



League of Women Voters of New Mexico

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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 and Hannah Burling
LWVNM Co-President
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2024 looms before us, bringing a 30-day legislative session as well as the election of the president, the majority of the US Congress, and all of the NM legislature. In this context,

the value of the League's work can not be overemphasized. Please consider ways in which you can contribute your time and energy to our efforts to empower voters and strengthen democracy. We especially hope to see many members at League Day at the Legislature in Santa Fe on January 25, preceded by a reception on January 24.

Recently, LWVNM (along with other good government organizations) was engaged in submitting an amicus brief in the redistricting case brought by the Republican Party concerning Congressional District (CD) 2. This submission was not supportive of either party but was consistent with the League's position on an independent redistricting commission. We were fortunate that Hannah was able to travel to Lovington for the first day of the trial in District Court. Thanks also to Felicia Orth for reviewing the brief on behalf of LWVNM. The district court judge issued a decision that there was no egregious partisan gerrymandering as described by US Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan in the Rucho case. The district court decision was then appealed to the NM Supreme Court in a hearing on November 20, 2023, but that court upheld the district court decision, so the boundary of CD 2 remains as is.

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Our Voter Service activities are led by Edwina Jaramillo, to whom we are grateful for coordinating the state's participation in VOTE411, especially relating to the 21 counties not covered by local Leagues. Edwina has provided the board with a list of next steps to improve our voter information efforts for the 2024 elections.

Looking beyond November 5, 2024, LWVUS will be moving
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LWVNM Nuclear Issues

By Karen Douglas

Background

During the June 2022 LWVUS Convention in Denver, the Pennsylvania League recommended a Nuclear Issues Resolution promoting commercial nuclear power as a greenhouse gas-free alternative to support the LWVUS Climate Emergency Declaration. LWVUS did not accept the resolution. However, during the Convention, 34 state Leagues expressed interest in revisiting the LWVUS Nuclear Issues Position, which “opposes increased reliance on nuclear fission.”

LWVUS staff recommended that a state League (LWVNM) conduct a nuclear issues study; if a new state position resulted, other state Leagues could consider concurrence.

After the Convention and many meetings with members of other state Leagues, LWVNM requested clarification from LWVUS. LWVUS staff recommended that a state League (LWVNM) conduct a nuclear issues study; if a new state position resulted, other state Leagues could consider concurrence. The position could then be considered for adoption by concurrence at the 2024 LWVUS Convention.

The Nuclear Issues Study was approved by the delegates at the LWVNM Convention in April. Since then the committee members have carried out the tasks described in the proposal and produced four reports, which have been posted on the LWVNM website:

<https://www.lwvnm.org/studies/2023/nuclear-issues/consensus-meetings/>

Recordings for four interviews with nuclear industry experts have also been posted on the website.

Current Status

The LWVNM Nuclear Issues Study is on schedule. At the LWVNM Board meeting on November 18 the consensus questions proposed by the study committee members were discussed, amended, and approved by the board. If you want to get some helpful background from the experts, plan to attend one of two Zoom meetings scheduled on December 14, the first at noon and the second at 6:30 p.m., to ask questions of the study leaders: Karen Douglas (CNM), George Chandler (LA), Kathy Brook (SNM), Jeanne Logsdon (CNM), and Karen Douglas/LWVNM Nuclear Issues Director.

Whether or not you attend one of the December 14 meetings, be sure to participate in one of the important consensus meetings. The first consensus meeting will be held on Saturday, December 16th at 1:00 p.m.; the second will be on Tuesday, December 19th at 6:00 p.m. Registration will be available in early December and all LWVNM members are encouraged to participate at their preferred time. The results of the meetings will be used to formulate a position to be submitted to the LWVNM Board during the January 2024 meeting. Then we'll be ready for the LWVUS Convention in 2024!

