



# League of Women Voters of New Mexico *La Palabra*

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*The League of Women Voters of New Mexico, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*



## **The Co-Presidents' Corner**

*By Kathy Brook*  
LWVNM Co-President  
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Thanks to the work of LWV of Los Alamos the biennial state convention was both enjoyable and productive. In particular, thanks go to Ellen Mills for the lovely reception at her

home and to Felicia Orth for her work as parliamentarian. Thanks as well to Barbara Calef, Rosmarie Frederickson, Becky Shankland, and Rebecca Chaiken and to those who contributed and/or bid on items at the silent auction, raising \$661 for LWVNM.

We were welcomed to Los Alamos by Denise Derkacs, Los Alamos County Council Chair, and later heard from State Representative Christine Chandler and from State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard. A budget was approved for the 2023-2025 period along with recommended program. State positions were reaffirmed including recent revisions to the positions on the Administration of Justice, Election Procedures, and Public Regulation Commission. Also, the heading on the Natural Resources position was changed to Environment. New to the board are Edwina Jaramillo, Voter Service; Kim Sorensen, Treasurer; and Heather Balas, Director at Large. Kathe Kanim and Jo Galván Nash, co-presidents of LWVSNM, and Felicia Orth, president of LWVLA, are also new to the board

Directions to the board by convention participants included requests for access to materials in advance of the meeting and for more information about the relationship between LWVNM and the new LWVNM Education Fund.

In June, I joined Co-President Hannah Burling at the LWVUS Council meeting in Las Vegas for more than two days of formal and informal interactions with LWVUS staff and board members and League members from across the country.

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## Co-Presidents' Corner

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LWVNM current model involves collection of dues at the local level with local Leagues then making per member payments (PMP) to the state and national Leagues. The new model will have members paying online or by check and the payment being split immediately between the three levels of League. This new structure is expected to be rolled out in 2024.

As we look ahead, we expect considerable League activity related to November local elections and follow up on recent state and federal Supreme Court decisions

## Photos from the Convention



Above, State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard addresses the delegates. Center, Rep. Christine Chandler reports on the legislative session. Right, Hannah Burling presides at the Convention. Photos by Maire O'Neill. Below, Delegates enjoy a lighter moment. Photo by Janet Blair.



## Redistricting Report

By Hannah Burling

The decision of the New Mexico Supreme Court on July 5th allowing consideration of Republican claims of partisan gerrymandering to proceed under a legal standard proposed by U.S. Supreme Court's liberal justices has given new momentum to our redistricting work. Several League members along with Fair Districts for New Mexico Project Coordinator Kathleen Burke have met with other groups to explore next steps on the way to a fairer redistricting process in New Mexico.



## The 2023 Making Democracy Work Award Goes to Representative Natalie Figueroa



Through her commitment to redistricting reform in New Mexico, Representative Figueroa has expressed an exemplary willingness to lead beyond the partisan divide in order to pass important legislation. In the 2021 legislative session Rep. Figueroa, a Democrat, worked with fellow legislators of both parties to pass the Redistricting Act, which created the Citizens Redistricting Committee. In the 2023 session she co-sponsored House Joint Resolution 1 (HJR1) with Republican Representative Jason Harper, which would have placed the question of creation of an independent redistricting commission on the 2024 ballot.

In addition to her efforts to improve the redistricting process, Representative Figueroa has worked with Senator Michael Padilla to pass legislation that expands access to broadband throughout New Mexico. Broad Access to broadband enables

more New Mexicans to fully participate in the political process.

In the 2023 legislative session Representative Figueroa sponsored HJR2, which would have reorganized the way the Legislature operates to make it more effective. She also co-sponsored HJR12, which, had it passed, would have allowed Declined to State voters and those enrolled in minor parties to participate in primary elections without changing their affiliation.

Collectively, Representative Figueroa has sponsored legislation that helps make democracy work for New Mexicans, while holding a position as a high school Spanish language instructor in the Albuquerque Public Schools.

