



# League of Women Voters of New Mexico

## La Palabra

www.lwvnm.org

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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.*

### A NEW DAY

#### for Health Insurance Coverage in New Mexico

Dick Mason, Chair of the LWVNM Action Committee

October 1, 2013, marked the beginning of enrollment in the New Mexico Health Insurance Exchange (NMHIX) as well as for those newly eligible for Medicaid. Actual health insurance coverage for both will begin on January 1, 2014. In New Mexico we expect as many as 325,000 to enroll.

#### The Health Insurance Exchange Eligibility

New Mexican citizens and legal residents between the ages of 18 and 64 who purchase individual health insurance policies are eligible to buy from the Exchange. The federal government will provide subsidies on a sliding scale for those making up to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)—that is \$94,000 for a family of four and \$47,000 for an individual. The subsidy will be subtracted from the health insurance premium payment so the person will only have to pay the difference each month.

Also eligible to purchase coverage on the Exchange are employees of small companies that choose to have their employees purchase from the Exchange. There are a number of options available to such companies. In most cases, subsidies are not provided to the employees; instead, the company pays a portion of the premium.

New Mexico will have at least five plans offering coverage on the Exchange, and the rates that have been submitted are very competitive. All plans must offer the Essential Health Benefits required by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Essential Health Benefits include items and services within the following 10 categories: ambulatory patient services; emergency services; hospitalization; maternity and newborn care; mental health and substance abuse disorder services, including behavioral health treatment; prescription drugs; rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices; laboratory services; preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management; and pediatric services, including oral and vision care. New Mexico will also require that plans include additional services mandated by New Mexico law.

There has been confusion about the Exchange and Medicare, so I want to make it clear that people with **Medicare** will not be purchasing their coverage on the Exchange. They will continue to

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## Health Care Exchange *Continued from page 1)*

get their coverage the same way they do now. Those on **Medicaid** will continue to get their coverage the same way as they do now.

Key to making sure that eligible people enroll in the Exchange will be education and outreach efforts. Advocates are concerned that the Board of the NMHIX has not made a sufficient commitment to doing outreach to those most difficult to enroll.

You will be able to find out more about the NMHIX at its website: <http://www.bewellnm.com>. There is valuable information on the website including a subsidy calculator that allows individuals to calculate the subsidy they will receive.

## Medicaid Expansion

In addition to the creation of the Exchange, New Mexico was one of the states that opted to accept Medicaid expansion offered under the ACA. Many people don't realize that until this expansion, most low income adults without children were not eligible for Medicaid. On January 1, as many as 200,000 additional New Mexicans with income below 138% of the FPL, around \$15,600 for an individual, will be eligible for Medicaid coverage. The federal government will be picking up 100% of the costs for the first

three years. Now we must be sure that the New Mexico Human Services Department mounts a vigorous campaign to enroll the newly eligible. Health Action New Mexico, a health consumer advocacy group, will be tracking the progress of the Exchange and Medicaid expansion. You can find that information at: <http://www.healthactionnm.org/learn>.

## Economic Benefit to New Mexico

It is estimated that between 2014 and 2020 the New Mexico economy will receive over \$6 billion of additional federal funds due to the Affordable Care Act. Many of the newly insured will live in rural New Mexico. That means many of their health care dollars will be spent there. Health care dollars are estimated to generate more than \$1.6 dollars of economic activity for every \$1 spent. This infusion of money will help small businesses in rural New Mexico. So the ACA will be a big boost to the New Mexico economy.

## Conclusion

When the social history of the United States is written, January 1, 2014, will go down, along with the starting dates for Social Security and Medicare, as a landmark event. On this date, as many as 30 million more Americans will be eligible for affordable health insurance coverage through health insurance exchanges and the expansion of Medicaid.



