



La Palabra

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

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Complications in PNM Proposed Plan for San Juan Generating Station

The PNM case on the San Juan Generating Station (SJGS) is still pending before the New Mexico Public Regulation



Commission (PRC). PNM is proposing to abandon two coal-fired units and purchase a greater share of one of the remaining two units as a replacement. They also intend to purchase more coal for the purpose. The plan also includes natural gas, nuclear power, and a small amount of renewables (wind, solar, and geothermal). PNM has been granted two more extensions since the original June deadline to

present a final coal contract for the San Juan mine and ownership restructuring agreement at SJGS.

Ten days of hearings were completed in mid-October. One intervener, New Energy Economy (NEE), presented detailed testimony rebutting PNM's proposals. An additional complication: the NM Supreme Court has agreed to hear NEE's request to have four of the five PRC commissioners disqualified from voting on the case, citing inappropriate contacts with PNM. If the Court were to disqualify the commissioners, who would rule on the case?

-Judy Williams, Co-Chair

President's Message



How should we react when we read yet another report showing how New Mexico, more than most states, is facing serious challenges? Virtually every week there are articles, reports, and analyses that show how intractable our problems are. Scandals and mismanagement lead to decreasing confidence in government. While we are tempted to wring our hands in despair and step back from our unrelenting advocacy efforts, that is exactly what the League cannot and will not do. Our fundamental purpose is to improve civic dialogue and voter engagement so that we can address some of these serious challenges, including ethics violations, job losses, educational achievement gaps, health disparities, poverty, revenue shortfalls, infrastructure, and environmental needs. We must work to improve our local, state, and federal governments and rebuild confidence in the potential effectiveness of public programs. Our democracy will flounder even further if we give in to the cynical theory that nothing government does will ever make a difference.

We need to do whatever we can do to make sure that we are all tugging the barge in the same direction. We have no more time to waste on partisan gridlock. We have to work together more earnestly than ever before to combat the influence of powerful corporations and individuals with vested interests in private gain and the failure of government. We need to re-establish a working political system and fight plutocracy. By holding issues and candidate forums, producing non-partisan voter guides, and continuing our numerous advocacy efforts, we can restore some trust in government. We can and do influence our elected officials and candidates who work in the public interest.

Please see my adjoining articles on the League's study of Money in Politics and the State Ethics Commission to see a couple of the ways we can expose and combat the increasing influence of special interest groups and nay-sayers.

Thank you for all you do!! Together we can!
Si se puede!

-Meredith Machen

Local League News

LWVSFC Report

The Santa Fe League began the summer with issues and fun. We had a briefing about proposed campaign finance law changes in the city of Santa Fe. There was a breakfast with Magistrate Judge Shannon Bulman, a lawyer (not a requirement in New Mexico) and a League member. She briefed us on various issues of probate, including processes, wills, powers of attorney, and other topics.

The fun started with a Hummingbird Party at the Terrero General Store in Pecos Canyon. The owners feed hundreds of hummers every summer. They hosted the League with food, and Cheryl Graeber of Wild Birds Unlimited in Santa Fe gave a talk. The event attracted quite a crowd despite its distance from Santa Fe. There was also a backstage tour of the Santa Fe Opera, with a brief recital by one of the apprentices. The grounds were very lush – flowers and grass in the back garden, which is only open to the public for special events. The reason for the profusion was the opera's extensive rainwater catchment system, with two 20,000 gallon tanks. The final event was a tour of the Spanish Colonial Arts museum.

In early September, we had a board retreat to consider investments in the organization and to revisit our strategic plan. It was also held at a cabin in the Pecos, which was a stimulating environment for conversation. The board felt re-energized.

Advocacy has also been a major activity. After following a number of city council and county commission meetings--where decisions were made late in the evening, sometimes well after midnight--we sent letters to city and county leaders to remind them of our transparency advocacy and the need for open meetings and deliberations that encourage public participation. The county then made an effort to schedule public hearings for close to 5:00 p.m., so we thanked them for that. Members are also attending various city committee meetings, particularly finance and parks and open space. The city has been using parks and open space bonds for general operations and has also drawn on the water utility funds for general purposes. The public is not happy with this, and many are concerned that it will discourage voters from approving future bond issues.

-Judy Williams, President

LWVLA Report

In August, the Los Alamos County Council chose to take no further action regarding our request to place a fee on single-use plastic bags. Their motion encourages the continuing education efforts of the County Solid Waste Department. The Solid Waste Department has produced a commercial for our local theater illustrating some of the materials that can be recycled. Unfortunately, the information on the new bin-shaped magnet and on the webpage is neither clear nor complete. The League and the Sierra Club plan to continue our recycling education efforts.