### Report of the LWVNM Action Committee

By Akkana Peck, Action Committee Chair

The Action committee held a Zoom educational session on the Legislative Interim Committees on June 21. It was well attended. Schedules for the various committees were not yet available, but attendees learned about the different interim committees and what topics they cover. Over the next few months, Action Committee members will be monitoring some of these committees. Subscribe to the Action mailing list to hear more at: <https://mailman.swcp.com/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/action>

At 10 a.m. on Thursday October 12 at the Roundhouse, there will be an educational program on the budget and taxes, with Raul E. Burciaga, Director of the NM Legislative Council Service.

Our weekly Action Zooms will probably start in December or early January.

Dates for next year's session and our advocacy events:

October 12: Legislative Council Service presentation

January 2-January 12: Legislation may be pre-filed

Saturday, January 6: Advocacy Workshop (10am to noon)

Thursday, January 11: Legislative Preparatory Zoom for members

Tuesday, January 16: Opening day at the Legislature (noon)

Wednesday, January 24: LWVNM Reception

Thursday, January 25: League Day at the Legislature (covering redistricting and budget issues)

Wednesday, January 31: Deadline for introduction of bills

Thursday, February 15: Session ends at noon

Wednesday, March 6: Legislation not acted upon by governor is pocket vetoed

## ***LWVNM Nuclear Issues***

*By Karen M. Douglas*

The Nuclear Issues Study was adopted by the delegates at the LWVNM Convention on April 30. However, progress since then has been hampered by staffing challenges. Two of the four study tasks would benefit from greater member participation:

1. Summarize the current contribution nuclear energy provides as both a baseload and a greenhouse gas free source for domestic/international energy production.
3. Consider the current U.S. energy situation and domestic nuclear plant status including closures with related impacts on states.

The study schedule is accelerated to permit consideration of a possible LWVNM Nuclear Issues Position for concurrence during the LWVUS 2024 Convention. Completion of a five-page report from each of the four study task committees will be required by October 31. In November references and interviews with experts will be shared with League members, and two NM League consensus meetings will be held online in December. If consensus is reached, the LWVNM Board will be asked to adopt a new position during the January 2024 meeting and information about the study and position will be shared with the other state Leagues.

### **SNF Storage Safety activities**

SB53 Storage of Certain Radioactive Wastes sponsored by Senator Steinborn was signed by Governor Lujan Grisham and became law on June 16. However, because the issuance by the National Regulatory Commission of a license for the Holtec Consolidated Interim Storage Facility (CISF) on May 9 predates enactment of the NM legislation, the legal relevance of the new law is unclear. An amendment to SB53 would render the state law void if legal challenges persist in order to avoid the expensive results of continuing litigation.

The NM Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Interim Committee met in July and plans to discuss spent nuclear fuel storage by HOLTEC during their October 10 meeting in Carlsbad, NM.

In 2022 LWVNM submitted public comment to the US Department of Energy (DOE) regarding the Consent-Based Siting process for a federally owned & operated CISF (Centralized Interim Storage Facility). A public webinar is being offered by the DOE on July 25 to discuss the path forward and LWVNM committee members will be participating. There has been no indication that siting of a federal CISF would impact either the TX/ISP or the NM/Holtec privately-owned ventures.

## ***Bringing the NM Legislature Into the Current Century***

*by Judy Williams*

Creating a more modern and efficient New Mexico legislature is still on the minds of many, although efforts to enact two constitutional amendments in the 2023 legislative session failed. Currently a coalition of organizations is working on several possible actions. These include a constitutional amendment to increase the length of the sessions to 60 days every year, allowing all topics to be considered; a constitutional amendment to create a commission on legislative salaries to set pay for legislators; and consideration of actions to provide staff and district

offices for legislators. In addition to these items, which require legislation, advocates have advanced many ideas to improve administration and transparency in the legislature.