## President's Message Fighting for the "Dream" of Democracy

It has been a good while since Americans believed that the best of times are yet to come or assumed that the younger generation would experience more progress and equality than our own. The League of Women Voters is finding itself increasingly playing defense, trying to protect the civil rights that we and many others have fought for over the years. Our members and the communities we represent count on us to be vigilant and responsive and to speak truth to power. We recognize that we can't weigh in on

everything, but we are busy responding to many high priority issues based on our positions.

With New Mexico at the bottom of rankings for job creation, school success, percentage with health insurance, child well-being, and economic indicators, we are asking our state and local governments to put politics aside and focus on solving problems. We cannot let socioeconomic divisions become even more severe as the number of people living in poverty steadily increases from the already dismal 1 in 5. League members are working with other public service groups to

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advocate for adequate funding for education, social services, health care, and environmental protection.

Not since the Great Depression has there been such a clear public consensus that our local, state, and federal governments must work together to protect the most vulnerable among us. Thankfully, the Governor and legislators have acknowledged the state's need for federal support, so Medicaid and our Health Insurance Exchange will expand health insurance coverage.

Currently, 442,000 New Mexicans, including 215,000 children, rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for food stamps and free lunches. New Mexico will be in crisis if this federal program is defunded as some members of Congress are threatening to do. We will continue to urge the members of our Congressional delegation to vote for health and human services safety net programs.

At the state level, we recognize that funds are severely limited because of our stagnant economy, job losses, and tax breaks, but we know we will never improve unless we have a better educated workforce to attract higher paying jobs to our state. We are fighting for more money to improve our public schools, teacher education and mentoring programs. While we support the Common Core Standards, we think it is unfair to tie teacher evaluations to student test scores, which will naturally decrease with the increased difficulty of these more rigorous standards.

We are deeply disturbed at the shutting down of behavioral health care services based on an audit that has not been released to the public, much less to the providers who have allegedly engaged in fraudulent Medicaid billing. It is a sad day when legislators, non-profit public advocacy groups like the NM Foundation for Open Government, and the League have to fight to see a publicly funded audit.

We applaud courageous citizens for taking personal risks to do the right thing. If the Doña Ana County Clerk had not decided that it was unconstitutional to deny same-sex couples the

right to marry in New Mexico, we would remain in limbo on this issue. We support the lawsuit filed by the county clerks and other groups asking the Supreme Court to expeditiously declare once and for all that "the equal rights under the law" provision of the NM Constitution means what it says. Forty years ago we passed the Equal Rights Amendment in New Mexico, so why ask voters now if they believe what it says. Likewise, why would we want to ask voters whether the government should intervene in women's rights to make their own reproductive choices?

We celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington. Although blatant discrimination and segregation are no longer allowed, we must continue to fight voter suppression tactics because we believe that most Americans do not want more power to rest in the hands of the privileged.

We all suffer when our schools are "drop-out factories," our homeless shelters are overcrowded, our emergency rooms are full of patients who can't afford health insurance, when even college graduates are unemployed and burdened with debt because there aren't enough decent paying jobs. We work to make sure that both the legislature and the administration of our state government focus on the needs of people and of the environment. We expect government employees to act in open, accountable, ethical ways, and we are watching and speaking out when they do not do so. We in the League are proud to fight for the rights of all and for the American Dream.

*Meredith Machen*

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

*Margaret Mead*

# PROGRAM UPDATE

## League Day at the Legislature

### *Legislative Reception*

**Monday, January 27, 2014**

**5:30 - 7:30 p.m.**

**Desert Inn, 311 Old Santa Fe  
Trail**

(Just down the street from the  
Roundhouse toward the plaza)

The 2014 Legislative Session is limited to budget items, legislation that the governor puts on her call, and proposals for constitutional amendments.

