



UPDATE

League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

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Calendar

- February 24 Board meeting, Mesa Public Library, noon
- March 11 Fund Drive Meeting, 520 Navajo Rd. (Barranca Mesa), 7 p.m.
- March 18 Lunch with a Leader, Richard Sayre, Mesa Public Library, 11:40 a.m.
- March 20 Agriculture Consensus Meeting, 7 p.m., 1372 47th St. (Western Area)
- March 27 Board Meeting, Mesa Public Library, noon
- April 29 Annual Meeting, Mesa Public Library, 11:40-2:30

Lunch with a Leader March 18: Richard Sayre

Lunch with a Leader will be Tuesday, March 18, at 11:40 a.m., upstairs in Mesa Library. Dr. Richard Sayre, the Director of the Biofuels Project at the New Mexico Consortium, will give a talk titled, "Regulatory approval processes for GMO foods, potential versus perceived risks." Dr. Sayre is a former member of the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center (DDPSC), where he served as the Director of the Enterprise Rent-A-Car (ERAC) Institute for Renewable Fuels (2008-2011). From 2005-2010, he was Director of the BioCassava Plus Program funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; and from 2009-2011, was the Director of the Center for Advanced Biofuel Systems, a DOE Energy Frontier Research Center. He is currently the Chief Technology Officer for Phycal, a start-up biotechnology company developing microalgal-based biofuel production systems. Sayre was formerly Chair of the Department of Plant Cellular and Molecular Biology at the Ohio State University. He was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, during the spring of 2007 and was elected a Fellow of AAAS in 2011. Sayre received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa and did post-doctoral work at Harvard University.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

President's Message

The LWVLA Board has decided to change the format for the Annual Meeting this year. This important event is usually held on a Saturday in April. During the business meeting, we plan the program for the following year, approve the budget, and elect a new board. Then we share a potluck lunch and listen to a talk. This year we will hold the event on Tuesday, April 29, at the library. We will begin with the speaker and lunch as we do for Lunch with a Leader. The business meeting will follow. Mark your calendars! There will be much more information in the March Update.

During the program planning meeting on February 11, the group considered three suggestions for LWVUS studies and voted to recommend an update on the position on campaign finance reform in view of the impact of decisions by the Supreme Court on campaign financing at all levels of electoral politics. This issue has been a priority for the national and state Leagues for a long time, but we are further than ever from achieving our goal and need to consider how to reverse the trend. The second choice was a study of alternatives to partisan primaries.

A long discussion about our local public schools was inconclusive, but may lead to a proposal for a local study of education.

Barbara Calef

Fund Drive Party: March 11

We will hold a fundraising party on Tuesday, March 11, from 7-9 p.m. at the home of Lynn Jones, 520 Navajo Rd., on Barranca Mesa. This is a relaxed event, a chance to catch up on the news while addressing letters to prospective donors. Refreshments will be served.

Agriculture Study Consensus Meetings

LWVLA held the first meeting on February 18, during which we discussed the first six consensus questions from the national study on agriculture. The second and final meeting will be held on March 20, again at Rosmarie Frederickson's (1372 47th St., off Sandia in the Western Area). All League members are invited. New material will be presented; it is not necessary to have attended the first meeting. On March 20 we will consider questions 7-11, which cover research and development, food safety, and food labeling. The study papers and reference documents for the questions are among those that may be viewed or downloaded here: <http://www.lwv.org/member-resources/agriculture-update>. Plan also to learn about genetically modified organisms at Lunch with a Leader on March 18.

Leagues across the country are conducting similar meetings and will send reports to LWVUS. In April the study committee will develop a new agriculture position based on the reports. That position will be used for advocacy at the federal level.

Barbara Calef

Report of February LWL: Johnson and Valdez

Every county in New Mexico is required to have an elected assessor. Los Alamos County Assessor JoAnn Johnson is nearing the end of her second four-year term in office and will be succeeded by the winner in the November General Election. But she says she is really a figurehead; the office will continue to function smoothly under the assured leadership of Chief Deputy Assessor Joaquin Valdez. Valdez used a power point presentation to illustrate the responsibilities of the assessor's office.

Assessors must re-appraise properties once a year and any time they are sold. If the market value has risen in a neighborhood, the assessor can increase the property valuation by up to 3%

per year. There is no equivalent limit to the decrease in valuation if the market value has fallen. When a house is sold, the market value for the following year is considered to be the purchase price. "Tax lightning" is a large increase in taxable value that may occur when a house is sold for the first time after many years.

Actually, the Los Alamos Assessor's office works on a five year rotating schedule to re-appraise properties, visiting a portion of the neighborhoods in the county each year. Also, an assessor will visit a home where new construction has been completed. Valdez noted that staff wear uniforms and badges and drive official County vehicles.

The notice of value is mailed out by April 1 of each year. Both Johnson and Valdez emphasized the importance of reviewing the notice when it arrives. Property owners are allowed just 30 days to protest. The taxable value is one-third of the full (market) value. The county property tax is determined by multiplying the taxable value by the tax rate for the year. The Los Alamos office received about 50 protests last year. Most of them were settled in the office. County assessors are evaluated by the state every year.