Members of the coalition include Common Cause, 350.org, the League of Women Voters of New Mexico, AAUW, Ethics Watch, New Mexico First, the Center for Civic Policy, and others. We have had briefings from Representatives Joy Garratt and Angelica Rubio as well as Timothy Krebs of UNM (author of a major study on the state of the NM Legislature). The coalition meetings are convened by Mason Graham of Common Cause New Mexico. We have long-time current and former legislative staffers as well as former Senator Dede Feldman to help guide us in understanding various issues.



Photo Courtesy of the *Las Cruces Sun*

Three separate groups will work on specific aspects of the effort: communications (to the public), including messaging; research on other states; and outreach to legislators.

The League is looking for one or two volunteers to help with monitoring and participating in the various aspects of the effort. To volunteer, please contact

Judy Williams: [jkwilliams24@gmail.com](mailto:jkwilliams24@gmail.com)

A group of legislators, the Legislative Momentum Group, worked hard to prepare ideas and turn them into constitutional amendments

(all are women). Two legislators, Reps. Garratt and Rubio, dedicated their “junior money” to fund a study. UNM’s Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) conducted the study of legislative salaries around the nation, a survey of legislators’ attitudes on paying legislators, and staffing issues. The results were presented to the legislature during the 2023 session. In addition, two UNM Political Science professors, Drs. Tim Krebs and Michael Rocca, conducted a study, funded by the Thornburgh Foundation, of legislatures around the country.

During the 2023 session the legislature included funds for a staffing study in the general appropriations bill. The Legislative Council Service is managing the RFP process. They expect to announce a contractor at the end of July. This study will examine current staffing and needs for staffing year-round and in legislative districts. The contractor will be expected to rely on the recent work as a start.



# Local League News

## Central New Mexico

By Donna Sandoval, President

### Annual Meeting and 75th Anniversary May 6, 2023

The celebration at the Sheraton Uptown started with the annual meeting led by Co-President Karen Douglas, recognizing the board of LWVCNM and their roles. The budget for 2023-2024 was adopted and the board was elected. Nominations included:

President Donna Sandoval, who will work with an Executive Committee comprised of three board members: Starlyn Brown, Gina Mahfouz and Jennifer Black.

1st Co-Vice President- Voter Guide Advocacy Karen Wentworth

1st Co-Vice President – Voter Guide Advocacy Lani Desaulniers

4th Co-Vice President – Development Betsy Carlson

4th Co-Vice President – Development Mary Mulvany

Honored guests of the celebration were four Albuquerque Academy students who rallied behind New Mexico House Bill 134, Free Menstrual Products in Public School Bathrooms: Sophia Liem, Mireya Macias, Noor Ali and Marly Fisher.

### **Keynote Speaker Roberta Cooper Ramo**



Photo by Janet Blair

The Keynote Speaker for the celebration was Roberta Cooper Ramo, who graduated from the University of Chicago Law School in the mid-1960s and couldn't get a law firm job because she was a woman. From that difficult beginning, she has earned the highest recognition in the legal profession over a 50+ year career. She was the first woman president of the American Bar Association (ABA) and of the American Law Institute (ALI). Locally, she was selected as "Lawyer of the Year" in Albuquerque for Arbitration in 2017 and Mediation in 2018.

Several of Ramo's many accomplishments stand out as particularly relevant to LWV values and concerns, especially in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, when she could not find a job in North Carolina law firms because she was a woman, Ramo spent two years teaching constitutional law at historically black Shaw University in Raleigh.

As ABA president, she supported the continuation of the Legal Services Corporation's ability to provide legal help to the poor and launched the ABA's commission on domestic violence. As ALI president, she championed the first-ever Restatement of American Indian Law.

Ramo challenged the League to get more involved in civics education in New Mexico. Currently civics is an elective course for many high school students, although it is required in some districts. The Central New Mexico League has long been concerned about this, although we have no organized program to try to address it. She asked the League to work harder to educate voters in the basic information they need to participate as citizens. Addressing the problem of civics education would take a major effort, probably in coordination with other New Mexico Leagues. Volunteers would be required to lead and organize the effort. If you have been looking for a way to become more involved with the League, this would be a great chance!