**Once again, on the evening before League Day at the Legislature, we will host a reception for legislators so they can learn our priorities and meet with us on issues. Please plan to attend.**

**Accommodations:** Through December 27, Garrett's Desert Inn is offering us a very special rate of **\$59 plus tax** for single occupancy or \$69 for double occupancy and waiving the \$8 parking fee. Reserve your space under the code "**SWING VOTE**" to take advantage of this rate. After the December 27 cut-off, rooms will cost \$99 for a single room if space is available. Call **1-800-888-2145** to make a reservation with a credit card or advance deposit. Be sure to mention the code.

***League Day Program***  
**will continue on**  
**Tuesday, January 28, 2014**  
**(See La Palabra, Winter 2014 for**  
**program details)**

## LWVNM Action Committee Report

Dick Mason, Chair

Until we know what is on the governor's call, it is hard to plan for action on legislation for the 2014 session. Here are some issues that may arise:

1. A fix for the behavioral health crisis created when the Human Services Department cut off funding to 15 behavioral health care providers and turned over management of those programs to Arizona-based companies.
2. If the New Mexico Supreme Court sends the marriage equality issue back to the Legislature, it will be heard. Legislators could propose a constitutional amendment that would not need the governor's approval.
3. We don't expect any major budget items, but given what happened at the end of the last session we have to be on our guard. We don't see any initiative by the legislature to fix any of the negative components of the last minute budget bill they passed last year. They know the governor would veto them.
4. Anti-choice advocates will be lobbying the governor to put measures to restrict reproductive rights on her call, especially if the Albuquerque initiative passes. We will have to remain alert.
5. We don't see mandatory voter photo ID being on the governor's call.
6. We are working with Common Cause to try to get an ethics commission on the governor's call.

**League Day Plans:** We are in the planning stages for League Day activities. There will be a Legislative reception and educational event on the evening of January 27 and a League Day program on January 28 at the NM Land Office.

The LWVNM Action Committee will be sending out email Action Alerts before, during, and after the 2014 Legislative session. If you are not part of the LWVNM Action list, please go to [www.lwvnm.org](http://www.lwvnm.org) and sign up.

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**Action Committee** *(Continued from page 4)*

**Lobbying Workshop :** Plans are complete for the workshop on December 7 at Sandia Prep in Albuquerque (see p. 12)

**Behavioral Health:** I have been participating in the meetings and calls regarding the crisis caused by the cessation of Medicaid funding to New Mexico behavioral health care providers. Federal officials were in New Mexico on September 16-18 to hear about the issues from providers and consumers. (See article below on NM Legislative Subcommittee Hearing in Las Cruces on September 3, 2013.)

**Implementation of the Affordable Care Act:** The Health Exchange enrollment for 2014 started October 1. There have been problems with getting the Exchange to do adequate outreach and with getting the Human Services Department to facilitate enrollment for Medicaid expansion (see p. 1).

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### **Behavioral Health Hearing** Bonnie Burn

Members of the NM Legislative Subcommittee on Behavioral Health traveled to Las Cruces to conduct a public hearing on September 3. The focus of the hearing was current changes in provider service for people who need mental health services in New Mexico. Through an audit conducted by Public Consulting Group (PCG), a Boston-based company, \$36 million in Medicaid fraud is alleged among 15 mental health providers. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) provides new tools to detect billing fraud. Since March 2011, there has been a requirement that Medicaid reimbursement payment is stopped, whether or not it is warranted, when fraud is detected. Without knowing the results of the audit or the charges against them, Medicaid funding for New Mexico behavioral health providers was stopped. Businesses were immediately closed and replaced by providers from the State of Arizona. The audit is currently being reviewed by the NM Attorney General, and a gag order prevents information about the alleged charges from being released.

