



UPDATE

League of Women Voters of Los Alamos

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Calendar

- December 17 Lunch with a Leader, Robert Westervelt, Mesa Public Library, 11:40 a.m.
- January 8 Legislative Preview, Fuller Lodge, 7 p.m. (6:30 for refreshments)
- January 21 Lunch with a Leader, Environmental Sustainability, Mesa Library, 11:40 a.m.
- January 23 Board Meeting, Mesa Public Library, Room 1, noon
- January 27 Legislative Reception, Garrett's Desert Inn, 5:30 p.m.
- January 28 League Day, NM Land Office, 10:30 a.m.
- February 11 Program Planning Meeting, Karyl Ann Armbruster's, 7-9 p.m.

Lunch with a Leader, December 17: Robert Westervelt

Lunch with a Leader will be Tuesday, Dec. 17, at 11:40 a.m. upstairs in Mesa Library. This month's speaker is Robert Westervelt, Deputy Utility Manager of Finance and Administration. If you live on Barranca Mesa or North Mesa and are participating in the Smart Meter Study, do you wonder what those rates on your emails mean? Are you in the punishment group or the reward group? What does that mean? These and other questions as well as other information will be shared with those attending. The two studies are supported by DPU's partnerships with Kyoto University, Japan's technology ministry NEDO, and Toshiba.

Westervelt, who earned both his BA and MBA from UNM, joined the Los Alamos Utility Department in 2012 after twenty years of work in finance and accounting in state government and utilities. He is responsible for the financial planning for the electric, gas, water, and wastewater services, and the Electric Coordination Agreement with the US Department of Energy. In addition, Bob oversees the 311 Customer Care Center.

On January 21 a member of the Environment Sustainability Board will talk with us about the Environmental Sustainability Plan, which they proposed to the County Council, and the results from that meeting. You will receive an email regarding the particulars or can read information in the LA Daily Post or the Monitor as the time gets nearer.

Karyl Ann Armbruster

President's Message

The holidays are nearly here, but we have one more League event scheduled for 2013: Lunch with a Leader. There will be numerous League events in January to inform our members and the public about the important issues of the 2014 NM legislative session. You can read in this issue of the *Update* about the Los Alamos legislative preview. In the Winter *La Palabra*, coming out in early January, you will be able to read about the LWVNM legislative reception and League Day, both of which will be held in Santa Fe. There is also information on the LWVNM website. We strongly encourage League members and friends to participate in these activities and let your voices be heard at the Legislature!

2014 Legislative Preview

We're preparing for the next NM legislative session! The League of Women Voters of Los Alamos and the American Association of University Women will hold our annual legislative preview in Fuller Lodge on Wednesday, January 8, from 7 to 9 p.m. with refreshments at 6:30 p.m. Everyone is invited.

Our legislators, Representative Stephanie Garcia Richard and Senators Carlos Cisneros and Richard Martinez, are planning to come and share their views on the upcoming session. We have also invited Kristina Fisher to explain *Think New Mexico's* jobs creation initiative and LAPS Assistant Superintendent Gerry Washburn to discuss the educational issues. Helena Whyte will moderate.

The 2014 NM legislative session will begin on January 21 and continue for 30 days. The short session is limited to budget items, vetoed legislation from 2013, and legislation that the Governor puts on her call. The League will be supporting a number of proposals aimed at making New Mexico's tax structure more progressive. Other League priorities include education, behavioral health, health care funding and policies, driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants, and environmental protection.

Barbara Calef

Observer Corps Report – December 2013

At the November 8th County Council meeting Peter Soderquist, the airport manager, presented a request for an additional \$365,248 to fund the continuation of the commercial air service program between Los Alamos and Albuquerque. The ridership has not met expectations, in part due to low use by LANL employees. The fare between Los Alamos and Albuquerque is currently \$49, but it may have to increase in the near future. Council voted 6 to 1 to allocate the additional funding to see the service through next September in hopes that LANL participation can be increased.

At the same meeting, Council approved the Art in Public Places proposal for several public art projects in White Rock. The art pieces include three wind sculptures at the White Rock Visitor Center; five paintings by Kathi Geoffrion for the White Rock Visitor Center Conference Room; and, in collaboration with San Ildefonso Pueblo, several pots/plates along the White Rock/Bandelier corridor, similar to those along Sunport Drive at the Albuquerque airport. We look forward to seeing these art pieces installed over the next year or two.