## ***League Archive Material Displayed in New Exhibit at the Albuquerque Museum***

A new exhibit scheduled to go on display on August 12 at the Albuquerque Museum will use items from the Central New Mexico League archives. The title of the exhibit is “News for the People: Local Journalism the 1970’s and Beyond.” The exhibit will run through March 3, 2024.

The exhibit contains Voter Guides that local newspapers printed in conjunction with the League, and leaflets in English and Spanish that League members created to help new mothers with day care questions.

Central New Mexico League archives will soon be available at the Center for Southwest Research at Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico.

### ***Santa Fe County***

*By Jody Larson, Liaison*

Our League has a total of 148 members. We are trying to recruit a Membership Director to provide some relief for our stalwart VP/Administration.

LWVSFC has taken steps to update our designations of funds for our Operating Reserve and our Opportunity Fund. Our policies for these funds cover procedures for their uses, including the Rising Leaders Fund, which is part of the Operating Reserve. The Finance and Budget Committee tracks these funds and the Treasurer notes all reserve categories on our financial statements. Our Treasurer is also researching banking options that might offer a better return than we are currently getting on our reserves.

In other administrative activities, the board is considering pros and cons of leaving Twitter, and our VP/Admin will be completing the national League annual survey and reviewing what data we need to track. Board members are reviewing our Conflict of Interest policy.

Two of our members have signed up to participate in the LWVNM Nuclear Issues Study.

Our Action and Advocacy Committee is monitoring many local government issues, especially within city government. The administration is congratulating itself for having completed its FY2021 audit, only a year and a half late, but has withdrawn its former promise of completion of the FY2022 audit, which was due last December. In addition, we are following several issues of land use, including an update of the city’s Land Use portions of the General Plan and Code. Interestingly, a partial code update will precede the planning activities. This seems a novel approach. Transparency in the city as well as Santa Fe County remains a concern, with our local press reporting regularly on apparent liberties being taken with state and local transparency requirements. The city is also considering updates to our charter – we are a home rule city – and LWVSFC has questions about the advisability of some of them.

Our recent Events Planning Meeting yielded several ideas for general meetings, most of which will include public participation. An overarching theme this year will be water.

At a recent board meeting, our County Clerk, Katharine Clark, presented a sobering view of the elections-related functions and duties of the Clerk’s office. Chronically underfunded and now burdened with new responsibilities because of the need for added security of polling places, voting machines and data, as well as retirements of seasoned staff, the office is struggling to meet its deadlines. These kinds of issues are affecting elections management around the country and are of great concern to all organizations concerned about good government and the future of our democracy.

## **Los Alamos Report**

*By Barbara Calef, Past President*

At the Annual Meeting on April 20 Felicia Orth was elected president of the Los Alamos League. The former co-presidents, Barbara Calef and Becky Shankland, became past president and director-at-large respectively. Long-time board member and treasurer Rosmarie Frederickson has retired from the board. Addie Jacobson is the new treasurer.

There were two interesting developments during the program presentation. Jody Benson's proposal to lead a study asking, "should large scale pit production for nuclear weapons occur in Los Alamos?" was approved after some discussion. Also, in response to a request, League members voted to include a focus on Racial Equity and Inclusion as an action item.

Subsequently, Dr. Emily Piltsch, the Comprehensive Health Planning Coordinator for the Los Alamos County Health Council, was invited to speak at the May meeting of the LA Board. She explained that the Health Council was charged with developing recommendations to the County regarding comprehensive health planning, coordination of health resources and identification of needs, services, projects, and programs that can affect community health. The Health Equity Advisory Group has been formed to help ensure that equity and inclusion are at the forefront of comprehensive health planning. The investigation is ongoing.

During the May meeting the LA Board adopted the proposal submitted by Membership Director Jean Dewart to invite all local League members to participate in the development of questions for the Voter Guides. Jean hopes this will get more League members involved and engaged with the League. The questions will be submitted to the Board for final approval.

The League hosted three interesting programs during Lunch with a Leader in recent months. All of them were recorded and links to the videos are posted on our website.