The hearing consisted of three panel discussions with an opportunity for public input at the end of the day. During the morning session, an overview of events leading to the audit and subsequent action was presented by representatives from the NM Human Services Department (HSD). Deputy Director Brent Earnest explained that because HSD had received referrals or notice of irregularities from OptumHealth, the company that has oversight of providers of mental health, substance abuse, and recovery resources for all New Mexicans, HSD entered into a contract with Public Consulting Group (PCG) to conduct a claims audit. When the audit results were available, HSD contacted the NM Attorney General and other agencies that investigate fraud. Diana McWilliams, Chief Executive Officer, Interagency Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative and Director, Behavioral Health Services Division, HSD, reported on the current state of behavioral health services. Legislators and members of the audience were assured that 88 percent of the staff of the 15 involved providers had been retained. Problems that arise and individual inquiries and concerns are being handled by HSD. While Medicaid funding is suspended, HSD has found \$17.8 million in its budget to continue to pay the salaries of individuals who are now working for the Arizona companies. OptumHealth has been the oversight contractor since 2009 and annually receives \$43 million in payment for services. Contracts with OptumHealth and the Arizona providers expire on December 31, 2013.

The requirement to identify and recover improper Medicare payments paid to healthcare providers resulted in a similar audit in North Carolina. A manager from PCG, Thomas Aldridge, gave information about PCG's credentials and involvement with North Carolina and New Mexico claims audits. He noted, as did Mr. Earnest of HSD, that PCG is on the approved Government Services Agency (GSA) list of suggested Recovery Audit Contractors. He explained that the appeal process in North Carolina resulted in a much lower recovery amount because PCG was able to review more records. The accuracy of that audit was

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### **Behavioral Health** *(Continued from page 5)*

questioned because only a small number of records (100-150) were reviewed. PCG had extrapolated that there were \$702,000 in recoverable overpayments. When appealed, the amount was reduced to \$336. This raised the issue of a claims audit done by computer software as opposed to a review of documents by a person who can reach decisions based on information in the record. Questions from legislators about the vetting of the Arizona replacement providers revealed that Mr. Aldridge accompanied HSD officials to Arizona to meet with prospective companies. He did not see this as a conflict of interest because the travel occurred before the audit contract was awarded to PCG.

The final panel discussed quality audits that were conducted on OptumHealth, the coordinating company of the NM regional support network for behavioral health providers. Panelists were clear in differentiating between quality audits that ensure that the state is "getting what it is paying for" and claims audits that review billing accuracy. OptumHealth has been in compliance.

During public input, citizens raised the issue of due process for the organizations that had their funding frozen and were essentially put out of business. Although they eventually may be exonerated, it will be hard or impossible to begin anew. Concern was expressed about the future of behavioral health care in New Mexico and the nature of the contracts with the Arizona providers.

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### **Marriage Equality** - Meredith Machen

The League of Women Voters of New Mexico has joined the All Families Matter Coalition because we support marriage equality as a fundamental civil right. We hope the NM Supreme Court will make an expeditious decision regarding equal treatment under the law for same-sex marriages and end the discrimination that thousands of loving couples experience daily. We applaud the actions of the clerks who issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples and are

proud supporters of the amicus brief submitted by Equality New Mexico for the freedom to marry. New Mexico already recognizes same-sex marriages from other states, so why not issue licenses here and provide the legal rights, obligations, and benefits now? We will cover this issue in the Winter La Palabra after we know the outcome of the Court's decision.

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### **Natural Resources Issues**

Barbara Calef

As we reported in the Spring 2013 *La Palabra*, last year the Water Quality Control Commission issued a revised draft of its new Copper Rule that ignored input from environmental groups and instead adopted industry preferences. The attorney general's office said the proposal is in violation of existing law. The response from environmentalists and the general public was overwhelmingly negative. Here are the comments submitted by Judy Williams on behalf of the LWVNM:

*After months of hearings and meetings with public interest groups, industry and government last year, the New Mexico Environment Department decided to disregard the public interest and bow to the mining industry's desires. This new proposal would permit copper mining companies to pollute groundwater underneath their mine sites.*

*The League of Women Voters of New Mexico opposes this proposal, which flouts current state laws and implies that the New Mexico Environment Department favors corporate profits over the public interest.*

*We believe the state should require the mining industry to prevent pollution at its source, as common sense would dictate, rather than attempt to mitigate the effects of pollution after the fact.*

*We also object to the lack of transparency. Why even bother with the charade of going through a public process and then allowing*

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## Natural Resources *(Continued from page 6)*

*the industry to gut regulations in the dark? What happened to government in the sunshine? What happened to the interests of the residents of New Mexico?*

After holding several hearings this year, the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission met on September 10 and voted 9-1 to approve the new rule. Let's hope the attorney general's office sues to rescind it!

