**LWVNM COUNCIL MINUTES**

**April 30, 2022**

**6739 Academy Road NE, Suite 124**

**Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**(and via Zoom)**

**Board Members Present**

Hannah Burling, President (SFC)

Kathy Brook, First Vice President (SNM)

Barbara Calef, Second Vice President (LA)

Dick Mason, Action Chair (CNM)

Rebecca Chaiken, Secretary (LA)

Suzanne Ronneau, Treasurer (SFC)

Judy Williams, Past President/Voter Services (SFC)

Meredith Machen, Education/Immigration/Special Projects (SFC)

Akkana Peck, Webmaster and Action Vice Chair (LA)

Karen Douglas, LWVCNM Co-President and Spent Nuclear Fuel (CNM)

Susan Haase, Membership and Events (SFC)

Janet Blair, Communications (CNM)

Renny Ashleman, Voting and Elections (SFC)

Jody Larson, Archivist (SFC)

Rebecca Álvarez, JEDI (SFC)

**Delegates Present**

Becky Shankland (LA)

Edwina Jaramillo (SNM)

Felicia Orth (LA)

Sally Sabo (SFC)

Karen Wentworth (CNM)

Donna Sandoval, (CNM)

Eileen VanWie, (SNM)

**Observers Present**

Denny Blood (CNM)

Jeanne Logsdon (CNM)

Linda Miller (CNM)

Judith Minks (CNM)

Terry Quinn (CNM)

MaryEllen Smith (CNM)

**Call to Order**

The 2022 LWVNM Council was called to order by President Hannah Burling at 11:45 a.m. Renny Ashleman confirmed we had a quorum. Judy Williams and Barbara Calef volunteered to read the minutes following their completion. When both readers are satisfied, the minutes will be filed.

**Agenda**

Renny moved that the agenda be approved, and this motion was seconded by Meredith. All voted in favor.

**Featured Speaker**

Heather Balas is Vice President of Programs for the Election Reformers Network (ERN). She has over 25 years of experience in public policy including policy research, citizen deliberation, legislative advocacy, voter education, and coalition building. She is a senior consultant to the nonpartisan Issue One and the Carter Center, where she advises on advancing reforms to strengthen American democracy. ERN aims to modernize U.S. democratic institutions to protect against growing polarization. Its priorities include nonpartisan election administration, better voting rules, and redistricting reform. ERN is a member of the Fair Districts of New Mexico coalition.

Public trust in elections is in a worrisome decline. According to a CNN poll, in September 2021, 52 percent of those polled had little or no confidence that elections in America today reflect the will of the people. That percentage dropped to 40 percent in January 2021 but increased to 56 percent in February 2022. Both COVID and the expectation of fraud likely played a part in this lack of confidence.

Heather said that election administration is now more worrisome than voter suppression. Thus, Secretary of State races have increasingly become races to watch. Currently, there are 19 races in which candidates either dispute the 2020 election results or express some willingness to overturn future elections. These issues are not normal and do not happen in other democratic countries that have improved upon the way election administrators are selected. In Canada, for example, a chief election official may not be a candidate for any election while in office and the officials are required to perform their duties impartially by oath or statute. Only 40 percent of election officials in the United States are required to do so. Election officials in Canada are also selected by appointment rather than election.

ERN maintains that the problems in the United States can be mitigated by instituting appointment of election officials, nonpartisan elections, and elections ethics codes. At a minimum, all 50 states need a threshold of neutrality for Secretaries of State and County Clerks. Such ethics codes are not required in 40 of 50 states. In conjunction with the Carter Center, ERN seeks to explore how proven models for impartiality in redistricting and the judicial system can be used to ensure our election leaders are independent, professional, and accountable.

The bipartisan select committee researching the events of January 6, 2021, has reviewed tens of thousands of documents and the next round of public hearings will begin in mid-June. This is an opportunity for us to say to Democrats not to use this hurtful day for political purposes, and to Republicans that this is an opportunity to focus on the facts. The Electoral Count Act of 1887 must be reformed on a bipartisan basis. This Act currently allows a state to have their legislature decide an election and it does not define what a “failed election” is. It must clarify the role of the Vice President, narrow the concept of “failed” elections that enable legislatures to decide the outcome; and provide reasoning when it does go to congress.

