



UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

P. O. Box 158, Los Alamos, NM 87544

Website: www.lwvlosalamos.org

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Calendar

- February 3 LWVNM Legislative Reception, Garrett's Desert Inn, 311 Old Santa Fe Trail, Santa Fe, 5:30 p.m.
- February 4 LWVNM League Day at the Legislature, 311 Old Santa Fe Trail, Santa Fe, 10:30 a.m.
- February 16: Lunch with a Leader, Arin McKenna, Mesa Public Library, 11:45 a.m.
- February 22 Program Planning Meeting, 7 p.m., location TBD
- February 25 Board Meeting, Mesa Public Library, noon
- March 3: Fund Drive Party, 7 p.m., location TBD

Lunch with a Leader: Arin McKenna

Our February Lunch with a Leader will feature Monitor reporter Arin McKenna. McKenna joined the Los Alamos Monitor as county reporter in 2011, where she strives to shed light on the workings of county government and on other topics of interest to local readers. She earned her MFA at the University of Southern California after completing her undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan and Wayne State University. McKenna's topic for Lunch with a Leader will be "Digging in: Getting to the heart of a story." She will discuss how she uses interviews, research, and other means to develop an idea into a full-fledged article.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

LWVLA Board 2015-2016

President, Barbara Calef
1st Vice President, Wendee Brunish
2nd Vice President, Rebecca Shankland
Secretary, Julie Williams-Hill
Treasurer, Rosmarie Frederickson
Directors:
Reservations, Amy Birnbaum
Lunch with a Leader, Karyl Ann Armbruster
Membership, Tarin Nix
Director-at-Large, Anne Nobile
Voter Services, Lynn Jones
Off-Board Directors:
Arrangements, Mary van Eeckhout
Budget, Kathleen Taylor
Newsletter, Kathleen Taylor
Nominations, Carroll Thomas, Michael McKay
Publicity, Jody Benson
Webmaster, Barbara Lemmick

Program Planning

In preparation for our Annual Meeting in April and the LWVUS Convention in June, we will hold a program planning meeting on Monday, February 22, from 7 to 9 p.m., location to be decided. All League members are invited to the event. We will send out a friendly reminder well in advance.

At the meeting we will consider whether there are local issues that should be addressed based on our League's current positions (on our website at <http://lwvlosalamos.org>), or whether there are other studies to be undertaken.

In addition we will discuss issues for the national League such as the Immigration position and the need to revise the Natural Resources position in view of the League's support for the EPA's Clean Power Plan. Specific recommendations will be sent out with the friendly reminder.

Barbara Calef

2016 Legislative Session

Legislative Preview

The Legislative Preview hosted by the League and the AAUW on January 7 was an excellent introduction to important issues under consideration during the current session of the New Mexico Legislature, which started on January 19. Representative Stephanie Garcia Richard announced that she anticipated a brutal session because it will last only 30 days and all of the legislators will be up for re-election. In an effort to separate the demand for a real ID from the battle over issuing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, she has introduced (dropped) a bill calling for a real ID card to be issued by the MVD to residents who have the necessary documentation. The card would not replace the driver's license.

Senator Carlos Cisneros noted that the price of oil is crucial to budget formulation. For every \$1 drop in the price of oil, the state loses \$10 million. The fluctuation in the price of oil makes the task of producing a balanced budget especially difficult for the legislature. Cisneros noted that he has introduced SB 31, a bill to promote technology and economic development through a gross receipts tax credit for the laboratories when they provide assistance to New Mexico businesses.

Senator Richard Martinez said that the state budget is a reflection of legislative morals and that legislators should discuss it before addressing other issues such as DWI to be certain they would have adequate time to consider financial support for education. He noted his support for an Ethics Commission and listed several of the bills he is sponsoring, including a pilot program for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Kristina Fisher explained Think New Mexico's campaign to change the way infrastructure is funded in the state. In 1977 the legislature came up with a plan to combine 119 projects into one bill, which they called the Christmas Tree Bill. Fisher said that approach, which is still followed

today, results in urgent priorities not being funded, piecemeal funding, and lack of transparency. Think New Mexico has proposed the creation of an independent Capital Outlay Planning Board modeled on the merit-based system used to allocate funds for repairs in the public school system. Experts would rank the projects proposed by local committees. Representative Garcia Richard responded that her capital outlay list was published in the Los Alamos Daily Post and that she did not want local voices squeezed out.

Former State Senator Dede Feldman began her talk with a rhetorical question: should the state still have such a short session with so many important matters to debate? She reminded the audience that while in office she had worked for transparency in government, health care reform, ethics, campaign finance reform, and an independent redistricting committee. Now retired, she works with Common Cause and the NM Foundation for Open Government on ethics and transparency issues. In a year when the state's chief ethics officer was convicted of embezzling campaign contributions, the impact on people's faith in government creates an impetus for reform. This is the time to move forward with a constitutional amendment for an ethics commission.

