



La Palabra

The newsletter of the 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.

LWVNM Board approves PRC position

The LWVNM Board approved a position on the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (PRC) at its Sept. 22 meeting. The position was developed through a study and consensus process; the study committee met with all four local Leagues during August and September to gain consensus on the eight statements that comprise the position.

Neva Van Peski and Karen Heldmeyer of the Santa Fe County League headed the committee. Other members included Jody Larson (LWVSFC) and Naishing Key (LWVLA).

“We wish to acknowledge the cooperation of all of the local Leagues in this consensus process. Participation in the unit meetings was lively, focused and well-informed,” Neva said.

The study was proposed at the LWVNM convention in 2011 and turned out to be quite timely, Neva noted. Think New Mexico, a think tank located in Santa Fe with a fairly long track record of achieving its legislative goals, published a report on its study of the PRC in September 2011. Its lobbying efforts during the 2012 legislative session resulted in three proposed constitutional amendments regarding the agency, which appear on this November’s ballot.

One of the LWVNM's PRC position statements provides a basis for advocacy in favor of one of those amendments, which would require qualifications for candidates for PRC seats. The study committee chose not to include one of the questions in its scope -- whether registration of corporations should be moved to the office of the Secretary of State.

The third amendment, proposing that regulation of the insurance industry should be moved out of the PRC, will not be supported or opposed by LWVNM this election season because of feedback from local Leagues. The proposed amendment makes no provision for how this is to be implemented, and many questions remain for the legislature to address. For example: Is there to be a separate agency, or will insurance be merged into another existing department? Will its agency head(s) be elected or appointed? Will there be a commission or just a chief executive answering to the governor? Many local League members felt this was too vague for the League to support the amendment itself, although there was strong consensus for removing the regulation of insurance from the PRC's authority.

The following is the position as approved by the board. It is an official position as of that action and may be used for advocacy at

(Continued on page 2)

Your League needs you to serve on LWVNM Board

The LWVNM Nominating Committee invites members of the Leagues in New Mexico to nominate themselves or their colleagues to serve on the 2013- 2015 board of directors. Nominations can be made by emailing Mary Wilson, committee chair, at T3Wilson@aol.com or calling her in Albuquerque at (505) 881-6136.

Nominations must be made before Dec. 1, 2012. Send your name and contact information or the contact information for the person you are nominating. You do not need to send a resume with the initial nomination.

The positions to be filled include president, vice president, secretary and treasurer, as well as six directors, a nominating committee chair and two members of the Nominating Committee. The job descriptions for the positions can be found at <http://lwvnm.org/board.html>. You may hold a board position for the State League even if you also hold a position on the board of your local league.

“The great thing about League jobs is that they can be tailored to your time availability, interests and capabilities,” Mary said. “Think of all the reasons you joined the League—commitment to voters, good citizenship, a public policy issue. The

League cannot make progress on those ideals or issues unless our members step forward and say, ‘I can do that.’ You can do that and you will have a terrific team working with you.”

All expressions of interest will be considered. The process the committee is: as nominations are received, the nominating committee will start calling nominees to discuss their interests and experience. At that time nominees will provide the names of at least three references who are current League members. The committee will interview the references and talk to officers of the nominee's local League. It is the committee's intention to nominate a person for the LWVNM president position before moving on to fill the other board positions. “That way, we hope to put together a team,” Mary said.

Another goal of the committee is to assure that all local leagues and the member-at-large units are represented on the state board. The full slate will be announced at the March state board meeting.

“I know it sounds like it is early for nominations, but we want to get started now to make sure LWVNM has a great team in place next May that is ready to hit the ground running,” Mary said.

PRC Consensus

(Continued from page 1)

any time by the LWVNM.

The League of Women Voters of New Mexico supports the following with respect to the PRC.

1. PRC candidates should be evaluated on the basis of qualifications by a broad-based nonpartisan process.

2. Candidates for the PRC should have education and/or appropriate professional experience in a related field or in consumer advocacy. There should also be mandated, ongoing professional training after election.

3. The PRC should be funded by assessments on the industries that it regulates and those funds should be sequestered from the general fund. The legislature should provide enough money in the PRC's budget so that it can carry out its allotted duties successfully.