2024 Action Calendar

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

January 6 Advocacy Workshop – (Saturday) **10 a.m. to noon**

January 9 LWVNM Board Zoom to set priorities, (Tuesday) Zoom **6:30 p.m.**

January 11 Legislative Prep Zoom for members, (Thursday) **6:30 p.m.**

January 16 Opening day (Tuesday) **Noon** – Governor speaks

January 24 Three tables at Legislature: LWV, Election Integrity, and Fair Districts, (Wednesday) **8 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

January 24 LWVNM Reception, Attorney General Raul Torrez speaking, (Wednesday) **5:30 to 7:30 p.m.**

The closest inexpensive hotel to the Roundhouse is El Sendero, formerly Garrett's Desert Inn, at 311 Old Santa Fe Trail, (505) 982-1851.

January 25 League Day at the Legislature (Thursday) **10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

Heather Balas – Redistricting

Paige Knight – Budget & Taxes

January 31 Deadline for introduction of legislation (Wednesday)

February 15 Session ends, (Thursday) **Noon**

Co-Presidents' Report from page 1

forward with a new membership system. Not all issues have yet been resolved, but the expectation is that most of us will join and renew our membership online and will pay the recommended dues level of \$75 (with a “pay what you can” option of at least \$20. Details can be found at <https://www.lwv.org/league-management/membership/lwv-new-membership-system-faqs>.

Kathy Brook

Working with the LWVNM Education Fund, we were able to join the Election Integrity Project in advance of this year's election. We were part of the effort to engage trusted voices to combat mis- and dis-information around the voting process and to encourage voter participation. This was an outgrowth of last year's Democracy Project where our video PSA series, “Your Vote Counts” and the four shorter “Your Voting Information Videos” were disseminated. For 2023 we, along with other coalition members, made both audio and video PSAs of county clerks urging New Mexicans to vote. We are very proud that two of these were made in Spanish and one in Navajo. All of these are on the News page of our website. For last year's clips, you'll need to keep scrolling down. We've been busy!

On January 24th, the day before League Day at the Legislature, please consider volunteering at one of our tables between 8am and 2pm. In addition to the Fair Districts for New Mexico table, we will also have a League information table and an Election Integrity Project table. I hope to see you there!

Hannah Burling

Voter Services

By Edwina Jaramillo

VOTE411 and the 2023 Election

The LWV has successfully survived another election! It was challenging from the get-go but the local Leagues cajoled, encouraged, and convinced local candidates to participate in VOTE411 - at response rates over 80% for three of the four Leagues! Candidates were informed that VOTE411 provides a candidate's position on issues in their own words via their response to LWV-provided questions, and gives voters the ability to compare candidates before voting. The Voter Guides are especially well-received by local communities, and County Clerks often refer voters to them when asked for a candidate reference, and also refer them to the LWV website.

The Voter Services (VS) Committee, comprised of one to four members from the local NM Leagues, met once a month from April 2023 until our last debrief meeting prior to the November election. The meetings were to share information with and between the local Leagues, discuss possible issues, inform about the VOTE411 system, inform about communication needs and share templates for GOTV and VOTE411, etc.

There were several challenges LWVNM and the local Leagues encountered, not the least of which is a very tight deadline between publication of the candidate/race list by the Secretary of State (SOS), the time the Leagues have to provide questions to candidates and receive their responses, and the time the Leagues must send the Voter Guide contents to a printer. LWVNM and the local Leagues met the challenge by calling candidates (up to five times in some cases), texting, and, of course, sending the candidate invitation and the reminder letters to candidates through VOTE411. The month prior to the election was very hectic as LWVNM contacted approximately 800 candidates in twenty-one counties while the local Leagues contacted approximately 175 candidates in the remaining NM counties.

We also encountered several other issues with the “back-end” to set up candidate races (e.g., race types, race categories, candidates, candidate questions, bio questions, Geographic Information System (GIS) files, candidate letters) in VOTE411. This year we used the Proclamation to establish race names, then discovered that those names did not precisely match the names used in the SOS race/candidate portal that we rely on to mass upload candidates and assign them to the appropriate races. This resulted in a labor-intensive matching of races to candidates, selection of race type, and a need to redo some of the race set-up work. I give a shoutout and kudos to Maia Pugh, whom the LWVNM hired to assist us with VOTE411, and who was indispensable in this endeavor and the success of VOTE411. I also don't want to fail to mention Akkana Peck who, along with Maia, spent countless hours ensuring the GIS files were accurate.