The LWVLA board has decided that we should participate in the national study of constitutional amendments. A committee has volunteered to read the articles from national and write pros and cons and background for the controversial questions. The consensus meeting was held on October 13.

The Department of Public Utilities (DPU) responded to the recommendations presented in the report of the Future Energy Resources Committee (FERC) in July. In general, they

seem supportive. However, the Board of Public Utilities has not yet agreed to adopt the proposed definition of carbon neutrality or to approve the various steps FERC outlined to achieve that goal.

For our League's annual membership meeting, we invited Emile Nakhleh, National Intelligence Council Associate and member of the Council on Foreign Relations, to speak. The public event, which was co-sponsored by the AAUW and held in Fuller Lodge, drew a huge crowd. Nakhleh's talk was sobering. He warned that our government must revise the policies that have led us to support dictators rather than democratically elected leaders. He believes that only a coalition of Arab countries, such as Turkey, Jordan, and Morocco, will be able to contain ISIS, and then only if they have a clear mission and receive financial and logistical support from the U.S. He said that there should be no American boots on the ground. The one bright note mentioned is the Iran Nuclear Deal, which Nakhleh said can be an agent of change in the region.

-Barbara Calef, President

LWVGLC Report

The Greater Las Cruces League has been busy. We have focused on League members and our priorities. Our League was on hiatus for the month of July, although leadership was busy planning fall programming. We hope our members had an opportunity to vacation and refresh over the summer.

A focus on building our effectiveness has become an organizing feature of our programming. The topics for our monthly meetings are linked to our identified priorities. Held in August, our 1st Annual "Fiesta" Showcase of Priorities provided an opportunity for members to become better acquainted with each other and learn more about our League's advocacy priorities in an informal social setting with dinner. The event was well attended and received and will return as an ongoing August monthly meeting.

Following a successful kick-off, September programming allowed members the opportunity to continue their engagement through participation. Health care delivery was the topic of the monthly meeting. Dr. George Mychashiw, the Founding Dean and Chief Academic Officer of the Burrell School of Osteopathic Medicine, which will open in Las Cruces in fall 2016, was the speaker. There is unlimited opportunity for community members to engage in committee work.

The Election Procedures Committee has produced new voter information materials, and the Immigration Committee is actively investigating the LWVUS position on immigration, with possible recommendations for change. The committee has preliminarily identified several goals: (1) to study the impact on migrants' lives and on the residents of the border community who are lawfully in the U.S., (2) to educate the public about the complexities of immigration law enforcement in a border community, (3) to educate the public on attitudes and terminology, (4) to identify specific immigration laws which have created "felon status for entry without permission," (5) to work closely with LWVUS to review and revise the points set forth in the Position Statement, and (6) to support League lobbying efforts in Congress.

As we look forward to October, our work will be focused on the upcoming municipal election, with the attendant activities, Voters' Guide, and Candidate Forums. Our monthly meeting will offer an educational perspective on standardized assessments by Dr. Steven Sanchez, recently retired Deputy Superintendent of Las Cruces Public Schools. Lastly, our League will host a Unit Meeting on the LWVUS Proposal for a Constitutional Amendment Study.

-Gwendolyn Hanson, President

LWV Central NM

League of Women Voters of Central New Mexico had a busy fall season. The following are some of the organization's activities.

Our League produced the *Municipal Voters' Guide* for the Oct. 6 election under the direction of Jo Porter, editor. Volunteers distributed the guides to libraries, schools, churches, and other locations to make them available to voters.

Our League moderated a candidate forum for the District 6 Albuquerque City Council race on September 6. Mary H. Smith was moderator; Diane Goldfarb, timekeeper; and Helen Wright and Ann Piper, question sorters.

Dr. Bruce Thomson, director of the UNM Water Resources Program from 2006 to 2013, addressed the August General Meeting. He talked about factors influencing the stability of surface and ground water resources in New Mexico, with a special emphasis on the Middle Rio Grande Basin.

Bob Perls, president of New Mexico Open Primaries, addressed the Luncheon Unit on September 10. Perls talked about the impacts of closed primaries in New Mexico, with comparison to other states which currently hold open primaries.

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich spoke to a combined meeting of the Central New Mexico League and Albuquerque Press Women on Friday, October 9, at the MCM Elegante Hotel. Heinrich, who is a member of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, spoke about balancing civil liberties with national security in a digital age. This was a special meeting for both groups.