4. Insurance and Utilities should be regulated by separate agencies.

5. The laws forbidding ex parte communications between commissioners and those who are interested parties in cases before the PRC should be very strong, and penalties for violating these laws also should be strengthened.

6. The PRC should have an inspector general charged with reviewing practices for handling incoming payments properly, conducting internal audits of other functions, and pursuing such other investigations as are deemed necessary.

7. PRC Commissioners and advisory staff should be prohibited from working in a business regulated by the PRC for at least one year after they complete their tenure at the PRC.

8. Consumer interests should have strong representation when the PRC is making policy decisions and setting rates.

LWVNM helps with classrooms for Laguna Danta children

By Katherine Campbell

A year ago, the LWVNM board made a generous donation to United by Friendship (www.unitedbyfriendship.org) in memory of Laurence J. Campbell. Larry was deeply involved in this Española-based nonprofit, which works in the municipality (~county) of Uspantán in the department (~state) of Quiché in the central highlands of Guatemala. He steered the fledgling organization through the intricacies of obtaining 501(c)(3) status and traveled several times with its teams.

The LWVNM donation was used to build and equip two elementary school classrooms in the small village of Laguna Danta. Laguna Danta is a mountain village of the K'iche Maya. Its 67 families speak primarily K'iche; only a few men speak some Spanish. The villagers endured much suffering during Guatemala's protracted civil war in the 1970s and 1980s, during which the northern half of Quiché found itself in the middle of the armed conflict. Understandably, then, they are wary of outsiders, but UbF volunteers have formed trusting relationships with them over the years.

By implementing seriously the democratic structures created by the 1996 Peace Accords, Uspantán has become one of the better-governed municipalities of Guatemala. Its citizens do not tolerate corruption; in the early 2000s they literally ran a corrupt mayor out of town. Since then they have had a popular and apparently effective mayor, recently re-elected to his third four-year term. By working in this single municipality, although it is large with areas that are very difficult to reach, UbF has been able to develop excellent working relationships with the municipal officials (the "muni") as well as with individual villages.



The children of Laguna Danta

All proposed projects originate at the village level and are steered through the application process, including the preparation of an impressively detailed budget, with help from the muni. UbF teams visit in the spring of each year to evaluate proposed projects and visit completed ones. For each approved project, UbF provides funding for material and supplies, while the muni provides professional expertise (engineering design and oversight), and the villagers themselves contribute a large amount of sweat equity. Under this arrangement, a few thousand dollars go a very long way and create things that the villagers themselves want enough to maintain.

To the certificate of appreciation from UbF, I also add my thanks to the LWVNM board for its support. I made my second trip to Guatemala with the 2012 UbF team, and although I did not get to visit Laguna Danta, I know from the projects I did see that the new classrooms were well built and will be valued by generations of teachers and children. And should you ever go there yourself, look for the plaque dedicated to LWVNM somewhere on the wall!

League Day at the Legislature -- Save the Dates - Feb. 4, 5

The League of Women Voters of New Mexico will be holding its annual League Day at the Legislature in the first full week of February. Here are the basics:

Evening of Monday, Feb. 4 -- Reception

and Educational discussion at the Desert Inn, Santa Fe

Tuesday, Feb. 5 -- Day at the Legislature with lunch and speakers at the Desert Inn

Full information will be in the Winter *LaPalabra*.

Our sacred mission: Educating voters

*If a nation expects to be ignorant and free...,
it expects what never was and never will be.*

-- Thomas Jefferson

By Meredith Machen

As the Voter Services Chair for LWVNM, I have been honored to work with an incredibly dedicated group of members from all of our local Leagues in putting together *Voters' Guides*. All through August and September, we've been extremely busy getting the information necessary for voters. By this time, I hope you have seen the products and your election choices. If not, please log onto www.lwvnm.org for the statewide and local *Voters' Guides*.

Our very dedicated Voter Services Committee has worked diligently to produce our non-partisan, comprehensive *Voters' Guides*. We took on our charge, believing that voting is the keystone of our democracy and that an informed public will make the best decisions. When we had to ask certain candidates repeatedly to please return our questionnaires so they could be included in our *Voters' Guides*, we did so on behalf of the public. We HAD to persist. We joined in spirit with League members across the country and across the decades in making sure that all candidates were given an equal shake and that all the information we produced was accurate and complete.