GIS files are the standard for encoding geographic information that is used to identify voting boundaries. Unfortunately, many of the local election GIS files were not published in a centralized, publicly accessible location prior to this election. The SOS contractor hired to collect these files was helpful, but progress was slow; at least two files were inaccurate, and some files were not obtained. This resulted in having to use a disclaimer for less than precise districts for a very small number of races and to develop district sets requiring VOTE411 viewers to select their district numbers manually for another small handful of races. The SOS has assured us that we will not encounter this issue for state and national elections next year. We plan to meet with the SOS early in 2024 to discuss issues encountered and to mitigate them for the 2024 election.

On the “front-end”, there were also some complaints about the inability to see a sample ballot in VOTE411 as in the past, the inability to compare candidates side by side, and slow loading of content due to an increase in traffic. LWVUS will be made aware or is already working on these issues. In summary, in spite of the above concerns, response rates for the local Leagues were mostly high and the Voter Guides were very well-received. The Voter Guides, I predict, will be extremely important for the 2024 election as all signs indicate the election

cycle will be contentious, with much mis- and dis-information on social media. Our work on VOTE411 will be all the more needed.

Lastly, I want to thank all members of the VS Committee and local League members for their dedication and hard work for arguably the LWV's most important project. Job Well Done!

Modernizing the Legislature – What's Next?

by Judy Williams

The 2023 legislative session appropriations included funds to study various possibilities for providing staff to legislators. Proposed constitutional amendments to lengthen sessions and pay legislators failed to pass.

The Legislative Council Service (LCS) is managing the \$2.5 million to work on staffing. In late summer the LCS contracted with The Focus Group to do a study. The study wrapped up in October and the contracted groups presented to the Interim Legislative Council.

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts_List?CommitteeCode=ALC&Date=10/16/2023

- The Focus Group (TFG) analyzed staffing in eight other state legislatures and prepared a detailed report and recommendations.
- Research and Polling (Brian Sanderoff) polled legislators and staff.
- Architectural Resource Consultants examined office space around the state.
- The National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) researched other states.

Results of Staffing Study

TFG produced three main models. One model would provide one staff person for each legislator in district offices. The second would provide regional staff. The third, or hybrid, model would provide shared staff in regional offices and in Santa Fe.

The legislative surveys done by Research and Polling had good response rates. Seventy-eight, or 70%, of the 112 legislators responded.

- 66% of House members responded
- 76% of Senate members responded
- 88% of Democrats support having staff
- 37% of Republicans support having staff

The costs would vary according to the model. The hybrid model would cost \$7.8 million; the regional model would cost \$4.1 million; and one staff per legislator would cost \$13.9 million.

Recommended: the hybrid model. There would be three FTEs at the capitol, to provide nonpartisan policy and legislative analysis. They would be available to all legislators. There would be 56 FTEs in 12 regional offices. Each legislator would be entitled to 20 hours per week (half time). Although staff in the regional offices would be considered "partisan," they would not be allowed to participate in campaigning or electioneering. They would have to receive training and reinforcement on this. It isn't clear how they might be allocated to members of different parties.

The field staff would work on community engagement, constituent services, administrative support and policy research. These were the services legislators were most likely to say they need. Republicans were more concerned about partisan issues.

Architectural Resource Consultants assessed properties all over the state. They reported that state buildings are not suitable, and that higher education institutions, county and private buildings were the most suitable.

Issues for the Legislative session

Legislative pay, session length and staffing are the three major reforms being considered. Whether they will have a chance in the 2024 legislative session is still unclear.

Legislators are working on drafting legislation on salaries and length of session. There will be multiple bills in some areas, and there continues to be opposition, at least in the Senate. Concerns among legislators include impacts on retirement plans and the constitutionality of committing future legislatures.

The issue of staff in districts, including how they would be managed, may not be resolved in the 2024 session. Given the logistical challenges, it is unlikely that legislation will be introduced in the short session. The work will have to continue during the next interim.

Advocates are working on communications strategy, considering the best ways to communicate with individual legislators. They are compiling responses to legislators' questions.

