



# 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](http://www.lwvlosalamos.org)**

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## **Calendar**

- June 16 Lunch with a Leader, Marshall and Garcia, Mesa Public Library, 11:40
- June 18 Environmental Sustainability Board Meeting, Municipal Bldg. Room 110, 5:30 p.m.
- July 9 Board Meeting, Smith's Conference Room, noon
- July 21 Lunch with a Leader, Sanders Moore, Mesa Public Library, 11:40

## **Lunch with a Leader June 16: Jeremy Marshall**

Have you heard about the Southwest Jemez Mountains Landscape Restoration Project? On June 16 Jeremy Marshall and Jarrett Garcia from the Santa Fe National Forest will tell us all about it. Marshall is the Implementation Lead for the entire project and knows it backwards and forwards. Garcia is just coming on board as the Partnership Coordinator.

## **Future Lunch with a Leader**

In July Sanders Moore, the State Director for Environment New Mexico, will be our speaker. Environment New Mexico works to protect air, water, and open spaces in the state. Prior to joining ENM in 2010, Moore worked at the Georgia Conservancy on improving air quality in the metro-Atlanta area through education and advocacy. She received her Master's degree in Environmental Law & Policy from Vermont Law School and her B.A. from Wesleyan University.

Mark your calendars for the third Tuesday of every month for Lunch with a Leader!

*Karyl Ann Armbruster*

## **Bag Ban Now a Bag Fee**

On May 21 at the Environmental Sustainability Board meeting, Council Chambers were crowded with citizens eager to speak for or against a County ordinance to reduce the distribution of single use plastic bags. Jody Benson began by stating that, in view of very vocal opposition to a ban, the proponents had decided to drop that request and instead ask for a fee on both paper and plastic bags at the checkout counter. Over the next two hours everyone who wished to comment did so, with no time limits. Many of those opposed to an ordinance argued against a ban despite having heard that we are no longer supporting one. The ESB members made no comment.

There will be a second public meeting about the matter on June 18, after which the board will decide what action to propose to Council. Meanwhile, comments are again being accepted on the Open Forum. If you have not already registered your opinion, please do so before June 15 at:

<http://www.losalamosnm.us/gov/Pages/PublicCommentForum.aspx>

*Barbara Calef*

## **Study of Charter School Regulation**

The LWVNM Convention proceeded smoothly this year. The bylaws were revised and the positions approved as recommended by the board. The new board was elected and the proposed study of charter schools was adopted. Meredith Machen will lead the study and would appreciate lots of support. Here are the details:

**Scope of Study:** This study will review how charter schools are regulated and what impact their authorization has on the sufficiency of funding for traditional public schools. Because charter schools are publicly funded, the study will look at whether they should be held to standards of accountability and transparency that are as rigorous as those of traditional public schools. The study will also examine the possible need for changes in charter school regulations regarding their governing bodies, their

operations, and the rules for authorization and reauthorization.

**Rationale:** While the advantages of charter schools may outweigh the disadvantages, many policy experts and League members have identified areas of concern including the financial impact on school districts, and the presence of private, for-profit companies in the governance of public education. Much research has examined the effects of charter schools. Some of it will be considered, as will studies conducted by state and local Leagues. This study will not attempt to resolve the issue of whether charter schools or traditional public schools achieve better student outcomes or offer more choice to families. The goal of this study is to determine whether steps should be taken to tighten regulation of charter schools. Our Education position allows us to advocate for adequate and equitable school funding, but we are unable to address all of the causes and effects of the increasing insufficiency without considering the impact of the increasing number of charter schools in the state.

**Expected Outcome:** The study should be completed and a position adopted by consensus in time for the 2017 legislative session. This study will increase state and local League visibility. It will help the League to link with individuals and groups with different viewpoints outside the League. The study results will add a needed element to LWVNM's Education position and may assist a national study that will be proposed at the LWVUS Convention in 2016.

