

Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

August 3, 2026
Writer: Sally Tomlinson

CREATE
LASTING
IMPACT

Celebrating 104 years of Service

CREATE LASTING IMPACT 2026-2027

President **CHARLIE WEIDANZ** called the meeting to order at 12:30 and, after a very quick welcome to roomers and Zoomers, we moved promptly into the speaker's introduction. We had a flipped agenda because our distinguished speaker, Professor **Larry Diamond**, had a tight schedule. He was generous to come in person, and the club easily adapted to hearing our speaker first, but readers will find the summary of the speaker's remarks at the bottom as usual.



After Professor Diamond departed, President CHARLIE called past-president **BRUCE GEE** to welcome visiting Rotarians and guests of Rotarians. As BRUCE approached the podium his face glowed. All he had to do was stand there with the mike and a smile, say "I miss this," and the room erupted in laughter!



Two Rotarians visited us. James Horsman came down from the San Francisco #2 Club (the second Rotary Club to be established) to hear our speaker, Long Trinh, of the San Jose Rotary Club, brought his son Benjamin.

JACKIE WHEELER brought her friend Alan Davis

JOHN ST CLAIR III introduced Bryna Chang.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY



BRUCE introduced **JENNY SAVAGE**, who shared thoughts inspired by time she spends at her second home in Vermont, where her neighbors are bears and moose.

She read a poem by her favorite poet Mary Oliver, entitled

"The Old Poets of China."

Wherever I am, the world comes after me.
It offers me its busyness. It does not believe
that I do not want it. Now I understand
why the old poets of China went so far and
high into the mountains, then crept into the
pale mist.

Jenny asked us, "If you crept into the pale mist, how would you spend that time?"

PRESIDENTS CLUB

JOHN ST CLAIR III commended Bryna Chang, candidate for Palo Alto City Council. She grew up in Palo Alto, has degrees from Stanford, and has served on the Planning and Transportation Commission.

LISA VAN DUSEN is working on a grant related to the POPOS (Privately Owned Public Open Spaces). This week she has three activations: Tuesday, August 4 at 5 pm, meet at Avenidas for a tour of the seven downtown POPOS; Saturday morning at Edgewood Plaza, come hear some music and receive a bespoke compliment from Lisa; and Saturday evening 5:30-6:30 there will be a laughter party with the 2023 World Laughter Champion! Get details by searching her name online.

STANS KLEIJNEN and **JOOP VERBAKEN** have been away and are glad to be back after celebrating their **50th** wedding anniversary.

YUDY DENG is running for the Palo Alto City Council and she will have her campaign kick-off party on August 16, 6 pm at King Plaza in front of City Hall. Everyone is invited.

JENNY SAVAGE's son, Cameron, defended his thesis and got his first master's degree, with a second one likely next year.

SUNNY DYKWELL announced a Midtown block party tomorrow at Hoover Park from 5-8pm for National Night Out. Bring food celebrating your culture, and come for music, games, and fun with neighbors.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DANA TOM reported on the Endowment campaign results. With Rotarian precision, we exceeded the \$25,000 challenge grant by \$691!

And now, with the new quarter, the big message is "Pay your dues," a message reinforced by **REBECCA GERALDI**, waving a sheet with the names of people, many in the room, who have not paid their dues.

Thank you to all who responded so quickly, paying their dues today.. **"Beneficial to all concerned"** as no one needs to phone you.

SPECIAL FAREWELL



IRIS KOROL AND NANCY PETERS

accompanied **KEVIN CURRY** to the front of the room. NANCY was KEVIN's Rotary sponsor. IRIS, who was President when he joined, presented Kevin with a proclamation containing lots of whereas statements, recognizing his 20 years of service in Palo Alto Rotary. Kevin said he has been in Rotary for over 50 years, beginning in Minnesota, and he praises this club for the best speakers. KEVIN and Jayne are moving to Santa Barbara. He looks forward to Santa Barbara, but promises to come back and visit. President CHARLIE joined in the well wishes and thank you!

PROGRAM

DIANA DIAMOND introduced our speaker, Professor Larry Diamond (no relation). He is a Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute, a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, and a Professor of Sociology and Political Science. He has devoted his research to the study of democracy and democratic trends around the world. The title of his talk today was, *"America is facing a crisis in democracy: What can we do?"*



While Professor Diamond studies governments around the world, he focused on American democracy because “if we don’t fix American



democracy, I don’t think the future of democracy globally is very bright.” He launched his remarks by first asking how many of us think American politics is too polarized. Everyone raised a hand. He noted that Congress has become even more polarized

that the American electorate. The nominees of both parties are at ideological extremes. This has been the case for over 20 years in the Republican party, and now is becoming true of Democratic nominees.