Barbara Calef

LWVNM Priorities for the Session

At the LWVNM Board meeting on January 16 the board adopted the following priority areas for the current session:

Good Government – Ethics Commission & Redistricting & Elections

Education – Supporting an increase in “above the line” funding according to the State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) to address the need for additional resources for at-risk and low-income students; opposing third grade retention

Budget – Opposing any giveaways or regressive taxes; supporting progressive taxes.

League Days at the Legislature

This year the legislative reception will be on a Wednesday and League Day on Thursday. All League members are invited to both events. Registration is not necessary. Both events will feature educational talks on important issues. There will be food and beverages at the reception, which is also an opportunity to talk one-on-one with legislators. League Day is a chance to lobby our legislators as a group.

Legislative Reception,

**Wednesday, February 3, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
Garrett's Desert Inn, 311 Old Santa Fe Trail**

Budget Issues

Richard Anklam, President/Executive Director of the New Mexico Tax Research Institute, Former Assistant Secretary/Director of Tax Policy for the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue

League Day,

Thursday, February 4, 10:30 a.m. to noon, Garrett's Desert Inn

Ethics Commission

Paul Biderman, Former Director of the Institute of Public Law; Santa Fe Ethics and Campaign Review Board Member; ethics trainer, and legislative staffer.

Budget and Tax Policies

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

Barbara Calef

Board of Public Utilities Update

During the December Board of Public Utilities (BPU) meeting the effort to agree on a definition of “carbon neutral” electrical energy was tabled after a lengthy attempt to wordsmith the proposed definition. At the January meeting a new, streamlined version was adopted by a vote of 4-1 with Stephen McLin opposing. The definition is:

“The Department of Public Utilities will be a carbon-neutral electrical energy provider when the electricity distributed to Los Alamos County consumers is generated or purchased from sources that in their normal operation cause no net release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

1. ‘Los Alamos County consumers’ means those customers scheduled in the Los Alamos County Code of Ordinances Section 121; this does not include DOE/LANL.

2. ‘No net release of carbon dioxide’ means that purchases or generation of carbon-based electrical energy, necessary when carbon-free supplies are not practically available to supply Los Alamos County consumers, will be fully offset from previous sales of surplus carbon-free electricity to other entities.”

The board then went on to consider the Future Energy Resources (FER) Committee’s recommendations for strategies to achieve the BPU’s goal of being a carbon-neutral electrical energy provider by 2040. The first one called for incorporating “environmental impact, specifically greenhouse gas production” as a factor to be considered in all resource decisions. The board adopted all but one of the recommendations. They voted 3-2 to reject the

recommendation to adopt policy regarding extension of the Electric Coordination Agreement between Los Alamos County and the DOE after hearing arguments against it from DPU staff. The strategies that were adopted are not binding; many call for study, planning, evaluation.

At their February 17 meeting the BPU will consider the FER Committee’s recommendations for a policy regarding distributed generation in the county.

Barbara Calef

Observer Corps Report

At their meeting on December 8, 2015, the County Council established a process for determining which Capital Improvement Projects would be funded. This process involves a series of public meetings in Los Alamos and White Rock to hear both citizen comments and organizational input. The meetings are scheduled for January and February (see our Friendly Reminder of 1/12/2016). Then at a March 1 meeting, the Council will begin to pare down the list of projects. The Council wants to hear from the public, so be sure to participate if you have a preference.

At the January 5, 2016, meeting, the Council elected a new chair and vice-chair. Rick Reiss was voted in as Chair, and Susan O’Leary as Vice-Chair. We wish them both well in their new roles.

At this same meeting, Council passed a resolution supporting the Endangered Species Act, plus three nuisance ordinances that have been in the mill for several months. The first ordinance requires owners to keep sidewalk areas clear of brush and obstacles. The second prohibits unhitched trailers from being parked on the public streets. And the third shortens the building permit period from three years to two years, with an optional 6-month extension. These three ordinances are an effort to stem chronic situations that contribute to neighborhood blight and are largely in response to citizen complaints.

Our Probate Judge, Chris Chandler, is resigning her post as of February 20th. We are sorry to see her leave, but wish her well in her future endeavors. If you are interested in the Probate Judge position, the deadline to submit a letter of interest to the County Council is February 5.

Lynn Jones

Invitation from AAUW

The community is cordially invited to attend this production, which is our major branch fundraiser for the June AAUW-NM Tech Trek STEM camp for middle school girls.

Einstein: A Stage Portrait

Saturday, February 13, 7:30 p.m.;

Sunday, February 14, 2:00 p.m.

at the Los Alamos Little Theater

\$20.00/person available at CB Fox, and at the door, payment is check or cash only.

Tom Schuch, an internationally acclaimed actor, will portray Albert Einstein in Willard Simms' 1984 award-winning play. It will be a performance of humor, introspection, science, and even a little violin as Schuch keeps the audience spellbound, inviting the listener to reminisce and hear tales of Einstein the genius. Tom Schuch's performance will give an understanding of Einstein's ability to solve many of the world's most difficult puzzles with astounding creativity and humor.