In New Mexico, a constitutional amendment creating an Independent Redistricting Commission was introduced this legislative session. It was not expected to pass this session but survived a committee vote. There is now momentum for the amendment, and New Mexico is ahead of the game, nationally. There are four other states on the verge of doing something similar. Also on the horizon in New Mexico are Ranked Choice Voting, an ethics and disclosure package, legislative modernization, and election protection. Legislative modernization, including pay for legislators and extending the length of the legislative session, is endorsed by Common Cause, LWVNM, and other organizations. While New Mexico recently approved same day voter registration and “open primaries,” the bill did not allow for voters to easily change their party affiliation following the primary. A modest revision could fix this issue.

ERN would join with other organizations, like the Fair Districts of New Mexico coalition, in working towards nonpartisan election administration. Dick noted that neither LWVUS nor LWVNM has a position on nonpartisan election administration. Hannah suggested that a resolution at Convention would be needed, and more state Leagues would need to be on board. Dick agreed to draft the necessary language.

**President’s Report**

Hannah reported that LWVUS President Dr. Deborah Ann Turner has instituted calls every few months with small groups of state presidents. Most recently they discussed the structure of LWV. During the most recent call, it was noted that there is not a unified way for League members to understand what LWV membership means, and we do not have an understanding for state and local Leagues to know what to expect from LWVUS. The proposed approach to address these issues includes an affirmative set of rights and responsibilities for members and Leagues and a compilation of information in one place about what it means to be a League member and what it means to be a League. The goal is to ensure a diverse, strong membership to increase our organizational power and fulfill the League mission. Our membership system must make it easy for people to join wherever they encounter the League, and quickly connect members to their state and local Leagues and minimize the administrative burden on individuals and Leagues. A unified dues structure that will be more equitable across all levels will be part of the bylaws changes that will be presented to delegates at the 2022 Convention. Hannah expects the changes to be implemented over the next two years.

Increasing state League capacity is another long-term goal. This is expected to be a multi-year approach to support state Leagues in exercising political power within their legislatures, support professional paid staff, build organizational strength, and support local Leagues. The budget supporting these efforts will be presented at Convention.

Locally, Hannah would like to focus on “get out the vote” efforts for sovereign nations and rural voters, which has become more urgent since the failure of the Voting Rights Act. Advocacy efforts will be helped through our EdFund and our application for 501(c)(3) status, which may be completed by the end of the summer. Hannah also asked each of us to give serious thought to a succession plan given the losses we have experienced over the last year.

Hannah and Janet have been working with the Public Information Officer for the Secretary of State in the creation of a four-to-five-minute video explaining how votes are counted in New Mexico. The video will cover topics including voter registration, secret ballots, how votes are counted, and how using paper ballots is safe. A local public relations firm has agreed to produce this video for $4,000 and the narrator, August Myers, has agreed to participate at no charge. The video is intended to be snappy, easy to understand, and visually appropriate. It will be ready before the general election and will be posted on YouTube, social media, and earned media coverage. Hannah hopes this could become an annual video covering various aspects of voting and informing young people about how to become more politically active for younger people.

**First Vice President’s Report**

Kathy has been working for several months on a LWVNM Handbook to assist in on-boarding new members of the state board. She hopes that it will also be useful to members statewide who may want to know more about how the state League functions. The Handbook is currently in draft form and can be shared with anyone who is interested. Kathy asked anyone to send her suggestions for material to be included to kathybrook@comcast.net.

**Treasurer’s Report and Budget**

Suzanne’s report reflects a bank balance of $34,152.86. Our checking account includes a donation from Meredith for diversity membership ($1,840). Meredith asked that this be renamed Rising Leaders. Our EdFund is currently held by LWVSFC but, because of our pending 501(c)(3) status, it will be moved into the newly established LWVNM EdFund.

**Archivist’s Report**

Jody’s report indicates that most files she has received from local Leagues have been catalogued but she has been unable to move them to the UNM Zimmerman Library because of COVID. Now that restrictions have been lifted, Jody expects to have this task completed by the end of the school year. Local League records are properly boxed and will be returned to the local Leagues along with a spreadsheet detailing the contents. The last 10 percent of the uncatalogued files will be finished soon. Jody welcomes any help in getting this project completed. She also needs assistance in creating a policy or procedure for the archival storage of electronic records.

