League of Women Voters of New Mexico

La Palabra

Vol. 72 No.4 www.lwvnm.org Fall 2026

League Contacts

LWVNM
Hannah Burling
President
president@lwvnm.org

Central New Mexico
Academy Office Park, Suites 124,126
6739 Academy Blvd NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109-3352
505-884-8441
President Starlyn Brown
office@lwvcnm.org

Southern New Mexico
P.O. Box 15142
Las Cruces, NM 88004
Liz Rodriguez-Johnson, president
lizrodjohn@aol.com
lwvsnm@gmail.com

Los Alamos
P.O. Box 158
Los Alamos, NM 87544
Leslie Wallstrom, President
president@lwvlosalamos.org

Santa Fe County
P.O. Box 31547
Santa Fe, NM 87594
Debbie Helper, President
dwrighter@hotmail.com

La Palabra Editor
Barbara Calef
bfcalef@gmail.com

La Palabra Publisher
Janet Blair
505-259-0203
jkblair@swcp.com

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 educaion and advocacy.

The President's Corner

By Hannah Burling
LWVNM President
president@lwvnm.org

In New Mexico our state election code now prohibits federal intimidation or obtrusion in local elections. Still, with the election coming up, there are concerns about discrimination and intimidation at polling locations. Here is the link to the New Mexico Secretary of State's guide **https://www.sos.nm.gov/voting-and-elections/guidance-on-voter-intimidation-and-discriminatory-conduct/** The Common Cause telephone number for reporting interference at polling locations is 1-800-OUR-VOTE (1-800-687-8683). This number is for reporting only.

We are being encouraged by LWVUS to participate in these dates:
October 5-9, National Voter Education Week
October 20, Election Hero Day
October 24, Vote Early Day

There is a new Membership Toolkit available with resources to support recruitment, engagement and retention. Here's the link: **https://www.lwv.org/league-management/membership/membership-toolkit**

I'm delighted to announce that we have a new Membership Director. Karen Douglas has stepped forward to take on that task. There are still some gaps on our board. At the LWVNM board meeting on September 19th, we approved changing the name of the Action Committee to the Advocacy Committee, but we are still looking for an Advocacy Chair.

To be truly effective in achieving our mission, we need to develop succession planning as well as data collection, analysis and/or analytics. We need to actively recruit members with experience in these areas. ...continued on p. 2

Table of Contents

President's Report.....1
Voter Services Report.....2
Medical Malpractice Study.....3
Nuclear Issues Report.....4
Local League Reports.....5

The President's Corner, continued

I would like to congratulate the SNM League for their extremely effective work in reaching out to low propensity voters prior to the primary election. Daniel Gomez, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Public Law, and Administration at New Mexico State University published an article in the Albuquerque Journal on August 15 highlighting the League's work to empower voters in Doña Ana County.

He wrote, "That's where LWVSNM came in, running targeted outreach in rural parts of the county to explain permanent absentee status to voters who might otherwise never have heard of it. Even without the budget of the statewide absentee campaign that drove turnout in 2020, these efforts moved the needle: Rural absentee use rose steadily compared to 2022 and 2024.

The lesson is straightforward: Structural reforms create the potential for higher turnout, but it takes funded outreach to convert that potential into votes. Sustaining that progress means giving the organizations doing this work the resources to reach more voters. That's an investment worth supporting."

In the last year, I have been on television three times, twice on KOAT and once on PBS, which is much more than in any other year since I began my first term in 2019. Mainstream TV may be a dying medium, but I believe that we have been successful in raising the League's profile in this state.

Voter Services Report

By Edwina Jaramillo, Acting Voter Services Director

We are at the finish line! The Voter Services Committee has done an incredible job contacting candidates to encourage them to respond to the questions posed by the League and has worked hard on the multitude of tasks needed to produce the Voter Guides. A big thank you to everyone who make this so-important public service endeavor possible.

The online VOTE411 Voter Guide will be available for all races for all counties in NM on October 5th (in time for early voting on October 6th). The Voter Guides cover all local races across New Mexico's 33 counties. Additionally, the four local Leagues will each print Voter Guides for some or all the counties they serve in time for early voting as follows:

- The League of Women Voters of Central New Mexico will publish two versions of a downloadable PDF Guide (one for Bernalillo and Sandoval Counties, and one for Torrance and Valencia Counties) that can be found on their website (https://www.lwvcnm.org). Additionally, they will distribute the Voter Guides at the Bernalillo, Valencia, and Torrance County Clerk's offices, polling places, libraries, community centers, businesses, and school campuses, etc.
- The League of Women Voters of Los Alamos will publish a Voter Guide in the Los Alamos Daily Post on October 1st and it also can be found as a downloadable PDF file on their website (https://my.lwv.org/new-mexico/los-alamos). Additionally, they will distribute the Voter Guides at the County Clerk's office, polling places, libraries, community centers, etc.
- The League of Women Voters of Santa Fe will publish in the Santa Fe New Mexican on October 2nd and it can also be found as a downloadable PDF file on their website (lwvsfc.org). Additionally, they will distribute the Voter Guides at the County Clerk's office, polling places, libraries, community centers, etc.
- The League of Women Voters of Southern NM will publish an insert in the *Las Cruces Bulletin* for Doña Ana County and as a downloadable PDF file on the website **(https://www.lascrucesbulletin.com)** and on the League's website (https://www.lwvsnm.org) beginning Oct. 2, 2026.