If you would like to be involved, e-mail Meredith at [mermachen\(AT\)cybermesa\(DOT\)com](mailto:mermachen(AT)cybermesa(DOT)com).

## **Report of May LWL: Ellen Mills**

Ellen Mills has been president of the Los Alamos Federation of School Employees for seven years. She has also served as secretary and building representative for the union. And, she teaches special education in the schools.

Mills said that union is in her blood and has been from her early years as a teacher. She explained

the advantages of having a union. A recognized union can bargain much more effectively than individuals. And the contract is between the school board and the union. Individuals really are not allowed to negotiate for themselves. The union negotiates wages and clarifies concerns through discussion with the schools administration. They hire experts when necessary. The union serves both certified teachers and the “classified” staff of hourly wage earners such as plumbers and instructional assistants who work for the schools.

Membership is not required to benefit from the union’s negotiations, but there are additional perks such as a life insurance policy and a million dollar liability insurance policy. Seventy-five percent of the teaching staff are union members, and a smaller percentage of classified staff belong. Dues are based on income.

Mills spoke about the heightened frustration and concern among teachers resulting from a combination of decisions at the state and federal level. The major issues are standardized testing, evaluations, and wages. She expressed support for the Common Core standards, which endeavor to expose children to a broad range of subjects and to encourage critical thinking. However, they are hard to test. Yet the mandated PARCC tests are administered to every child, ready or not. Mills drew an analogy between giving the same test to all children and assuming that every third grader should be five feet tall and weigh eighty pounds.

Not only is the test unfair, it consumes many hours of classroom time, the results are not available in a timely manner, the questions have not been validated, the scoring has not been explained...yet the results will be used to evaluate the teachers. In view of the low wages and the increased stress, it is no surprise that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find teachers for our schools.

*Barbara Calef*

## **LWVLA Meeting with DPU Officials**

Julie Williams-Hill, the LWVLA secretary, arranged for a meeting of LWVLA members with Department of Utilities Manager Tim Glasco and Deputy Manager Steve Cummins on June 1 to discuss the ramifications for our county of the PNM case currently before the PRC. This is what we learned.

The nine San Juan Generating Station (SJGS) owners have been meeting for over two years (about 15 hours a week) to work out the details of closing Units 2 and 3 of the plant, installing selective non-catalytic reduction scrubbers (to lessen nitrogen oxide emissions) on the remaining units, reclaiming the open pit mine, finding an operator for the current underground mine, and re-organizing since four of the owners are leaving. Five separate major agreements have been hammered out, but it will take another month to finalize them and the failure of any one could lead to the collapse of the whole plan.

The current mine operator is quitting, but a new company, Westmoreland, is willing to take over only if they can do so in 2016. It is likely they will shut down the mine in 2022 or shortly thereafter because the mine would need significant investment in new equipment to continue functioning after that.

If the plan fails, Los Alamos may have to pay tens of millions of dollars to remove itself from participation in the plant, of which it owns 2%

Los Alamos County’s contract for the SJGS ends in 2022 and all agreements the county signs must allow it to exit in that year. However, the current fuel contract ends in 2017, so LA needs sufficient coal to keep the plant going five more years. Also, the cost of the open pit reclamation will be more manageable given another five years. A trust fund financed by the plant owners pays for the reclamation. Ash from the underground mine is being used for the reclamation.

*Barbara Calef*

## **LWV/LA Advisory Board Election**

Following up on the questions that arose during program planning, we have learned from Gloria Maestas, Bureau of Elections Manager, that the requirements for conducting the election of UNM/LA Advisory Board members are set by state statute, NM Stat § 21-14-2.1. The relevant sentence says, “The candidates shall file for and be elected to a particular position number. The candidate receiving the highest number of votes for a particular position shall be elected.” So, unless the law is changed, the County Clerk cannot allow Advisory Board members to be chosen in the same way as Council members.