To serve the public interest, we came up with questions that we hoped would reveal candidates' diverse viewpoints on controversial issues. We condensed the Legislative Council Services' 46-page document on the pro's and con's of the proposed constitutional amendments down to five pages in plain English. Our analyses won't draw huge ratings for exciting entertainment, but they will help thousands of New Mexicans think through important questions that will greatly affect our state.

Luckily, New Mexico's voters don't have to weigh in on any of the divisive issues that are on certain ballots across the country. Thanks in part to League advocacy, our legislators did not pass bills to impose photo ID requirements, which would disenfranchise tens of thousands of voters in our state, or change our very enlightened law that keeps our roads safe by requiring that undocumented residents obtain driver's licenses. Even though we certainly have our challenges with high poverty rates and

underfunded educational and social programs, we have much to be proud of in New Mexico.

Many constituents read our *Voters' Guides* without giving any thought to the complicated process of producing them. Few people are aware that the League prepares them as a public service. Fewer still realize that Leagues often struggle to raise the necessary funds to pay for the publication of the *Voters' Guides* and later for the *Voters' Key to Elected Officials in New Mexico* and the local *Who's Who*.

I think I speak for most Americans that we have heard enough political ads to last us for the rest of our lives. League members and other educated people will keep digging for information, knowing how to find substantive journalism and in-depth analysis of policy issues. Unfortunately, the majority of voters do not take the time or make the effort to go beyond the sound bites that fill the media. In some races, the differences between candidates have never been clearer. In other races, the public barely seems to have noticed who's running. Coverage of the proposed constitutional amendments and the bond questions has been skimpy at best.

Most people would probably not get the information from the newspapers. Our challenge now is to get people who are soured on government to go beyond complaining and get involved.

We need to make sure that we encourage voter turnout. We can't let voter apathy and frustration spoil the results of the General Election. As all of us who have been doing voter registration can testify that far too many eligible residents say they aren't inclined to vote this time. It is unconscionable to think of the amount of taxpayer dollars spent on the elections and what's at stake. We've got to work our hardest to have an informed and engaged electorate.

The League role in civic education and engagement cannot be underestimated.

We need every League member's help in getting out the vote. Please carry some *Voters' Guides* with you when you go to public places and make sure that people know there is more to this election than the vote on the presidency. While we decry the influence of big money in politics, we have to remind others that our voices are heard best through our votes. We need to elect the candidates who will work for the best interest of their constituents, not those who are

(Continued on page 5)

New Mexico Health Insurance Exchange must serve needs of customers

By Dick Mason

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) calls for the creation of health insurance exchanges (HIE) that will serve as a market place for individuals and businesses to purchase health insurance. The HIE will be the only place where people can receive subsidies to help pay for their insurance, The ACA allows states to: create their own HIE; form a partnership with the federal HIE or have their residents participate in the federal HIE.

New Mexico has created an HIE Advisory Task Force and has hired a consultant to help them develop a New Mexico HIE. New Mexico must submit a plan to the federal government by mid-November, 2012 and have their plan approved by Jan. 1, 2013. Part of the certification process requires that the state show that they have the legal authority to create a HIE. This could be a problem for New Mexico since the governor vetoed SB38, a bill supported by the LWVNM, that would have created a New Mexico HIE.

The New Mexico legislature does not convene until mid-January, 2013, so the question is how does New Mexico show that it has the legal authority to create a HIE by Jan. 1, 2013. Past court cases are quite clear that the executive cannot create these type of entities by executive order. Should be interesting. Over the process of evaluating the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and advocating for legislation to create a New Mexican Health Insurance Exchange (NMHIE), advocates, including the LWVNM, have expressed some key principles. Those principles can be captured

in the following mission statement: The NMHIE should be a strong and active purchaser that represents customers -- small businesses and individual policy holders.

Key to achieving the above mission are the following:

* **Structure:** The NMHIE should be a quasi-governmental entity (outside the government, but with government appointees) so as to maintain independence and the flexibility to create the best product for New Mexicans. The structure should be created through legislation, not through executive order.