Adding insult to injury, the commission also voted to set a March 2014 meeting to hear the dairy industry's petition to alter groundwater discharge rules that are applied to farms.

### San Juan Generating Station

Also in the Spring *La Palabra*, we reported on progress in a plan to reduce pollution from the San Juan Generating Station. The plan required approval by two state commissions as well as the Environmental Protection Agency. Another hurdle was crossed on September 5. On that date the NM Environmental Improvement Board approved a proposal to retire two of San Juan Generating Station's four coal-fired electricity-generating units by the end of 2017 and install nitrogen-oxide reducing technology on the remaining two units in early 2016. The state plan requires approval from the NM Public Regulation Commission and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency before it becomes final. That process is expected to take about a year. The plan will reduce water usage, carbon emissions and coal combustion byproducts. The changes are to be implemented by the end of 2017.

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## Renewable Energy for Electric Utilities

Barbara Calef and Judy Williams

The NM Renewable Energy Act of 2004 requires investor-owned utilities to supply 15% of the energy they sell to customers from renewable sources by 2015 and 20% by 2020. To implement the legislation, the NM Public Regulation Commission adopted rule 17.9.572,

Renewable Energy for Electric Utilities, in December 2012 after 18 months of work from all stakeholders — utility companies, renewable energy activists, consumers and others. The current rule requires a diverse mix of renewable energy sources: 30% from wind, 20% from solar, 5% from other technologies, and by 2015, 3% from distributed generation such as rooftop solar. The utilities are allowed to charge customers for the costs of adding energy from renewable sources. The “reasonable cost-threshold” caps the costs to utilities and their customers; it is currently set at 3 percent of a utility's gross receipts from business transacted in New Mexico during the preceding calendar year.

Within weeks of the adoption, critics of the rule began an effort to amend or overturn it. Those appealing the rule included the Office of the Attorney General, El Paso Electric, Southwest Public Service, Public Service Company of New Mexico and the New Mexico Industrial Energy Consumers (NMIEC), which includes Intel and the University of New Mexico. The critics have various objections, mostly related to cost.

Over the summer, the PRC received hundreds of comments, most of them supporting the current rule. At a hearing on September 10, about forty people spoke. Only three opposed the rule. Supporters included solar installers, biofuels developers, renewable energy lobbyists and ordinary rate-payers.

Judy Williams, speaking for LWVNM, made the following points:

- *The rule being reconsidered today was approved by the PRC last November only after the commissioners had listened to all interested parties and conducted extensive deliberations. Altering the rule before there has been time to analyze its impact will result in a waste of time and public funds and will undermine the PRC's reputation. Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus that the rule should be amended or how it should be amended.*
- *To date, we have seen no compelling evidence of harm to any parties resulting*

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## Renewable Energy *(Continued from page 7)*

*from the rule. However, if a utility is unable to meet both the Reasonable Cost Threshold and the Diversity Rule, the Renewable Energy Act does allow for exemptions.*

- *The Renewable Energy Act calls for diversification of renewable energy resources, taking into consideration the overall reliability, availability, dispatch flexibility and cost. Without a requirement for diversifying the renewable sources of power, the utilities will choose the perceived best deal at the time.*
- *Solar energy at present is more expensive than wind, but the price has been falling rapidly. Sunlight is readily available in all sectors of our state. Solar power offsets the need for fossil-fuel plants more effectively than wind because it closely matches peak demand. Solar energy production is one of New Mexico's fastest growing industries. If the PRC votes to remove the diversity requirements from the rule, the impact on that industry will be severe. The future New Mexico economy will be affected as well. The League of Women Voters believes that the diversity requirements should be retained.*
- *We also believe the avoided capacity costs section of the rule should be retained. Avoided costs other than fuel have to meet a high standard of proof. There is ample requirement that they be incurred in the current period and be provable, not speculative.*