His second question for us was whether we are happy with the choices we have in our elections, and people are not. How does our system contribute to the problem?

47 states start with partisan primaries, where only a small percent of the electorate votes. Who is more motivated to turn out to vote in a low turnout primary? The more passionate. In 1940-60s, there was ideological overlap between Democrats and Republicans, but many of those moderates could never get elected today. If we don’t fix the incentive structure we will end up with a further divide, with neither extreme representing the majority of the American electorate.

Three states don’t have partisan primaries: CA, WA, and AK. In CA and WA, the top two from the open primary proceed to the general election, and usually it is a Democrat and a Republican. AK sends the top 4 candidates to the general election where it uses rank choice voting. This gives Alaskans more choices, and gives an opportunity for less extreme

candidates to win. Prof. Diamond believes the most independent-minded US senator is Lisa Murkowski, from Alaska.

His fix: Eliminate partisan primaries, let the top 4-5 proceed to the final election, and decide it with a rank choice vote.

There is talk of reforming California’s system to send 4 candidates to the final election and use rank choice. Another tweak is consensus choice (“Condorcet”) voting: the winner is the person who would beat all others in a head to head vote.

Professor Diamond offered one final point regarding the crisis of gerrymandering. There is bipartisan unhappiness with what has happened recently with gerrymandering. He believes that a simple bill focused solely on partisan gerrymandering could be passed in a few years. He predicts that Democrats will win the House in 2026. If Democrats in the House passed such a bill, it would lose in the Senate because it couldn’t get 60%, but it would garner bipartisan support that could win the measure ultimately after the 2029 election.

He left us 15 minutes for questions.

ED LAUING asked about the Electoral college. Prof. Diamond: It is an anachronism, and can only be eliminated by constitutional amendment, but it is so unlikely to meet the requirements for approval that it doesn’t merit Prof. Diamond’s focus.

HENRIETTA BURROUGHS: You said that “the profit making model of the tech giants is to tear apart societies.” Prof. Diamond: The way to make money in social media platforms is to have people on your website so that you can constantly collect data on them and sell that data. Outrage is the best way to keep people on the website, and extremism feeds outrage. We need to reform the immunity they have been given. Tech platforms spend more money on lobbying than any other industry.

Benjamin Tranh: How can we consume less polarizing information, and should we look to a third political party? Prof. Diamond: Exercise

personal responsibility and verify information before passing it along. Listen to and read varied sources of information, and talk to people who have differing views. A third party might emerge with rank choice voting.

RALPH ADAMS: What about election financing? Prof. Diamond: The only hope it to press for a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court decisions that have equated corporate entities with individuals.

Bryna Chang: How do we help with regard to gerrymandering and rank choice voting? Prof. Diamond: A simple bill against political gerrymandering could pass in the first few months of 2029. Regarding voting, there are a number of organizations, including "Fair Vote" based back east.

Professor Diamond had to leave hurriedly back to Stanford with a round of appreciative applause.

CLOSING

President Charlie thanked our speaker and our members for attending and their attention.

MEETING VOLUNTEERS

Greeter: Ginny Lear

Welcome Desk: Rebecca Gerald

Hybrid Host: Dana Tom

Microphone: Joop Verbaken

Pinion Writer: Sally Tomlinson

Pinion Editor: Ginny Lear

UPCOMING PROGRAMS & EVENTS

August 10 12:15 - 1:30 PM Club Meeting	District Governor Geeta Kadambi Topic: District 5170 in 2026-2027
August 17 12:15 - 1:30 PM Club Meeting	5th District Supervisor Margaret Abe-Koga Topic: Outreach and Engagement
August 24 12:15 - 1:30 PM Club Meeting	Georgia Farooq, ED, Thrive Alliance for Nonprofits Topic: The Pulse of Nonprofits in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties
August 31 12:15 - 1:30 PM Club Meeting	Eric Jensen, Hands on Service Project
September 7 Club Dark for Labor Day	No Meeting, Labor Day Post Flags on University Avenue
September 28 Monday Special Rotary Event 12-1:30 pm Mitchell Park	Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul Insights on International Topics A shared event with Los Altos Rotary Club Registration required