* **Governance:** There should be strong conflict of interest language in the enabling rules/legislation to bar those with direct financial interests from the governing board to prevent them from using the NMHIE for personal gain.

* **Benefit Package:** The Essential Health Benefits Package should be as comprehensive as possible and should include the benefits mandated by New Mexico law.

* **Accountability:** It should strive for maximum transparency and accountability to ensure that New Mexican consumers will benefit from the NMHIE.

* **Integration:** Those applying for insurance through the NMHIE should be screened for eligibility for Medicaid and other public benefits and either qualified at that point or linked directly to the qualifying entity.

* **Outreach: Navigators** should come from nonprofit entities that already have relationships with the target communities. Navigators should be trained and certified, but not licensed. The certification process should not be so cumbersome so as to block entry. Navigators should be funded by an assessment on insurance providers.

* **Financial Sustainability:** The operations of the NMHIE should be fully funded by an assessment on insurance providers. This includes funding for navigators and for staff with the expertise to run a health insurance exchange.

The LWVNM will be following the action and advocating for the most consumer friendly NMHIE. Stay tuned!

Voter Services

(Continued from page 4)

beholden to big donors and special interests.

Many thanks to all who are trying to promote an informed, engaged electorate, especially to those who worked on the *Voters' Guides*, candidate forums and voter engagement. After the election, we need you to continue to let our elected officials know where you stand on issues. We have amazing access to our elected officials in this state, so let's get the best ones in office.

State develops Tax Expenditure Report

By *Barbara Goedecke*

On Aug. 9, 2011, New Mexico's Governor Susana Martinez issued Executive Order 2011-071 that directs the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department, in coordination with other executive agencies, to develop the first annual tax expenditure report. This 2012 New Mexico Tax Expenditure Report seeks to provide a comprehensive review and analysis of existing tax expenditure programs in New Mexico and provide a foundation for annual

tracking of tax expenditures. The League of Women Voters has supported this type of reporting.

Through this report, we develop many insights, explore tax policy foundations, compile a tax expenditure reference resource, quantify specific tax expenditures and address many policy objectives. Most importantly, it establishes a data and analytic resource to further develop our understanding of the benefits achieved by New Mexico's specific tax expenditure policies in the future.

LWVNM joins the New Mexico Coalition for Choice

By *Dick Mason*

At its meeting on Sept. 22 the LWVNM Board voted unanimously to join the New Mexico Coalition for Choice (NMCC) and accepted Diane Goldfarb's offer to be the LWVNM representative to the coalition.

The mission statement for NMCC reads: The New Mexico Coalition for Choice works with its member organizations to coordinate legislative advocacy, grassroots organizing and public education and awareness regarding the preservation of reproductive choice and privacy for women and men regardless of age, economic or ethnic background.

The member groups of NMCC include: American Congress of Obstetricians & Gynecologists (ACOG), American Association of University Women (AAUW), American Civil Liberties Union-New Mexico (ACLU-NM), New Mexico Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, NM Women's Agenda, Nirvana Manana Institute, NOW Santa Fe, Planned Parenthood-New Mexico, Southwest Women's Law Center and Southwestern Women's Options

The LWVNM looks forward to working with NMCC to protect the reproductive rights of all New Mexicans.

Board meeting highlights

By *Chris Burroughs, LWVNM Secretary*

Sept. 22, 2012 Board Meeting

During their Sept. 22, 2012 meeting at the Pasa Tiempo Senior Center in Santa Fe, the LWVNM Board:

- * Heard from State Treasurer Cheryl Haaker that the LWVNM Wells Fargo Checking account had \$1,886.70 and the savings LWVNM account had \$6,103.31, for a total of \$7,990.11.

- * Finalized the date for the 2013 convention to be May 18-19 in Las Cruces. It is expected that some 27 people from throughout the state will attend the conference, not including members from the host Las Cruces League.

- * Discussed potential speakers for League

Day at the Legislature. LWVNM will sponsor a reception for legislators with a panel on Feb. 4, followed by League Day on Feb. 5.

- * Discussed potential speakers for the Dec. 1 LWVNM lobbying workshop.