Valdez described four exemptions available to residential property holders:

- Head of family exemption is \$2,000 off the taxable value
- Veteran exemption is \$4,000 off the taxable value
- Disabled veterans are totally exempt from residential property taxes.
- Home-owners over 65, or disabled, with a modified gross income for the previous year of \$32,000 or less can receive a limitation on increase in taxable value.

The head of family exemption was a surprise to many in the group. Valdez noted that the application is available on-line. Here is the link: <http://www.losalamosnm.us/assessor/Documents/HF%20Exemption%20Request.pdf>

Barbara Calef

Report of January LWL: Machen and Shelton

The Environmental Services Division (ESD), formerly the Solid Waste Division, provides solid waste and recycling services to County residents. Since it was created in 2008, the ESD has also been responsible for leading the County's sustainability initiative. Last fall, ESD Manager Tom Nagawiecki presented the draft Environmental Sustainability Plan for implementing the initiative to the County Council. Councilors expressed concern that the endeavor might be very costly, and requested staff to return with more specific goals and metrics.

The plan was developed in part by the Environmental Sustainability Board, whose role is to provide public input to efforts such as green building, recycling, fuel efficiency, alternative fuels, and sustainable development. The board, which replaced the Solid Waste Advisory Board in 2008, is composed of seven members appointed by Council for two-year terms.

Don Machen, board member as well as League member, told the group that the mission statement for the plan has been amended to allay the Councilors' concerns. It now reads, "Los Alamos County's Environmental Sustainability is defined as using environmental stewardship to enhance environmental quality by balancing costs and benefits to make decisions to enable the community to thrive today and well into the future."

Issues recently discussed by the board include a plastic bag ban in Los Alamos, bear-resistant retrofitting of roll carts, brush and bulk item pick-up, and tiered water rates. The board gives prizes for environmental sustainability projects at the science fair and a Recycler of the Year Award, which went this year to the LA Co-op. Machen pointed out the Los Alamos Monitor and CB Fox are also good recyclers.

Nagawiecki has moved to Pennsylvania. His former boss, Public Works Director Philo Shelton, is seeking to replace him, but in the interim is managing the ESD himself. Shelton

told the group that sustainability, which he defined as concern for the triple bottom line of economy, environment, and social equity, is the goal of a variety of County programs, including affordable housing, free transit, complete streets, and solar electric panels.

The price of solid waste disposal is rising by 5% a year, so the ESD is particularly interested in incentives to reduce the shipments to the Rio Rancho and Los Lunas landfills. Under consideration is a “pay as you throw” approach to replace the current flat rate. Customers would be charged according to the size of their roll cart and frequency of pick up. Los Alamos residents recycle only 22% of their waste, below the national average. ESD is trying to expand the recycling program. Shelton said that most residents favor an increase in curbside recycling, and he is working toward that goal. Meanwhile, the glass recycling is very successful, with outflow (consumption) of ground glass matching the inflow. Development of the composting facility in Bayo Canyon is proceeding on schedule. Compost will be trucked to the Eco Station for distribution to residents beginning in the spring.

Barbara Calef

Observer Corps Report – February 2014

At the County Council Meeting on January 28, Council heard from the Teen Center about its need for additional funding. The original contract funding was decreased last summer when the county cut back on all expenditures due to budgetary needs. The Council responded to the current request by bringing the contract amount back to the original \$194,155, an increase of \$14K. This was still not sufficient for the Teen Center needs, but the Teen Center is exploring donation and grant possibilities.

At the February 4th County Council meeting, Council voted to approve \$250K for the design of the remodel of the Community Building to prepare it for housing the new Teen Center. In addition, they approved \$200K for the design of

the remodel of the White Rock Municipal Complex. The actual work will have to wait until the White Rock Library moves to its new location in Piñon Park, but the County wants to be ready to perform the remodel as quickly as possible. Among other things, the Municipal Complex remodel includes plans for renovating both the Senior Center space and current library building, which will be used by the Senior Center, too.

Also at the February 4th meeting, there was a long and complicated discussion of the Indigent Fund resources. The county currently uses the second 1/8th GRT increment to fund our state Medicare requirement, and to fund Los Alamos’ own indigent health care program. The state has threatened to intercept the entire 1/8th GRT increment to be used for the state Medicaid needs and for its own process for supporting local hospitals. After much discussion, the Council voted to support Senate Bill 268 in the current NM legislative session. That bill supports the goal of the New Mexico Association of Counties (NMAC) to give 1/16th GRT increment to the state, and keep the remaining 1/16th GRT for local indigent care programs. (As of February 20, the bill has passed both the House and Senate.)

In the recent work session in White Rock on February 11th, the County Council heard from Harry Burgess, our County Administrator, and Steven Lynne, our Deputy County Administrator and Chief Financial Officer, regarding our current budget situation. They had previously given the council guidance saying we needed to allow for another 5% cut in general fund expenditures. Given the recently passed federal budget for fiscal year 2014, the projections are that the county budget can remain flat, so the 5% cut will not be needed. This is good news for the county!

Lynn Jones