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### **NM Coalition for Choice** Diane Goldfarb

LWVNM joined the NM Coalition for Choice in November 2012, and I was asked to be the League's representative. Although I was not able to participate much during the last legislative session, I have attended meetings on a regular basis and have become acquainted with the other members of the Coalition.

Our initial emphasis was on the Legislature. There was no real threat to reproductive choice during the 2013 session though there were several bills we had to fight. We were gearing up to attend sessions of interim legislative committees. We were expecting to attend meetings of the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee because of an attempt to change certification requirements for abortion providers, but this seems to have been put aside in the wake of the state behavioral health care problems.

Several things began to happen in Albuquerque. An organization calling itself "Survivors of the Abortion Holocaust" had a week-long boot camp for young people. They held multiple demonstrations and harassed patients and doctors. A drive to get 12,091 signatures for a ballot initiative banning abortions after 20 weeks was successful. The signatures were not certified in time to get on the October 8 municipal ballot; however, city councilors voted 5-4 to put it on the ballot for a November 19 runoff election. If no runoff is needed, then the abortion ban will be on a mail-in ballot. The ban is titled "Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act."

The Coalition has formed a finance committee and campaign called Respect Albuquerque Women. A press conference was held, and phone banks and canvassing are going on. I had a house party for LWVCNM members and others interested in working against this abortion ban, and the League has sponsored a daytime phone bank. LWVSFC has also agreed to host two phone banks in October in Santa Fe

We're going to need people to write letters to the editor, but the campaign, under the leadership of Julianna Koob, is working hard to keep the message very focused. The message is that every woman's situation is unique, that we cannot know what she is going through, and that politicians and others should not be making her health care decisions.

This is going to be a difficult battle. Albuquerque is the only municipality in the country going

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**Coalition for Choice** *(Continued from page 8)*

through this, and right now the polls are not in our favor. Even if the court eventually rules this ban unconstitutional, its success or failure at the polls will have a significant effect on the next legislative session.

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## LOCAL LEAGUE NEWS

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**Central New Mexico (CNM)**

*Andrea Targhetta, President*

Election season is here and the Central New Mexico League is busy. The South West Alliance & Neighborhood Association annual event on August 10 was a festival of music, candidates, and speeches. We registered voters and networked with the crowd of other organizations.

August 24 found us hosting voter registration training from the Bernalillo County Clerk's office. We added three new registrars to our growing number of agents. These members are very active and set up tables at local farmers' markets, high schools, folk art festivals, senior care facilities, and anywhere there was a need.

We had a presence Sunday, August 25 in Tiguex Park at the Equal Rights Amendment celebration and rally for the ratification of the ERA. We also attended a rally for the Coalition for Choice and their Respect Albuquerque Women campaign. We have several members helping with a phone bank to ask citizens to vote no on the Albuquerque ballot measure that bans access to abortions.

We were asked by the Coalition of Neighborhood Associations to moderate the District 7 City Council Candidate Forum. It is always good to get involved with the neighborhoods and increase name recognition for the League. The forum went well and the coalition was pleased. We followed the guidelines for the Membership, Leadership, and Development Training Program and appreciate how well it works.

The Bernalillo County Board of County Commissioners recognized LWVCNM by proclaiming September 24, 2013, National Registration Day. The proclamation is hanging on our office wall.

Nick Estes, Board member of Health Action New Mexico, gave us a talk entitled "The Economic Benefits of Health Care Spending" on September 10 at Erna Ferguson Library. We always go to dinner after such meetings and usually continue the discussion.