## **Observer Corps Report**

Following four full evenings of budget presentations by county staff, the County Council completed the budget hearings on April 28th and voted to accept the budget with some changes made by Council. The final budget was for \$193 million, and included a 2.25 mil property tax increase. The councilors found a lot of agreement on the majority of the budget, but the 2.25 mil levy was controversial. The budget ultimately passed with a vote of 5 to 2, with Councilors Sheehy and Chrobocinski objecting to the increase in property tax.

At the May 26<sup>th</sup> meeting the Council approved the sale of a section of the White Rock A-19 parcel to developers interested in building 97 single-family lots. This parcel sits west of the White Rock Visitor Center and east of Pajarito Road. There are still details to work out before the sale is final. The county has agreed to bring utilities to the site, but the developers are responsible for bringing those utilities onto the site.

The Los Alamos County Open Space Management Plan was approved by the Council at the May 26<sup>th</sup> meeting. Many of us in the League were disappointed that the plan was watered down in response to earlier objections by some councilors, who were afraid that the plan would inhibit some unnamed development.

Many of us in Los Alamos consider our open spaces as treasures to be protected, but that was not to be. Craig Martin, our County Open Space Specialist, is retiring in July, so we are losing the immense skill and knowledge and energy that he has brought to the protection and enrichment of our open spaces.

*Lynn Jones*

## **Minutes of the 2015 LWVLA Annual Board Meeting**

### **Call to Order**

President Barbara Calef called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm

### **Board Members Present**

Barbara Calef, President  
Lynn Jones, Voter Services & Observer Corps  
Becky Shankland, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
Kathy Taylor, Director of Arrangements  
Rosmarie Frederickson, Treasurer  
Karyl Ann Armbruster, Lunch with a Leader  
Julie Williams-Hill, Secretary  
And approximately 30 LWV members. A quorum was present.  
Rosmarie Frederickson and Lynn Jones volunteered to read the Annual Meeting minutes.

### **President’s Report**

Barbara greeted the group and gave a quick presentation of LWVLA activities over the past year. She reminded everyone that there is a thank you note party at Susy Havemann’s home on May 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **Membership Report**

Lynn reported that the LWVLA has 70 members, up from 68 members last year

### **Treasurer’s report**

Rosmarie presented the financial status as of March 2015 as well as an overview of expenses for the past year. Specifically, expenses totaled approximately \$9,000 and were mostly associated with the elections. These included the printing of the Voter’s Guide, hosting a number of public forums, and services to register voters. The recent fund raising drive brought in \$1040.

Lastly, she had proposed that the savings account be dissolved and the funds be moved to a CD.

### **Lunch with a Leader**

Karyl Ann noted that next month the Lunch with a Leader speaker will be Ellen Mills, President of the Los Alamos Federation of School Employees. No one is slated to speak in June. Sanders Moore, the State Director for Environment New Mexico, will be the speaker for July.

### **Observer Corps**

Kyle Wheeler commended Lynn for her efforts to follow the County Council meetings and report on them in the monthly newsletter. Barbara asked for volunteers to follow and report on activities with the Board of Public Utilities and Planning and Zoning Commission. No one volunteered.

### **Voter Services**

Lynn reported that the responsibilities of the Voters Services director are to support Barbara on the candidate forums and editing the Voter's Guide.

### **Adoption of Local Program (positions, studies, plans for action)**

This past year's program included promoting league positions, local government issues and public education.

- Six candidate forums were hosted by the LWV including a school board forum,
- LWV members registered voters and reviewed the County publication on the charter issues, and
- The LWV coordinated a legislative preview.

LWV actions consisted of

- Monitoring County Council and the Board of Public Utilities meetings,
- Advocating on voting issues, which included discussions with the County Clerk's office to resolve problems with the Motor Vehicle Department and the

ability for citizens to register to vote while renewing drivers' licenses,

- Supporting renewable energy and the open space plan, and
- Promoting transparency with the Board of Public Utilities.