**Program**

Kathy reported that, at the invitation of LWV California, the LWVNM board initiated a discussion of whether to concur with the California position on criminal justice. New Mexico has a position on the Administration of Justice which includes elements adopted at various times on the selection of judges, the death penalty, alternatives to incarceration, funding, legal aid, and juvenile justice. However, our position lacks elements contained in the California position, specifically policing/law enforcement practices and a clear statement of the goals of the justice system. After receiving feedback from the local Leagues, the LWVNM board voted to concur with the California position, understanding that the next step would be to meld the LWVNM Administration of Justice position with the California position. A subcommittee consisting of Barbara Calef, Karen Douglas, Jody Larson, Meredith Machen, and Eileen VanWie is working on this project.

Kathy also noted that studies on judicial selection and tribal law are ongoing.

**Action Report**

Dick reported that the Action Committee was previously made up of a small group of involved activists but, since more people have joined and are participating, they decided that a Steering Committee was needed. This committee will develop agendas, trainings and orientation documents, calendars of Legislative Sessions, and procedures for selecting legislation to present to the larger committee and the board. A Steering Committee for Action with Hannah, Akkana, and Dick serving as co-chairs has been established. Final decisions will remain with the Action Committee.

The LWVNM received a $50,000 grant from the Thornburg Foundation of which $35,000 will be used to continue our Fair Districts for New Mexico Campaign. The Navajo Nation will support a constitutional amendment for an Independent Redistricting Commission and Dick believes they will secure support from other Native American communities. Our consultant will continue to work to build public and legislative support for this effort as well.

The issue of county and municipal redistricting has arisen because of lawsuits in Sandoval and San Juan Counties. We need to determine if LWV positions allow us to take a position on county and municipal redistricting because such redistricting is not limited by the New Mexico Constitution or by statute. A study may be in order.

**JEDI Report**

According to the report submitted by Rebecca Álvarez, JEDI has addressed the tasks it was initially charged with by LWVNM President Hannah Burling. Those tasks included: assessing current diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the LWVNM; assessing the current diversity of the LWVNM; and assisting with recruiting and retention efforts to further diversify the LWVNM. Rebecca asked what the JEDI committee should do, moving forward. Hannah asked that JEDI assist the LWVNM in reaching out to sovereign nations with respect and in a culturally appropriate way.

**Membership Report**

Susan’s report reflects a statewide membership totaling 558. This includes 453 primary members, 69 additional members, 18 student members, and 18 lifetime members. The LWVUS database reflects membership in the local Leagues as follows: Central New Mexico - 190; Los Alamos - 125; Santa Fe - 129; Southern New Mexico - 105; and state members at large - 9. Los Alamos reports that LWVUS has more members in its database than are current with the local League. LWVLA will be removing names from the database they share with LWVUS. Susan is working on redirecting members who joined at the state level in error to the appropriate League and transferring dues to the local Leagues.

Members-at-large can join any local League they wish or could form a members-at-large unit. Such members can also participate in LWVNM Zoom meetings and participate on the various LWVNM committees.

**Making Democracy Work and NM Listens**

Meredith participates in a weekly immigration caucus with multiple states. In 2020, the Convention delegates approved unanimously having more action on immigration, but little has been done. Meredith will be pushing for more at the June Convention. This will be a major issue during the upcoming election.

According to Meredith’s report, NM Listens is a collaboration between the New Mexico Humanities Council and the League of Women Voters of New Mexico. This project enhances LWVNM’s capacity to further its mission as a good government organization that encourages informed and active participation in the political process, increases understanding of major issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. On May 22 from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., New Mexico Listens will hold a virtual event on Democracy and Elections. Meredith needs help publicizing this event. There will also be a rally on the Santa Fe Plaza on May 5 at 5:00 p.m. calling attention to murdered and missing indigenous women. A panel discussion on this issue will be held on a date to be determined.

**Spent Nuclear Fuel Report**

Karen submitted a report detailing the activities of the SNF committee to date. A final SNF Storage Safety Position was adopted by LWVNM Convention delegates in April 2021. Outreach for concurrence by 35 states with Independent Spent Fuel Storage Instillations was initiated in May 2021. A power point briefing for educating other state Leagues was distributed in June 2021.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission granted a construction and operating license for the first phase of a Consolidated Interim Storage Facility, but construction has stalled due to litigation. A subsequent request for additional information from the NRC was made to Holtec. Providing the responses are satisfactory, a license may be issued by August 2022.

As part of public comment, in March 2022 the LWVNM provided a six-page report to the U.S. Department of Energy addressing questions posed on consent-based siting of federally operated consolidated SNF storage facilities.