Los Alamos County's first Sustainability Manager, Angelica Gurule, spoke at Lunch with a Leader in March. Gurule, formerly the Solid Waste Manager, was appointed to her new position in November 2022. She will focus on all aspects of sustainability: energy, water, conservation, waste, care for the forest, and will work with the Utilities Department as well as Environmental Services.

Shannon Bacon, Chief Justice of the New Mexico Supreme Court, spoke to the League in April, discussing her concern about the erosion of confidence in democracy and in the rule of law. She said that judges across the country are concerned about this decline, which highlights the need for neutral information.

The New Mexico Supreme Court has developed a civics education program about the judiciary's role in our democracy and the development of the rule of law. The justices go on the road, conducting oral arguments before classes around the state. They select actual cases that will be of interest to students and develop lesson plans as well.

Justice Bacon announced that the Supreme Court is putting together a commission to study the system for electing judges in New Mexico. The current elections system is a compromise between election and appointment. The Judicial Nominating Commissions (JNC) screen applicants for judicial appointments. When there is a vacancy on a court, the Governor selects one of the candidates on the JNC list. The appointee must run in the next general election and may face opposition from a candidate who has not been vetted by the JNC. Perhaps it would be better to have the governor appoint, the Senate confirm, and then require a retention vote rather than election.

At Lunch with a Leader in June, State Senator Leo Jaramillo described the legislation he had sponsored during



the 2023 session. He was especially pleased with the success of two bills - Healthy Universal School Meals and the Catalytic Converter Sales Record Act, as well as Menstrual Products in School Bathrooms. In response to a question, Senator Jaramillo said he enthusiastically supports modernization of the legislature. He is only able to serve as our senator because he has a part time job at LANL that provides him with benefits.

## **LWVSNM Report**

*By Jo Galván Nash & Kathe Kanim, Co-Presidents*

### **Southern New Mexico Outreach Expanded**



The spring annual meeting elections brought two new co-presidents to SNM — Jo Galván Nash and Kathe Kanim — who will provide leadership for the next two years. The SNM Program was adopted and will focus on affordable housing, education, and libraries. SNM will also use the year to explore the possibility of conducting a study on the shortage of doctors, locally or throughout the state. In addition to the adopted program, the League placed Voter Services at the top of its priorities. In June, the organization's Annual Visioning Lab brought members together to determine action-oriented strategies for the yearly Action Plan. Also planned this year is a legislative conversation with lawmakers.

**Committee Activities:** Beth Bardwell, who chairs the Affordable Housing Committee, agreed to serve as the new Vice President, filling a vacancy. She will remain as chair of the Housing Committee, which will oversee the city's expenditure of bond funds earmarked for affordable housing. The co-chairs for the Youth Engagement Committee will be former co-president Eileen VanWie and educator Josie Miller. The committee has already engaged with Las Cruces Public Schools to get high school students registered to vote. We also elected retired UTEP Professor Kate Mangelsdorf as the Membership Director.

**Otero County Unit:** Two liaisons from the Otero County Unit — Claudia Powell (pictured with a Washington Post correspondent on Earth Day) and Cindy Broughton — were selected to attend Board meetings this year. The new Unit kicked off the year with voter registrations, attending an Earth Day event in Alamogordo, partnering with local Girl Scouts, and volunteering to get involved with the state Voter Services committee. This new unit is a tremendous benefit to southern NM's outreach.



**General Meetings:** SNM's adopted program includes an update to the League's library position. The August general meeting will convene a panel of three librarians from Las Cruces, Alamogordo and Anthony to discuss the hurdles and future of libraries. And, of course, a future general meeting will focus on the November election.



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Please consider helping your local League or LWVNM to pay for our voter guides and candidate forums. You can send a tax-deductible gift by check to your local League or to LWVNM. See [www.lwvnm.org](http://www.lwvnm.org) for more information and links to our local Leagues. Thank you for making democracy work!

*The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that helps the public play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, regional and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Anyone 16 years of age or older, male or female, may become a member. The League of Women Voters never endorses candidates for office or supports political parties.*