Common Cause of New Mexico paid tribute to a League member, State Sen. Daniel Ivey-Soto, at the annual Common Cause luncheon. He was honored for his dedication to restoring good government in New Mexico and his work on improving elections administration.

Dr. Jeanne Logsdon, LWVUS Money in Politics (MIP) Committee, addressed the LWVCNM board in early October regarding the status and materials for the Money in Politics Study Committee and the upcoming November 10 MIP Consensus Meeting.

-Chris Burroughs

It's High Time for an Independent Ethics Commission!



New Mexico is one of eight states without an ethics commission. Yes, there are disparate ethics laws overseen by the Secretary of State's office and other state agencies. Elected officials and all public employees can be held to the provisions in the NM Governmental Accountability Act, though many have never heard of it. We have no system, few standards, and very spotty training (provided mostly upon request of a department). The League has examined the ethics commissions/offices in many states and presented information about the strongest models at various legislative meetings. We have also advocated for ethics legislation in numerous sessions. We have supported the establishment of an ethics commission through legislation and through joint resolutions for a constitutional amendment and will continue to do so. Though we would like to hold out for an independent, non-partisan ethics commission that is well funded, we recognize that a partisan body might need serious convincing. If we can get our legislators to study the success of Wisconsin's non-partisan, independent Governmental Accountability Board, we will have a chance. See <http://www.gab.wi.gov>

After all, establishment of an ethics commission has passed the House many times and come close in the Senate. In late August, after the allegations against Secretary of State Duran emerged, we asked Governor Martinez to put the issue on her call for the upcoming short session, given her campaign promise to make ethics a top priority. She still has time to do so, and our legislators have the potential to step up to the plate. Given the legal costs and other expenses related to the impeachment

proceedings, this could be the opportune time to change minds. An ethics commission will take some money, but the training it would provide would save tax dollars over all and improve accountability.

If the Legislature passes a bill establishing an ethics commission and the Governor signs it, it could be implemented quickly, but it could also be watered down or eliminated in a subsequent session. If the Legislature passes a joint resolution, it would go on the next general election ballot where voters would very likely approve it. An ethics commission established by the electorate would be much harder to modify or eliminate.

Please ask your legislators to support the establishment of an ethics commission, which is so vital to ensure integrity, accountability, and transparency. Scores of ethics commissions in other states already have.

-Meredith Machen



**HELP
WANTED**

**Treasurer
LWVNM**

Current Treasurer Cheryl Haaker will work with and train her successor until she hands over the reins in May. Duties include bank account maintenance, budget and periodic report preparation, financial transactions, and oversight. If interested, send an e-mail to Meredith Machen, president@lwvnm.org

Money in Politics (MIP) Study--National and NM Update

As Leagues across the nation focus on Money in Politics, we have an opportunity to investigate and implement policies that will build public confidence and improve governmental effectiveness. The LWVUS MIP Study Committee has compiled a significant amount of information about the influence of money in politics and the increasing need for campaign finance reform since the disastrous Supreme Court

decision of *Citizens United vs. the Federal Elections Commission* (2010). For readings, presentations, policy analysis, history, and more, please connect to the resources through

our website, www.lwvnm.org and be sure to attend the local League informational and consensus meetings. The results of this national study will influence the League's ability to advocate forcefully for voter protection, clean elections, governmental accountability, and many other positions for the foreseeable future.

While this national study mainly focuses on campaign finance at the federal level, we know that much important work can be done at the state and local levels. Our local Leagues and the state League are committed to political action and advocacy to make sure that voters retain their power to elect competent leaders who will restore public trust in government by enacting strong regulations and imposing serious consequences for violations.

Recent news reports have shown serious flaws in the NM Secretary of State's campaign finance reporting system as well as lack of

compliance by many candidates, office holders, and lobbyists. It is far easier to find information on the top contributors to New Mexico lawmakers through the website of the non-partisan National Institute on Money in State Politics, <http://www.followthemoney.org/legislative-overview?s=NM&y=2015>, than through our state's campaign finance website, www.sos.state.nm.us



New Mexico's government would be quite different if we had well-regulated public financing for more offices. Not only would candidates be less beholden to the influence of political action committees, organized to raise and disburse campaign funds, but they would

be under less pressure to listen to the specific agendas of their contributors. Our unpaid legislators have grueling schedules during the legislative sessions and often serve on interim committees that take significant time and focus away from their primary livelihoods. Since public financing for legislative and other races is unlikely given our economy, we must have systems that regulate and watchdog interest groups, PACs, lobbyists, and media experts who supply selective information for their individual causes or political parties.