At the November 26th County Council meeting, the Council struggled with staff proposals for dealing with diminished revenues for Fiscal Year 2015 and future years. Ultimately, they accepted the bulk of the recommendations, which included a 5% cut in operational monies. The cut will be achieved through some cutbacks in staff (by attrition), services, and maintenance. Council voted 4 to 3 to retain the option of a 1.5 mil levy on property taxes for FY 2016. County staff will now use this budget guidance to create a FY 2015 budget; they will return in the spring to get Council approval of the budget.

And finally, on December 3rd, after years of work and discussion and debate on the part of two Charter Review Committees, the public, the DPU board and the County Council, Council voted to proceed with the Charter Review Committees' recommendations and, after

making minor revisions, directed the county legal staff to prepare ordinances in order to put the recommendations to a public vote. This is a big step after two highly respected Charter Review Committees concluded that Article V of the County Charter, which pertains to the Department of Public Utilities, needed to be updated and extended. The DPU board did not endorse most of the changes, so there will be a great deal more public discussion before the election. The League will be holding one or more forums on the pros and cons of the charter changes, so watch for these activities.

Lynn Jones

Report of November LWL: Gerry Washburn

Assistant Los Alamos Public Schools Superintendent Gerry Washburn explained the origin and significance of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) during the November Lunch with a Leader program.

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers led the development of the CCSS for kindergarten through twelfth grade. The goal is to prepare students to be “college and career ready” regardless of the state in which they live. To make the American workforce more competitive globally, the CCSS was developed in part using the standards of countries where students score highest on international tests. The federal government was not involved, but it requires state participation to qualify for funding for the Race to the Top program and to get a waiver from the “No Child Left Behind” federal law. The states must adopt 85% of the standards. Only Alaska, Texas, Virginia, and Nebraska have chosen not to participate.

Washburn is supportive of the CCSS. He says that New Mexico already had some of the most stringent standards in the country, but the lack of consistency nation-wide has made comparison meaningless, which is in part why NM ranks #50 for education. For example, the test taken by NM students includes written responses and is more

difficult than the multiple-choice tests taken by students in other states. Thus, the CCSS provides a better way to measure how state systems compare with one another. Furthermore, implementation of CCSS will increase rigor in the classroom and help develop higher-level thinking skills.

The CCSS addresses only math and English language arts. In math the emphasis is on technology-based learning. Notably, the standards call for mastery of algebra by the end of eighth grade, rather than the ninth. The focus of the math standards is on application, asking students to solve real problems. English language skills are taught across the curriculum with an emphasis on non-fiction reading comprehension and composing analytical reports. For instance, students in K-5 are asked to write opinion pieces, stating an opinion and giving reasons to support it. Washburn commented that students are no longer able to coast through their lessons. However, the program will take years to be fully implemented.

CCSS requires lots of collaboration and professional development for teachers. They will be able to share lessons and instructional materials. To allow teachers to monitor students' progress, the state will test them at third grade through eleventh grade levels three times each year and also require that they execute a performance-based task each year. Testing will begin next year and will be computerized, but the questions will be open-ended rather than multiple choice. New Mexico has joined many other states in a coalition called Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), which is developing the tests. Each state can determine the required proficiency level.

Washburn listed some of the problems with the CCSS:

- There is a lot of testing, although some current tests will be discontinued.
- Some of the standards may not be developmentally appropriate, especially for younger students.
- There is no equivalency test for children with special needs.
- The assessments will be on-line and therefore inaccessible for many rural schools.
- Science, social studies, music, and physical education are omitted.
- The process is very expensive.

Los Alamos has been involved in the program for 2½ years. Washburn said that most teachers are excited about it, but worried about the demands for the lower grades and the speed with which the evaluation system is being rolled out. He thinks that New Mexico will “leapfrog over other states that have played fast and loose with the standards,” but will be below average due to the high incidence of poverty in the state. Parental participation is expected; therefore the schools must explain what is expected of them and provide assistance for children whose parents cannot help. For some children the standards will be very difficult, but somehow they must be assisted without slowing down those who enjoy the challenge.

In response to questions, Washburn said that 94% of Los Alamos students graduate from high school and 90% go on to college. He believes the best way to judge how good a job our school system is doing is to listen to what college freshmen have to say about their readiness for higher education.

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 Ed. 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
Election Reform
Fuller Lodge
Land Use
Local Government
Medically Indigent Fund
Public Transportation
Sustainability
Water Issues
Not sure (I just support LWV)

Other (please suggest) _____

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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