- * Approved the PRC consensus report.

- * Discussed policy regarding write-in candidates for *Voters' Guides* and candidate forums.

- * Heard about LWVNM's support of National Voter Registration Day.

- * Learned that the LWVNM *Voters' Guide* was live on the website.

- * Agreed to have Dick Mason and Linda Moscarella be the state board's representatives on the LWVNM Nominating Committee, headed by Mary Wilson.

Local League news

Central New Mexico -- Shelly Shepherd & Sandra Browne, Co-Presidents

In July, Tony Sylvester spoke at the general meeting about transportation. Sylvester is a part-time professor in the UNM School of Architecture and Planning. He is also a Special Projects Manager with the Mid-Region Council of Governments and the Rio Metro Regional Council of Governments, and was involved with the Rail Runner project from its inception.

In July, work geared up on the *Voter's Guide* for the upcoming general election. Judith Binder stepped up to the plate as the editor. This is an expensive publication, and a great effort has been put into fundraising. Judith's goal is to distribute a copy to every APS high school senior, in addition to the usual locations.

Libby Rodke Washburn, state director for U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman was the speaker at the LWVCNM general meeting on Aug. 9. Ms. Washburn spoke on Native American voting issues past and present.

A new member reception was held on Women's Equality Day on Aug. 26 at the home of Carol Tucker Trelease. It was a lovely event. LWVCNM participated in the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's 2012 "Women's Equality Day" event. Jo Porter spoke about the history of voting in the United States.

Gayle Prinkey, LWVCNM Voter Services director, arranged for LWVCNM to join with Road Runner Food Bank to register voters. There are between 125 and 150 sites. On Aug. 14 Gayle held a voter registration training for new registrars and to update current LWVCNM registrars on some of the new regulations.

On Aug. 6, Jo Porter arranged for a meeting with Bartlomiej Balcerzk, who is originally from Poland and now living in Belgium. The meeting was facilitated by the Albuquerque Council for International Visitors with the objective of U.S. practices in the area of refugees and immigration, and to learn about the electoral process in the U.S. Albuquerque was one of several cities on Balcerzk's tour.

The theme for September unit meetings was

"STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) Education in U.S.:" Kerrie Greenfelder, registered professional chemical engineer with CDM Smith, Inc., spoke at the luncheon unit regarding the future of STEM outreach as it relates to the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) and K-12 students. Other unit speakers were Leslie Phinney, an employee of Sandia National Laboratories, who spoke about national and global challenges and how STEM education is important for finding solutions, Sharon Diamond, a Midwest teacher, now in Albuquerque, who believes that learning disabled students are not getting the unique teaching methods that allow them to be successful in math and is a member of STEM, and Cheri Burch, who was a computer scientist first in USAF and R&D in an oil company before teaching high school computer science (as well as some physics and math) until her retirement. Since she retired, Ms. Burch has volunteered to provide math enrichment at Roosevelt Middle School, as well as serving with the Supercomputing Challenge, First Lego League, ExpandingYour Horizons (EYH), and various school and state science fairs.

Gayle Prinkey arranged a meeting Sept. 4 with visitors from Bahrain with the National Council for International Visitors. There were five women in attendance from Bahrain. The Bahrain women stated that women have not had a problem voting in Bahrain, and there are no taxes. Maybe we should be visiting them?

On Sept. 8 a PRC Consensus meeting was held, conducted by Neva Van Peski and Karen Heldmeyer, Ph.D. Thank you Neva and Karen and those who attended on a Saturday morning special meeting.

An "Understanding the Affordable Care Act" seminar was also held Sept. 8 in Rio Rancho, sponsored by LWVCNM, Health Action New Mexico and volunteers in Support of the Affordable Care Act.

A Health Care Forum was held Sept. 19 for candidates of the First Congressional District, Janice Arnold-Jones and Michelle Lujan Grisham. LWVCNM co-sponsored the event with Health Action New Mexico, LULAC and the Social Justice Council of the First Unitarian Church.