As we approach the 2016 general election, we must work to improve state and local campaign finance laws and assiduously monitor the administration of and compliance of candidates, lawmakers, and lobbyists with the laws we do have.

-Meredith Machen

The League and Health Policy



As Chair of the LWVNM Health Care Committee, I represent the League of Women Voters of New Mexico in a number of health care activities.

The New Mexico Health Insurance Exchange was created by the New Mexico Legislature as a quasi- governmental agency to enroll people in individual health plans and to administer subsidies to those who qualify. I serve on the Stakeholder's Advisory Committee and am currently chair. Enrollment in the Exchange is currently at 44,000, which is only about 30% of those eligible to buy insurance on the Exchange. As can be expected, enrollment among Hispanics and those who live in rural areas is especially low. The next open enrollment period for the Exchange is from November 1, 2015 to January 31, 2016. For more information visit: <https://www.bewellnm.com/>

The Health Care for All Coalition (HCFA) is a coalition of 19 consumer advocacy and professional groups advocating for quality and affordable health care for all people living in New Mexico. I chair HCFA. The coalition's current focus is encouraging enrollment in coverage made available through the Affordable Care Act's expansion of Medicaid to low income adults without children. Currently there are 226,000 New Mexicans who are receiving coverage through the expansion. This brings the number of people in New Mexico who receive Medicaid coverage to over 800,000. In the 2016 Legislative session the coalition will be advocating for full funding for the Medicaid program.

Here is a brief primer on Medicaid funding. For those who received Medicaid under regular Medicaid, the Federal government pays 70% of the cost and the state 30%. For those covered under the Medicaid expansion, the federal government paid 100% of the costs for the first 3 years and this year will pay 95% of the cost. The federal government portion will decrease gradually over the next two years but will never go below 90%. Medicaid in general is a great bargain, and the Medicaid expansion is an even better bargain. Medicaid expansion has been credited with creating over 6,000 new jobs in New Mexico. This is a better economic stimulus than any of the tax giveaways created by the Legislature.

Health Insurance Advisory Group to the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance (HIAG). I coordinate this group, which provides advice to the Superintendent of Insurance on issues related to health insurance. Two major issues now are the adequacy of provider networks with health plans and the regulation of Pharmacy Benefit Managers.

So, the LWVNM is well represented in the area of health care advocacy in New Mexico.

-Dick Mason



February 3-4, 2016

League Day at the Legislature

Both events at Garrett's Desert Inn, 311 Old Santa Fe Trail*

Legislative Reception

Wednesday, February 3, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Budget Issues

Richard Anklam, President/Executive Director of the NM Tax Research Institute, former Assistant Secretary/Director of Tax Policy for NM Taxation and Revenue

League Day

Thursday, February 4, 10:30 a.m. to noon

Ethics Commission

Paul Biderman, Institute of Public Law; Santa Fe Ethics and Campaign Review

Budget and Tax Policies

Bill Jordan, Senior Policy Advisor/Government Relations, NM Voices for Children

*Garrett's Desert Inn, located down the street from the capitol, is offering us a special group rate of \$60 plus \$10 per additional person (not including tax) for any size room based on availability. Call 1-800-888-2145 or 505-982-1851 to reserve a room. You must reserve your room by January 12 with the code "Swing Vote" to get this discounted rate.



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LWVNM BOARD CALENDAR 2015-16

Nov. 14, Sat. Dec. 7	LWVNM Board meeting, Mesa Public Library, Los Alamos, 11am –2:30pm Deadline for Winter La Palabra
Jan. 16	LWVNM Board meeting, 11am –2:30pm, Socorro Public Library
Feb. 3, Wed.	Legislative Reception, 5:30-7:30pm, Garrett's Desert Inn
Feb. 4, Thurs.	League Day at the Legislature
Mar. 5	LWVNM Board meeting, Higher Education Center, Santa Fe
Mar. 22	Deadline for Spring La Palabra
May 21	LWVNM Council, Los Alamos, TBA
July 16	LWVNM Board meeting, Domingo Baca Center, Albq, 11am – 2:30pm
July 26	Deadline for Summer La Palabra

*LWVNM Board meetings are bimonthly on Saturdays and are open to all members. To add agenda items, or submit La Palabra articles, please contact Meredith Machen at president@lwvnm.org or 505 577-6337. Thanks for participating.

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