Report of December LWL: Suki Halevi

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) was founded in 1913 in order to combat anti-Semitism. Today the ADL has expanded its mission to opposing all forms of hatred and bigotry through education, legislation, inter-group relations, and law enforcement. New

Mexico ADL director Suki Halevi explained that the organization's goal is to secure civil rights for all people.

Halevi said that the ADL focuses on bullying in the schools, which is where discrimination starts. During the 2015 legislative session she advocated for the Safe Schools for All Students Act (SB393), which would have required school districts to develop and implement bullying prevention policies and programs. The ADL becomes involved directly when contacted by parents, and will then seek to work with the school principal to address the problem and the underlying causes. ADL provides resources for teachers at no charge.

The ADL also works to combat hate crimes. Halevi said that New Mexico has passed comprehensive hate crime legislation, but the organization's goal is to get every state to adopt such laws in order to send a strong message to the community. Focusing on what is most timely, she campaigns against Islamophobic talk and has reached out to the Islamic Center in Albuquerque to help with the problem.

The ADL is also concerned about attacks on voting rights. For instance, in 2013 the Supreme Court ruled in *Shelby v. Holder* that the coverage formula in the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) determining which jurisdictions must obtain federal preclearance before changing their practices is unconstitutional because it was over forty years old. Since then Texas, North Carolina, and other states have passed voter ID laws, cut voting hours, purged voter rolls, and ended same-day registration. Halevi encouraged League members to request Congress to defend the VRA, which had bi-partisan support through 2006.

Barbara Calef

Report of January LWL: Jenny Parks

In response to requests by Senators Bingaman and Domenici, Congress created the LANL Foundation 18 years ago to help make LANL “a better corporate citizen in the community” by supporting public schools in the seven counties surrounding the Laboratory. Congress allocated \$7 million a year for five years to start the endeavor. Today the Foundation has assets of more than \$78 million and is the only foundation in the state focused solely on education. Jenny Parks has been the Chief Executive Officer for one year now. Her background is not in education, but she said she is excited about the promise of the organization.

The Foundation has conducted the Inquiry in Science Consortium for six years, training teachers and providing science kits for elementary and middle school students. The program, which is expanding to serve more schools, has shown benefits for students in reading, writing, and math as well as science comprehension.

The Los Alamos Employees’ Scholarship Fund provides scholarship awards to students seeking college degrees or certification. The competitive scholarship program raised \$650,000 last year.

The Foundation offers educational outreach grants of \$1500 to fund programs in public schools as well as nonprofits supporting education in the region.

In addition, galvanized by George Cowan, the Foundation has raised funds to address early childhood education and developed the First Born Program, which provides support and information on child development and parenting to new parents from pregnancy through the child’s third year. Parks commented that early childhood education really matters, noting that researchers have found that children from high-income families are exposed to 30 million more words than children from distressed families, with resulting discrepancies in knowledge, skills, and experiences.

Parks said that the Foundation is currently engaged in a two-year effort to learn best practices in New Mexico and is looking at what other states do to improve their educational systems. Why is NM at the bottom in so many categories? She said that it’s a myth that education is not important to NM culture. The state spends \$9,000 per student, not the lowest in the country. But perhaps the money is not going into the right areas.

One concern is that “below the line” spending is controlled by the Governor. (The “line” is the cutoff point above which school spending for recurring expenses is distributed by formula directly to local school districts on a per-student basis. Below-the-line spending is earmarked for targeted programs overseen by the state Public Education Department and awarded to select districts at the administration’s discretion.)

Therefore, an initiative often does not last more than eight years because the next administration does not choose to continue it. Another issue is that in 48 of the 89 New Mexico school districts fewer than 1,000 students are enrolled; those districts have no opportunity for economies of scale.

Among the problems with education in New Mexico that she has identified are the rapid turnover in leadership, student poverty, lack of proficiency in English, and outdated curriculum. She concluded that educators should not just think about the money, but must figure out ways to do better with what we have.

Barbara Calef



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LOS ALAMOS
MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mail to: LWV Los Alamos
P.O. Box 158
Los Alamos, NM 87544

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail _____

Check here if you are willing to receive our local newsletter Update as an electronic file, saving us postage.

Check here if you wish to receive friendly reminders of upcoming events by e-mail.

Membership Categories

Single membership: \$45

Household membership (two+ people at the same address): \$65

Single Sustaining membership: \$75

Household Sustaining membership (two+ people at the same address): \$95

Note: Membership checks should be payable to LWV-Los Alamos

Additional ways to support the local League

Unrestricted contribution (not tax deductible): \$ _____

LWV Education Fund (tax deductible): \$ _____

Note: Checks for tax-deductible contributions must be payable to LWVLA Education Fund and not combined with any other payments.

Interests (check as many as apply)

- One-time activities (unit meetings, fund-drive mailings, etc.)
Affordable Housing
Budget, Finances
Elections
Local Government
Health Care
Money in Politics
Website, social media
Other (please suggest)
Education
Living Wage
Voting Rights/Voter Services
Public Relations
Newsletter
Membership
Transportation
Not sure (I just support LWV)

The League of Women Voters, 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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