Kevin McMullan, a Health Professional Recruiter with New Mexico Health Resources, presented a very interesting lecture on New Mexico's outlook on the future of our medical workforce. We are losing licensed doctors for a variety of reasons, and the Affordable Care Act will mean more doctors are needed—not just in New Mexico, but all around the country.

On September 22, CNM provided a timekeeper for the KOAT-TV Mayoral Forum. For KNME's Albuquerque Mayoral Debate on September 30, CNM collected questions from the general public and provided the timekeeper.

**Greater Las Cruces (GLC)**

*Erika Graf-Webster, President*

Two important "Lunch with a Leader" programs attracted 30 attendees: (1) Doña Ana County Commissioner Billy Garret discussed strategic planning for the commission and quality of life within the county, both visionary issues, and (2) Sam Fernald, PhD, Interim Director of the NMSU Water Resources Research Institute, gave a

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## Greater Las Cruces *(Continued from page 9)*

presentation on "Confronting Water Scarcity in New Mexico's Future."

We had the opportunity to raise the visibility of the League with two events in August. President Erika Graf-Webster and Past-President Bonnie Burn were interviewed on KSNM radio. Erika Graf-Webster also was invited by the Federally Employed Women (FEW) chapter at White Sands Missile Proving Grounds to talk about the League.

Members observed City Council Meetings during debate about increasing the gross receipts tax (GRT) by 3/8 of one percent to replace funding lost by the repeal of the "hold harmless" payments made by the state. In the end, the Council decided that (a) it had no choice but to go ahead with this tax increase, and (b) the state legislation that mandated the gradual elimination of the "hold harmless" payments would not allow the Council to put this up for a public referendum. This was a "hot button" issue, and many residents were displeased by the Council's decision.

A luncheon in late August, sponsored by the Education Committee of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce updated the community and Chamber members about education in Las Cruces. President Garrey Carruthers is bringing a business model of management to New Mexico State University through a new strategic plan, Vision 2020. Andy Burke, Doña Ana Community College Interim President, described efforts to bring back accreditation to the college's nursing program and measures to ensure graduation of its primarily adult student body. Las Cruces Public School Superintendent Stan Rounds focused on student graduation rates, the success of the Early College High School, and the revision of programs for at-risk students in middle and high schools.

The Greater Las Cruces Board is focusing on developing a plan for direction of the local League and instituting the Membership and Leadership Development Program.

## Los Alamos (LA)

*Barbara Calef, President*

The League of Women Voters and UNM-LA held a Town Hall Meeting on August 29 to inform residents about the mil levy election for which ballots had been mailed out that week. During a discussion of how to make the event appealing to the community, the League decided to provide sandwiches from the Los Alamos Co-op and also to invite the Los Alamos High School debate team, the Hilltalkers, to argue the pros and cons of the issue. The lively debate was followed by a presentation by the new Dean of Instruction for UNM-LA and a question and answer session moderated by the League.

The speaker at Lunch with a Leader in September was Kim Gabaldon, Los Alamos County's first Social Services Manager. Gabaldon, a native of Canada, has a Master's in Public Administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and a Master's in Counseling from Lesley University. Before coming to Los Alamos, she served as the Native American Liaison for the NM Behavioral Health Services Division for the last five years.

Gabaldon assumed her position in March. She took over management of the Health Care Assistance Program and also coordinates the Community Health Council, manages existing social services contracts, and identifies needs that can be met with new or different contracts. Gabaldon is working to coordinate all County social services from a single location and to provide coordinated case management.

She stated that there is a significant shortage of health care providers in the state, a problem that has been exacerbated by the recent actions of the Department of Human Services which led to the 15 largest providers of behavioral care in the state being defunded. Fortunately, Los Alamos was not much affected because its major provider, Presbyterian Medical Services, had a wider base than the other companies and is still active.