The San Juan Chama water issue is currently on hold while the Department of Public Utilities completes a revised 40-year water plan.

An education study was conducted by Susan O'Leary. It was completed and adopted in January, as well as featured in the Los Alamos Monitor.

Last February a program planning meeting for 2015-2016 was held. No new studies were proposed, however, various action items were identified.

- Observe the development of the comprehensive plan,
- Register all eligible high school students,
- Research how the UNM LA board member positions and LAPS school districts are determined,
- Revisit the sustainability position,
- Visit with the new LAPS superintendent on the education position, and
- Monitor the Council, Board of Public Utilities and the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Barbara solicited input for other issues that required LWV attention. There was no response.

As for positions, Barbara noted that at last year's annual meeting, Mark Jones pointed out that the second bullet in the Environment position was hard to understand. This bullet was reworked and unfortunately did not make it into the printed March 2015 newsletter. Barbara provided a handout with the revised bullet:

“To improve ecosystem health and community livability, we support wherever possible ‘Green Infrastructure.’ EPA defines this as ‘...an array of products, technologies,

and practices that use natural systems – or engineered systems that mimic natural processes – to enhance overall environmental quality.... Green Infrastructure techniques use soils and vegetation to infiltrate, evapotranspire, and/or recycle storm water runoff.”

Sustainability will be rewritten, however, not substantively. Barbara asked if there were any other amendments. There was no response. She noted that affordable housing will be an important issue once the County has received responses to the RFP for A19.

A question was raised about the Future Energy Resources Committee appointed by the Board of Public Utilities. Issues discussed by this group fit with the LWV position on the environment. As such, what role should the LWV play? Kathy Taylor, a member of the LWV Board, is on the Future Energy Resources Committee. She will provide monthly updates.

Anne Beyers moved to adopt the program, Kyle Wheeler seconded the motion. Item passed unanimously.

The State LWV’s Board adopted the Natural Resources and Living Wage positions in addition to completing an alcohol study and updating the Judiciary position and the Children and Families position.

The State LWV Convention will be held in May. Barbara, Becky, Tarin and Julie will be the delegates from LWVLA. The State LWV has proposed a study on Charter Schools in hopes of reaching resolution on a position within the year and then lobbying the legislature.

### **Adoption of the 2015 Budget**

Kathy Taylor presented the proposed budget for 2015. She explained the election cycle and how it affects the budget (non-election years generally require less money than election years). Questions and discussions revealed a mathematical error in the presentation of the budget document. Kathy confirmed that the final budget totals were correct. Chris Chandler

moved to approve the budget with the corrected addition. Becky Shankland seconded the motion. Budget passed unanimously.

### **Election of Officers and Directors**

Carroll Thomas nominated the following Board of Directors:

President: Barbara Calef

2nd Vice President: Becky Shankland

Co Treasurers: Rosmarie Frederickson and Kathy Taylor

Secretary: Julie Williams-Hill

Reservations: Amy Birnbaum

Lunch with a Leader: Karyl Ann Armbruster

Membership: Tarin Nix

Voter Services: Lynn Jones

Director at Large: Anne Nobile

### Off-Board Directors

Arrangements: Mary Van Eeckhout

Publicity: Jody Benson

Webmaster: Barbara Lemmick

Observer Corps: Lynn Jones

Newsletter Editor: Kathy Taylor

Nominating Committee: Carroll Thomas and Michael McKay

Wendee Brunish volunteered for the First Vice President position.

Anne Beyers moved to approve the amended nominations, Lynn Jones seconded the motion.

The officers and directors were approved unanimously.

### **Announcements**

Becky publically thanked Barbara Calef for her continued dedication and support to the LWVLA.

Jill with AAUW announced that two women will be traveling from Albuquerque on April 30 to give a presentation in Los Alamos on human trafficking. She encouraged members to come.

### **Adjourn**

Barbara Calef adjourned the meeting at 1:45 PM.

*Julie Williams-Hill*



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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