Because Illinois has 11 operating nuclear power plants, congressional action has historically been introduced by Illinois congresspersons. Hence, Karen and Bobbi Riedel presented the 2021 LWVNM SNF Storage Safety Position to the LWVIL Issues and Advocacy Convention in March. This presentation will be revised based on feedback from that group and a presentation to LWVCA is anticipated. The LWVIL cannot presently concur with our position because their bylaws do not allow for concurrence between conventions.

**Voter Service’s Report**

Judy’s report indicates that the LWVNM is producing a statewide Voter Guide for both the primary and general elections. The first time this was done was in 2020. LWVUS owns Vote411, the platform for our Voter Guide. LWVUS revamped the platform over the winter of 2021/2022 which required a significant effort to learn the new system, identify issues, and get LWVUS to fix them. Some improvements were made, and some new problems arose. The primary races included 661 candidates, of which 424 are not covered by the local Leagues, and 338 races. Invitations are sent followed by multiple reminders to the candidates to submit their responses. Some funding from the Thornburg Foundation allowed the committee to hire a project assistant (Maia Pugh) and publicize Vote411. Still, numerous volunteer hours have been needed to get this completed. Akkana Peck has been a lifesaver on this project because of her technical knowledge and problem-solving abilities.

This time we managed to do a bulk upload of all candidates and races, taking the load off the local Leagues. And because of the law we got passed in the 2021 legislative session, the GIS maps were (mostly) in hand. The Secretary of State’s office provided the contact information for the judicial candidates, which saved a lot of detective work.

Judy ended her report with a plea for help. We need a new Voter Services Chair and Vote411 manager. She hopes to have someone in place to work on the general election Voter Guide in August and September.

**Voting and Elections Report**

Renny reported that he has been following various coalition groups. There have been cancelled meetings, personnel shake-ups, and struggles identifying which issues to support in future sessions. Some groups want to focus on Indian voting rights or other minority issues, while others prefer to focus on general issues such as absentee voting.

In the 2022 legislative session, not a single voting bill on our list survived, despite unprecedented support from several coalitions. Parts of SB 6 (Election Security and Administration) and SB 8 (New Mexico Voting Rights Act) were amended into SB 144 (Intimidation of Election Workers), which contained important security items. Issues which led to the demise of this bill included objections to a requirement for ballot drop boxes, youth voting, and ex-felon voting procedures. The short session, drafting errors, absentee voting concerns, and an agenda change on the last day of the session all contributed to the bills’ failure.

**Judicial Selection Study**

Suzanne indicated that the Judicial Selection Study has been stalled because of COVID. The study design plan included going into courtrooms to observe proceedings. With masks, it is difficult to catch nuances. The committee has decided to wait until these restrictions are lifted in order to do it right.

**Tribal Law Study**

Rebecca Álvarez reported that at the April 2021 LWVNM Convention, a one-year study of the pros and cons of codifying federal Indian law at the state level was unanimously approved. The first objective of the study was to educate ourselves about the complexities of enforcing federal Indian law as well as the complexities of supporting tribal sovereignty. The second objective was to identify possible legislative solutions for supporting tribal sovereignty and tribes at the state level. The third objective was to develop a position for advocacy.

Although a considerable amount of research has already been conducted, gaps in the research include interviews with representatives of the Navajo Nation, interviews with faculty at the Indian Law Program at the University of New Mexico School of Law, and an inclusion of notable new developments in laws impacting tribal communities, including the passage of SB 12 and HB 135 in 2022. In order to address these gaps and promote the rigorous discussion of the issues in a full and inclusive manner, Rebecca requested permission to extend the study another year to give it the time it deserves. This was approved by the LWVNM board at its March 5, 2022, board meeting.

**Voter Guide, Election Calendar, and Candidate Forums**

Judy reported that Vote411 goes live on May 2 and a Constant Contact message will be sent to our membership the same day. To date, over 300 candidates have not responded. Late responses will be added to Vote411 but will not be included in the printed Voter Guides. Hannah suggested another way of publicizing Vote411, and the primary election, is through Outreach Circle.

Early voting for the primary election begins on May 10 and Election Day is June 7.

**Local League Reports**

Submitted in writing and will be published in the next edition of *La Palabra*.

**LWVNM Planning and Directions to the Board**

Hannah requested that attendees complete and forward to the board the “Directions to the Board” form included in the packet of materials.

**Adjournment**

Hannah adjourned the 2022 LWVNM Council at 2:20 p.m.

Written by Rebecca Chaiken (May 6, 2022)

Edited by Barbara Calef (May 6, 2022)

Edited by Judy Williams (May 15, 2022)