Local League News

Central New Mexico

By Donna Sandoval, President

Looking Towards December

On Thursday, December 14, CNM is hosting two Zoom meetings, one from Noon to 1 p.m. and the second from 6:30-7:30 p.m., for the discussion: Clean Energy Options – Should LWV Include Commercial Nuclear Power? The Nuclear Issues Committee, led by Karen Douglas, hopes to reach as many members as possible for an important overview of the fast-tracked nuclear study/position.

Annual Meeting

Tentative date is Saturday, April 20, 2024. We are researching venues, more news to come soon!

LWVCNM Book Club

The book club will resume next year on January 31, 2024 (Wednesday) with a TBA book on the topic of environment and climate change.

Observer Corps Report

LWVCNM includes several observer corps reports in our newsletter, The Voter. I wanted to share the on-going dialogue we have with the Bernalillo County Commission.

Bernalillo County Commissioner Walt Benson has pulled his proposed change to the Transparency Portal Ordinance from the County's current agenda. He reached out to ask about our concerns and we had a telephone conversation about his proposed changes.

We previously sent a letter to the Commission saying their proposed language change to allow the County to remove contract information from the portal at their discretion posed problems for citizens who legitimately sought information about contracts.

Bernalillo County's ongoing efforts to scrub information from their website stems from the ransomware attack last year that shut down the county's servers for two weeks. The County, working with the FBI, was eventually able to unlock their servers, but they are increasingly cautious about the information they post on the website.

Benson says he is reworking the language for the changes to the transparency portal. We will have more on this as the County moves forward.

Los Alamos Report

By Felicia Orth, President

More than 50 local residents attended the League's Candidate Forum on October 5. All the candidates aside from the two running unopposed were present in the races for the Los Alamos Public School Board and the UNM-LA Advisory Board. Short presentations on a school bond and on the new election laws were included in the program. October 5 was also the date of publication for the Los Alamos Voter Guide, which went to every household in the County, to both libraries, and to the polling places, 9,600 in all.

The September Lunch with a Leader (LWL) featured Karl Braithwaite, retired scientist from LANL, who discussed his time as a Congressional staffer during the Nixon administration, when many environmental protection laws were enacted, including the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act. Dr. Braithwaite also recounted his experience in New Mexico as a member of the state's Environmental Improvement Board, among other roles in governance and environmental advocacy.

The October LWL featured Eric Peterson, Los Alamos County's Open Space and Trails Specialist. In addition to providing updates on parks and trails projects around the County, he answered a lot of questions about the animals encountered in the area, including feral cows, and the County's efforts to remove them because they can be a menace to local hikers. The November LWL featured speakers from the Santa Fe Food Depot and Los Alamos Cares, a local food pantry. We have now held several LWL programs in person with excellent attendance, at least 40 people. The events are not live-streamed; however, all talks are video-recorded and uploaded to the League's YouTube channel.

It's been a few years since we've been able to gather in person for a purely social membership event. Ellen Mills hosted the gathering on October 20, and it was a great success, with several new faces. Jody Benson related her experience as a "Donut Dollie" attached to the U.S. Army in Korea, complete with photos and memorabilia; her presentation was both moving and entertaining.

Local issues of special interest at the County Council meetings recently have included housing, transportation, and waste-to-energy production. We entered the local scarecrow contest with an eye-catching "Vicki the Voter" scarecrow; she drew attention but didn't win.

LWVSNM Report

By Jo Galván Nash & Kathe Kanim, Co-Presidents

Board Business: The SNM Board is preparing for its annual "Legislative Conversation and Holiday Social" on December 2; 14 area legislators have been invited. The purpose is to network with members and our lawmakers, and to present the SNM legislative items of interest. The Legislators will also present what they are contem-

plating for the 2024 session. And, for the first time, the event is being co-sponsored by the local NAACP and AAUW. Plus, we'll enjoy a buffet and raffle drawings, courtesy of many donations from the community.

One concerning item is the loss of several SNM members compared to the previous fiscal year. Our League has approximately 100 members at this time. While some members have passed away or moved, the loss of members will negatively impact the budget. Conversely, there have been quite a few people who have joined since last May from Doña Ana and Otero counties. We will continue to focus on spreading our messages and encourage others to join.