(Continued on page 8)

Local League news

(Continued from page 7)

Los Alamos -- Barbara Calef, President

Following meetings with PRC Commissioner Doug Howe, Energy Analyst Dan Klein and PNM VP Ron Darnell, I met with John Arrowsmith, manager of Public Utilities for Los Alamos to hear his perspective regarding the San Juan Generating Station (SJGS) and also to learn how the plant's owners would decide what alternative to propose to the EPA.

Arrowsmith said that New Mexico meets the requirements of the Clean Air Act at present, and the SJGS is scheduled to shut down in 2052. He believes that the EPA's goal is to force the SJGS to close and would prefer that they announce a deadline for closure instead of creating obstacles to make continued function uneconomic.

He did not know how the decision would be made since there are so many owners of the various units. Arrowsmith is amenable to various outcomes, as long as the county is assured a reliable and reasonably priced source of energy.

Police Chief Wayne Torpy, the speaker for the August Lunch with a Leader program, told the group that the crime rate in Los Alamos is the lowest in the state. He stressed that the reason is the high education level. He belongs to an organization of police chiefs, sheriffs and prosecutors called "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids" that seeks to educate the public about the importance of providing preschool programs and reducing the number of high school drop-outs in order to cut the nation's crime rate. That rate has remained unchanged for 45 years, despite spikes in the number of police. Only education reduces crime, he said. Increase in a police presence just displaces the crime. Some 99 percent of prisoners have substance abuse problems or did not graduate from high school. In keeping with his beliefs, Torpy provides GED programs in the new county jail and seeks professional care for inmates with mental health problems.

At the September Lunch with a Leader, Tom Nagawiecki, the Los Alamos environmental services specialist, explained the re-introduction of glass recycling in the county after a ten-year hiatus. Dumped in our landfill, the glass was easily forgotten. However, now the landfill is closed and trash must be carted to Los Lunas. In 2011 we sent 835

truckloads there, consuming 30,000 gallons of fuel to transport 16,000 tons of waste. Nagawiecki is committed to reducing that number.

The glass will be pulverized and used by various county departments. It will also be available free to residents. The pebbles can be used for landscaping, as a base course in paved trails and for maintaining the cap on the County's landfill.

Sandra West, outreach coordinator at the Los Alamos Co-op, explained Terracycle, a program to "re-purpose materials that otherwise end up in the garbage." The Co-op collects cereal box liners, candy wrappers and other items and ships them to the company, where they are converted into products such as purses, picnic benches and toys. A second Co-op effort called Gimme 5 will re-cycle #5 plastics such as yogurt containers.

The Los Alamos League has been working hard to prepare for the General Election by registering voters, publishing the *Voters' Guide* in our local newspaper and online and planning three candidate forums, one of which we will co-sponsor with the Santa Fe County League. In addition, we were asked to review an eight-page brochure that the county will distribute to explain proposed charter amendments on the ballot.

Santa Fe County -- Judy Williams, President

LWVSFC has won the 2012 Piñon Award from the Santa Fe Community Foundation. The Tried and True Award is given to an organization that provides "high quality, greatly needed services and opportunities to the community for more than ten years... As an inclusive, independent, nonpartisan organization committed to civic improvement...the League continues to be influential and respected by people across the political spectrum." The award will be presented on Oct. 9.

The *Santa Fe New Mexican* has agreed to publish the League's *Voters' Guide* at no cost to the League other than an ad, and will provide 3,000 copies for distribution. The other 30,000 copies will be an insert in the Oct. 5 newspaper. We have worked with them in the past, but this is the first year of this agreement. The League is responsible for all of the content.

(Continued on page 9)

Local League news

(Continued from page 8)

League members met with the county at the county's request to discuss the upcoming bond issues and the proposed Fire Excise Tax. At our suggestion, they have developed a Q&A on the tax. The county staff will also make a presentation to the October Action and Advocacy meeting.

League members have been monitoring the proposed county Sustainable Land Development Code; we have sent letters and talked to county commissioners and staff about the importance of getting the code finalized this year.

Greater Las Cruces -- Bonnie Burn, President

The major focus that began in July and is continuing until the Nov. 6 General Election is voter education. The League, in conjunction with the NAACP, the Unitarian Universalist Action Committee, the Colonias Development Council and NM Comunidades en Acción de Fé (CAFÉ), mounted a county-wide voter registration effort. The League registered voters in traditional places such as high schools and retirement centers, but added Walmart and Pro's Ranch Market, a new entry in the food market industry in Las Cruces specializing in Mexican food products.

