

Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

January 6, 2025

Writer: Hal Mickelson



Celebrating 103 years of Service

THE MAGIC OF ROTARY 2024-2025

Both Roomers and Zoomers were called to order for the January 6, 2025, meeting of the Rotary Club of Palo Alto by our club's flawlessly well-organized president, **REBECCA GERALDI**. REBECCA pointed out that today's meeting was exactly the halfway point of her Rotary year as our Commander in Chief.



Among Visiting Rotarians were Mark Linsky of Pleasanton North, active in managing the District 5170 Speech Contest, and Victor Tom of Bedford, Massachusetts, past Governor of District 7910, attending with family support.... Also visiting was **Sana Sugita**, a Rotary District Scholar from Japan at Stanford's Center for East Asian Studies, who had honored us with an earlier visit as well.... Rotarians with Guests were **SUZANNE JAIN**, who introduced her husband Raj, and **JOY OCHE**, who presented her sons David and JJ.



We gladly welcomed our member, **LE LEVY**, who had missed a few meetings. LE is looking ready for 2025!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

JOY OCHE presented a Thought for the Day to help us build better habits in the new year: > Be patient. Instead of breaking bad habits, transform them into better ones. > Break things down. You can build a strong habit with small first steps. > Give yourself prompt, "snappy" rewards. > Manage your environment to foster the habits you want. > Plan to fail. Think about the obstacles that you foresee and consider how you'll deal with them, > Celebrate often



NEW MEMBERS PRESENTATION

REBECCA asked our Membership VP, **LINNET Kwok**, to induct our two newest Rotarians. As Linnet said in welcoming them, "Your records of integrity and service align with the mission of Rotary. Our principles and organization will be safe In your keeping." **KRISTINA LUGO**, President and CEO of Avenidas, was sponsored by **STEVE PLAYER**. Her degrees are



from UMass Amherst and Virginia Commonwealth University. **ALEX KENT**, is a real estate professional, sponsored by **JON GOLDMAN**, who said, "Alex is known for having answers to almost any question...."

ANNOUNCEMENT: Climate Action Summit

GEOFF BALL shared information about the Climate Action Summit to be held Saturday, January 11, from 11:45 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Los Altos Community Center. Led by the Climate Action Committee of Rotary in Los Altos, it will provide opportunities to learn and network on climate issues and actions we can take. You can register at: <http://GiveButter.com/ClimateActionSummt> .



PRESIDENTS CLUB

Six members made President's Club contributions: **Dr. MIKE FOGARTY** joined the PC to salute **ERIC JENSEN** for helping him master the 66-step instructions for installing a backyard grill... **ERIC** then announced the arrival of a second grandchild, Stephen Thor McClain.... **TRISH BUBENIK** applauded Rebecca for her interview with Palo Alto Online and published in the Weekly print edition, part of a January 3rd Living Well feature that described the three local Rotary units in approbative terms.... **CASH ALAEE**, who has "been there and done that" as our club's president, honored Rebecca at her half-year milestone.... **RALPH ADAMS and MIKE McMAHON** made a joint contribution, funded by just one of them because Navy beat Army 31-13.

TODAY'S PROGRAM

Dean Edwin Chemerinsky, who appeared via Zoom, was introduced by **DARYL SAVAGE**. Daryl explained that she and Dean Chemerinsky both grew up on Chicago's South Side and both attended the University of Chicago Laboratory School. Daryl added that they had nothing whatever in common in the rest of their careers. Chemerinsky has degrees from Northwestern University and Harvard Law School; he taught at DePaul, USC and Duke before becoming the inaugural Dean of the UC Irvine School of Law. He has been Dean of UC Berkeley Law since 2017.

Dean Chemerinsky's subject was "**No Democracy Lasts Forever**," the title of his book published in 2024 by Liveright.