Committee Activities: The voter services efforts continued right up to Election Day with a final LWV candidate forum held at the most southern part of the state — Columbus. Mayoral and Trustees candidates were asked multiple questions from the League and community residents. SNM held a total of six community forums during this election season, with four of them overseen by the Otero County Unit. On Nov. 7, SNM had more than a dozen election workers and election “watchers” at busy voting locations. LWVSNM will submit various observations to the County Clerk and Secretary of State. No major problems were noted, and many new voters registered on election day.



Election workers take a moment for a selfie on election night.

Education is one of SNM's programs, which prompted an important meeting in early November by the SNM Education Committee with faculty from the NMSU College of Health, Education and Social Transformation. Discussion focused on the Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit, what coursework prospective teachers are required to learn about multicultural/bilingual instruction, equity, literacy and more, and what technologies and hands-on opportunities are afforded to teachers before they move into multicultural classrooms. A complete overhaul to the SNM education position will be ready by next spring.

General Meetings: A November general meeting, with guests from AAUW, focused on the state's doctor shortage and the continuous rise in health care costs. SNM is using the 23/24 fiscal year to explore these issues before deciding whether to create a new LWV position. An eye-opening documentary “American Hospitals: Healing a Broken System,” jump-started the discussion about hospital costs, lack of rural health services, why doctors are hard to find (and keep) in New Mexico, and other issues that impact doctors and patients. A panel discussion followed the documentary with two excellent speakers. Pictured are Mary Feldblum (left), Executive Director of Health Security for New Mexicans Campaign, and Harriet Brandstetter, the former CEO of La Clinica de Familia and currently a health professional recruiter for New Mexico Health Resources, Inc. outlined several key healthcare cost drivers and potential solutions.



Santa Fe County *By Jody Larson, Liaison*

LWV of Santa Fe County has 159 members, 70% of whom are current on dues.

Our Action and Advocacy Committee has met recently with several city officials, including the mayor, city manager, economic development director, and Midtown project manager. We received updates on projects and shared concerns about the plaza's future, affordable housing, and transparency. Since then, we have been concerned about the future of funding for affordable housing in the wake of the approval of a new revenue stream for the city's Affordable Housing Trust, as the mayor has now indicated twice in the press that this money may replace rather than supplement existing revenue streams. We are communicating with the measure's sponsors on this.

We are scheduling a series of Lunches with a Leader with the administrative heads of our four local government entities, the Superintendent of Public Schools, the President of the SF Community College, The SF County Manager, and the SF City Manager. We have prepared a list of topics for discussion with these leaders, including their roles with respect to their governing bodies. We will restrict attendance to League members. Our Holiday Lunch and Legislative Lunch are scheduled.

Voter Services has been super busy and very effective in the election run-up. Our election insert, printed from the League's election pamphlet edited by Katharine Clark, was published in the Friday, September 22 New Mexican; the Voter Guide was published in the October 6 edition. We received 400 overruns of each, which were distributed to Libraries, Senior Citizen Centers, community-based organizations, SF Farmers Market and Food King consumers, high schools, and other entities. The four Santa Fe forums had a total of 190 in-person attendees, and many more online (exact number to come from the Santa Fe New Mexican, our technological partner). The committee is reviewing lessons learned and working on revising the script and the question grid. The New Mexican also ran ads for each forum, including one full-page spread. The board approved getting in touch with the newspaper over our concern that they endorsed some candidates before their respective forums. There was no mention of this at those forums, however.

Our Voter Services Director, Kelly Davis, worked with our local NAACP chapter to canvass several neighborhoods with traditionally low voter turnout. The group distributed the League election insert and other League materials. Tabling continued at the Farmers Market and the Food King.

Our High School Voter Registration program was active in September and October, registering over 450 voters at eight schools and training six students to be Voter Registration Agents. One of them is our new student intern. She is from Santa Fe Prep and is working with Voter Services first, under our rotation protocol. Although all the schools are using resources we have provided, not all have been able to schedule our team members to come for a visit. Many of the teachers at Santa Fe High were dealing with a brand new "block" schedule that placed senior classes on odd days at odd times. The teachers are a bit frustrated. We will schedule a spring event at Santa Fe High, ahead of the June primaries. Here is a photo of four of our new VRAs:





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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 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.