Through a memorandum of understanding with CAFÉ, the League will be publishing a Spanish edition of our *Voters' Guide* and will have access to a certified translator of Spanish. The *Voters' Guide* will be published in the weekly newspaper, the *Las Cruces Bulletin*, on Oct. 12.

Redistricting has added new candidates to our ballot, and some of us are finding that familiar elected officials are no longer representing us. We will be holding three candidates' forums to accommodate the large field of individuals running for office. The City of Las Cruces approved our request to hold the forums in the city council chamber. This venue gives us access to government television facilities for live broadcasts of the forums and for rebroadcasts up to election day.

Doña Ana County received a \$2 million grant from the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an association composed of the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Housing and Urban

Development and the Environmental Protection Agency. This three-year award supports regional planning efforts that integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation and infrastructure development for the 90-mile corridor stretching from Sunland Park to Hatch. It is aptly named the Camino Real Regional Plan for Sustainable Development.

The Public Education Department held hearings in Las Cruces regarding a request from the Academic Opportunities Academy of El Paso to develop five charter schools in Las Cruces, Carlsbad, Deming, Anthony, and Alamogordo. Based on our recently completed study of public education in Las Cruces, the League spoke in opposition. Currently, seven charter schools operate in Las Cruces. There was concern about the application, the wide grade coverage (1-12), and the continued commitment of the founders.

U.S. Senator Tom Udall and Barbara Couture, president of New Mexico State University, hosted the annual NMSU Water Conference on Aug. 28. Over 400 people attended and listened to individuals and panel members discuss the hard choices about water that need to be made to ensure a sustainable supply in the future.

League events included

* David Soules, local resident and member of the local chapter of the Wilderness Alliance, made a presentation about the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument initiative at our Aug. 13 luncheon meeting. Through a slide presentation and exceptional photos of our area from Google Earth, we learned the history of our area and the need to conserve 600,000 acres of land in this wilderness initiative.

* Ray Powell, NM Public Land Commissioner, addressed League members at the Sept. 10 luncheon. Through a slide presentation, he spoke about the work of the Office of State Public Lands.

* Sponsoring the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument by David Soules as an open public meeting on Sept. 13.

* Welcoming the LWVNM Public Regulation Commission Study Committee to Las Cruces where our League members discussed the study and consensus questions on Aug. 27.

Common Cause collaborates with LWVNM and other organizations

By Diane Wood -- Voting Rights Director

Common Cause New Mexico

Common Cause NM is collaborating with numerous non-profits across our state including the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, Asian American Association, NAACP, NM Vote Matters and many others.

The collaboration, Polling Place Participation & Protection, is working on a variety of election participation components (such as get-out-the-vote campaigns, voter registration drives, volunteer poll watcher recruitment, polling place accessibility, county clerk preparedness and outreach to non-traditional communities for paid poll worker recruitment). We develop recruitment strategies and target specific counties and poll locations for poll participation & protection.

The targeted populations include voters who are low-income citizens, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics and students.

The Polling Place Participation & Protection Collaboration is an opportunity for organizations to coordinate activities that will fully engage the target population in all aspects of voting and elections. By working together we create a unified force that brings together

marginalized communities, allowing them to seize their constitutional right to vote.

The county clerk meetings have focused on confirming poll location compliance with American Disability Act (ADA) and language translation, the training of poll workers to include how-to administer curbside voting, provisional ballots, verbal ID vs. photo/document ID and soliciting openings for poll workers from our target population.

The final phase of our collaboration is the recruitment, training and deployment of poll watchers. Poll watchers are volunteers on Election Day who assist voters in obtaining information about accessing the ballot box. After attending a one-hour training, they will have answers to voters' frequently asked questions and have the websites and toll free numbers to direct voters for additional assistance.

Toll free hot lines are available now for voters to get their questions answered and will be live on Election Day. 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683) or 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA (1-888-839-8682)

For more information and to volunteer as poll watcher contact dwood@commoncause.org or check out the Website: <http://www.counteveryvotenm.org/home>

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