In 1964, 77% of the US public had confidence in government institutions; now, only 20% say they have that confidence. Why? Why now? The Dean argues that flaws that are inherent in some fundamental aspects of American government have "become more salient"; he contends that some compromises made when the Constitution was adopted in 1797, "necessary at the time," have made government unresponsive to present-day needs. As an example, Chemerinsky observes that the Electoral College was "a terrible idea from beginning"; it was designed to insulate selection of a President from grassroots opinion and was engineered via the Three-Fifths Compromise to accept accounting for enslaved individuals in order to give the

South greater power. For much of the 20th century, outcomes in the Electoral College tracked the popular vote for President, but the difference between electoral vote results and the popular vote now has been increasing, thus becoming more troublesome.

As another example of structural problems under the Constitution, Chemerinsky pointed to the allocation of two Senators to each state regardless of population. Not long ago, a Senator from a big state had twelve times as many constituents as Senators from the smallest states. Now, a Senator from California represents 68 times as many citizens as a Senator from Wyoming. Each California voter has 1/68th of the influence held by a Wyoming voter. When the Senate was split 50/50 between Republicans and Democrats, Democrats represented 43 million more people. As further examples: The rules no longer require Senators to stand on their feet and continue talking to keep a filibuster going; they can now maintain a virtual filibuster while debating other business until a majority rounds up 60 votes for cloture. The makeup of the House is heavily affected by gerrymandering, although a few states, like California, have given nonpartisan commissions the power to draw new district lines.

Dean Chemerinsky also criticized the Constitutional provision that gives Supreme Court Justices their jobs for the rest of their lives. In the recent past, the nine Justices had been on the Court for an average of 27 years

According to the Dean, some of these issues can be addressed without amendments to the Constitution. The "winner take all" rule in the Electoral College could be changed by legislative action: Congress could adopt a law requiring all but two of each state's electoral votes to be determined by popular vote on a district-by-district basis.... The Senate could change its rules to provide that only 55 votes would break a filibuster.... The House and Senate could agree on a measure to end gerrymandering and require reapportionment

by independent nonpartisan bodies.... The effects of the Supreme Court's decision on voting rights in *Shelby County v Holder* could be reversed by Congressional action (potentially subject to a Presidential veto).

On the other hand, some of these problems can't be solved without amending the Constitution or, if we dare think about it, adopting a new Constitution altogether. (Dean Chemerinsky said, "Mabe it's time.") The Constitution explicitly provides that no state can be deprived of equal representation in the Senate without its consent; the Constitution itself would need to be replaced for that to change. Still, there are areas where it's not impossible to imagine reforms that will require Constitutional revisions. For instance, there may be bipartisan support for a Constitutional amendment limiting the tenure of Supreme Court Justices to an eighteen-year nonrenewable term.

In Q&A: **DIANA DIAMOND** said we should regard the framers of the Constitution as "wizards," in the positive sense of that word, for getting so many things right. Should we even think of calling for a new constitutional convention? The Dean answered, "I'm frightened by it, but I think it's going to happen..." **RALPH ADAMS** noted that the increasing concentration of wealth worldwide is perceived as a critical problem by many Americans. What can be done about the effect of money on politics? Chemerinsky asserted that it would be possible through legislation to require more stringent disclosure of the money used in campaigns, to provide greater taxpayer funding, and to prohibit political expenditures by federal and state contractors.... **TOM GRACON** observed that low levels of participation in primary elections sometimes put forward party candidates with far-left or far-right views. Dean Chemerinsky noted that there are countries that have mandatory voting – but he added that he has no solution for the polarization of our political parties.

CLOSING REMARKS

With thanks to our speaker and all who attended, President **REBECCA** adjourned the meeting at 1:30 pm.

TODAY'S VOLUNTEERS

Greeters: **Betsy Bechtel, Jake Yoo**

Welcome Desk: **Katie Seedman**

A/V: **Dana Tom**

Microphone: **Rene Morgan**

Pinion Writer: **Hal Mickelson**

Pinion Editor: **Ginny Lear**

UPCOMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

January 13 12:15-1:30pm Club Meeting	Mark Purdy , Retired San Jose Mercury News Sports Columnist: Sports Journalism
January 20 12:15-1:30pm Club Meeting	MLK, Jr Day: Service Project Hands On/Sleeves Up for Grateful Garment backpacks
January 27 12:15-1:30pm Club Meeting	New Member Talks: Rene Morgan, Jon Goldman, Jack Cabaness