Gabaldon explained that the County's Indigent

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**Los Alamos** (Continued from page 10)

Health Care Fund is supported through the second 1/8 of the gross receipts tax established by statute. Thirty other New Mexico counties have similar statutes. The NM Department of Human Services has announced plans to “intercept” that revenue to fund Medicaid expansion. Gabaldon said “There is something not quite right” in the presentation given by the state. She believes that, even with Medicaid expansion, there will still be a need for indigent care. This will be an important issue during the 2014 legislative session.

**Santa Fe County**

Donna Reynolds, President

The League of Women Voters of Santa Fe County has a very busy fall as members enjoy the extra rain and moisture. We held two very interesting events in our Breakfast with a Leader series in August. We kicked off September with a public forum on locally owned electric utilities and a consensus meeting on LWVNM's Alcohol Study. Our Action and Advocacy Committee has been active at the Santa Fe Charter Review Commission.

The first August Breakfast with a Leader featured Penny Ellis-Green, Santa Fe County’s Growth Management Director. She briefed members about the draft Sustainable Land Development Code which, when approved, will implement the Sustainable Growth Management Plan approved by the County Commission in 2010.

The second August breakfast featured Rachel O’Connor, Director of the Santa Fe County’s Health and Human Services Department. The focus was the Indigent Care Fund and elimination of the State Sole Community Provider (SCP) Program, as required by the Affordable Care Act. The state’s plan is to eliminate all indigent payments to hospitals with more than 200 beds. In exchange, the state would increase Medicaid payment rates to these hospitals, but the hospitals say this will not make up for the SCP losses. In addition, the state would pay for the Medicaid increase by taking the counties’ second 1/8 of its

Gross Receipts Tax dedicated to indigent care. The county is now considering what action to take in opposition to this.

The League partnered with the Sierra Club and New Energy Economy on a forum about the feasibility of a public electric utility. The well-attended forum, “Should We Own Our Power,” featured Karl R. Rábago, former Vice President of Austin Energy and a national consultant; Nann Winter, a New Mexico attorney who represented Las Cruces in its efforts to create a public utility; and Paul Campos, the former Santa Fe County Commissioner who started the county on the exploration of feasibility of local ownership. The panel explored the benefits and costs of local municipal utilities as the city and county of Santa Fe consider such an option. Many interesting questions came from the audience. More about this event is in the October LWVSFC VOTER, available at [www.lwvsfc.org](http://www.lwvsfc.org).



**League of Women Voters  
of New Mexico**

*Calendar*

**2013**

November 16	Board Meeting	Socorro
	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.	
December 7	Lobbying Workshop	
	(Details on p. 12)	

**2014**

January 4	Board Meeting	Albuquerque
	11 a.m. - 3 p.m.	

**LEAGUE DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE**  
(see Ad, p. 4)

January 27	Legislative Reception
January 28	League Day Program
	(Watch for details in La Palabra, Winter 2014)

March 29	Board Meeting	Albuquerque
	11 a.m. - 3 p.m.	

May 17	<b>STATE COUNCIL MEETING</b>
	Santa Fe



**League of Women Voters of New Mexico**  
**2315 San Pedro NE, Suite F-6**  
**Albuquerque, NM 87110**

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**League of Women Voters  
 Lobbying Workshop**

**Saturday, December 7, 2013  
 10:00 a.m. - Noon**

**Sandia Prep School  
 Student Commons  
 Albuquerque, NM 87113**

**[http://www.sandiaprep.org/  
 contact-us/index.aspx](http://www.sandiaprep.org/contact-us/index.aspx) (map)**

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**State Senator  
 Peter Wirth (D-Santa Fe)  
 State Representative  
 Jimmie Hall (R-Albuquerque)  
 Julianna Koob, Lobbyist**

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**Learn about the legislative  
 process and how to effectively  
 lobby your legislators**

**For more information:  
 Phone: (505) 884-8441  
 Email: [action@lwvnm.org](mailto:action@lwvnm.org)  
 Website: [www.lwvnm.org](http://www.lwvnm.org)**

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