal in Oakland Coalition won a major victory on June 27th as the City Council voted 8-0 to ban coal.

The victory was only possible because the broad coalition included faith groups, labor, environmental, neighborhood, businesses, Democratic clubs, and many progressive individuals and organizations.

The coalition had to overcome promises of money for churches and community groups from the

developers. One key leader who said no to the money was Rev. Ken Chambers from the Westside Missionary Baptist church. Another leader was Ms. Margaret Gordon from the West Oakland Economic Indicators Project. The East Bay Express reported that Ms. Margaret, "said at the time that her organization rejected the offer because coal would pollute Oakland and other communities along the rail line, and would also drive climate change when it is burned in foreign countries."



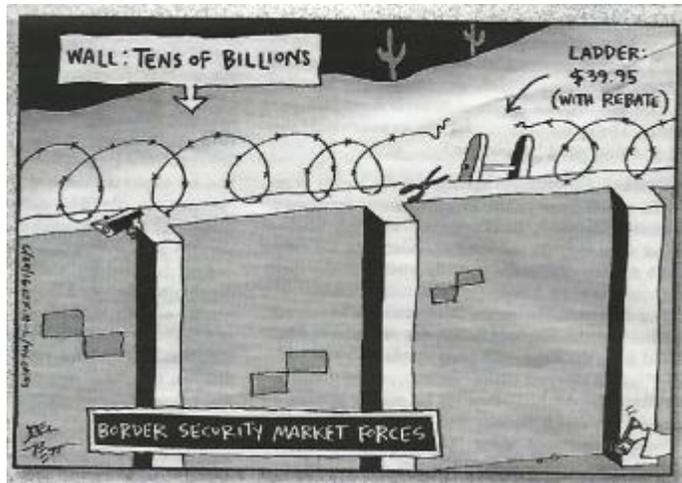
Ms. Margaret Gordon speaking to a No Coal in Oakland rally on June 25th at City Hall

Labor played an important role in the victory. The ILWU opposed handling coal as did nurses (CNA) and SEIU. The coalition gained support from 19 unions which led the Alameda Labor Council to join the opposition to coal.

Most critical to the victory was the role of the public health community. The contract for development of the site allowed the city to prohibit coal based on health and safety grounds. Three independent reports documented the health and safety risks of coal, including a [report from nine prominent public health officials](#). These compelling studies convinced

the City Administrator to recommend an ordinance banning coal, which was adopted June 27th.

It remains to be seen if the developer will try to sue or use other tactics to revive the project. Opponents of coal have emphasized that they are not opposed to the development of the Oakland Army Base. They point out that the vast majority of the Army Base project is proceeding independently from the coal terminal, and even that terminal could be used to export nearly 15,000 commodities, excluding coal.



From *Funny Times*

Name _____

Address _____

Tel: (D) _____ (E) _____

Email: _____

Enclosed are my dues for:

___ \$40 (Regular)

___ \$10 (Low Income)

___ \$50 (Sustaining)

___ \$100 (Sponsor)

Please make checks payable to John George Democratic Club and mail to P.O. 18802 Oakland, 94619. Contact: 510-436-7682, email: jgdc@jgc.org, web: www.jgdc.org

John George Democratic Club

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