Our challenge now is to get the word out to the public so voters can view the Voter Guide. Please help us spread the word that **Vote411.org** is the site where voters can get accurate information about what will appear on their ballots and compare candidates' responses. We hope you'll join us in our efforts to encourage an informed and active electorate.

Important Election Date on Vote411.org

Tue., Oct 6: First day of Early Voting at county clerks' offices; first day absentee ballots are mailed;
Sat., Oct. 17: First day of expanded Early Voting
Tue., Oct 20: Last day to request an absentee ballot
Sat, Oct 31: Last day of Early Voting
Tue, Nov 3: Election Day! Polls are open 7am - 7pm

Medical Malpractice & Access to Health Care in New Mexico

By Joanne Turnbull, Study Chair

Access to healthcare is a serious problem in New Mexico and in large part is caused by a shortage of physicians. Multiple factors contribute to the shortage. Some compromise our state's ability to attract any type of professional—spousal employment opportunities, rural geography, underperforming schools. Others are specific to the practice of medicine: Medicaid reimbursement, taxation of healthcare services, and high malpractice premiums. Training pipeline drivers such as cost and loan forgiveness are also contributing factors.

Medical malpractice laws have been cited as the root cause of high malpractice premiums and the most significant barrier to physician recruitment and retention. Enacted in 2026, HB 99 (Medical Malpractice Changes), addressed several aspects of the 2021 malpractice legislation that is believed to contribute to the current, acute physician shortage. The League of Women Voters of New Mexico is conducting a statewide study on the way that malpractice functions in New Mexico to ascertain if and how the shortage is correlated with medical malpractice, and how malpractice legislation relates to health care access.

The first weeks of the study were dedicated to summarizing information on legislation related to healthcare access and malpractice (specifically, legislation which contributed to the shortage and legislative attempts to remedy it), a review of national and state LWV positions on medical malpractice, a summary of legislative and regulatory approaches to medical malpractice in other states (i.e., premiums, capped damage awards relative to physician supply), and a survey of the purpose and scope of the seven state bodies that shape whether a New Mexican can find a provider and what happens when care goes wrong. The need for reliable, valid data is emerging as a salient issue.

The next steps are data analysis and interviewing stakeholders, which will be done simultaneously. Proposed areas of analysis include identifying legislative gaps and remaining actions, comparing other states' approaches to malpractice, applying guidance from national and state League positions on health care, identifying data gaps, and identifying the functions, statutory basis, appointing authority, and specific levers for the entities that matter for malpractice or access policies. We will also examine existing sources of data (the NM Medical Board Survey, the Health Resources and Services Administration, New Mexico Healthcare Workforce, Patient Compensation Fund and the New Mexico All-Claims Payer Database) and will research other sources, such as data from the Maryland Health Care Commission, to determine what valid, reliable data, if any, exists to inform policy decisions. The goal of the stakeholder interviews is to have a deeper understanding of the issues and to identify points of congruence and difference.

We plan to draft materials to seek consensus in early 2027. A resulting position can be used to advocate for leg-

islative or administrative actions in the state of New Mexico.

Study team members: Joanne Turnbull (chair), Shirley Armstrong, Kathy Brook, May Goldenberg, Randee Greenwald, Joyce Koenig, Kate Mangelsdorf, Akkana Peck, Liz Rodriguez-Johnson, Eduardo Santiago, Janet Simon, Terri Sugarman, James Wernicke, Judy Williams.

Nuclear Issues Report

By Karen M. Douglas, Nuclear Issues Chair

NM Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee meeting 8-13-26

Two presentations may be of interest to LWVNM

1. Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) Jonathan Plaue/Technical Director of the DNFSB Santa Fe regional office serving SNL, LANL, and WIPP testified that DNFSB includes 5 Presidential appointees and requires a quorum for actions. Currently only 1 of 5 appointees remain. DNFSB is tasked with maintaining Nuclear Safety at DOE Nuclear Facilities. DNFSB has access rights when occurrences/notifications arise and this access is currently being denied. Routine inspections are not currently allowed, either.

2. NM Uranium mining predictions: Prof. Daría Roithmayr, Provost Professor of Law, University of Colorado Boulder, presented concerns about the intention of the federal government to restart uranium mining activity in NM in view of the health and environmental risks of resumed activity.

Nuclear energy for Data Centers will be provided by the current fleet of 94 light water reactors with Small Modular Reactors on the horizon and advanced reactor deployment in its infancy. The initial operating license is issued by the NRC for 40 years with 94 reactors granted a 20-year license renewal to 60 years before 2022 and 15 reactors additional granted subsequent license renewal to 80 years lifetime.

Reactor decommissioning since 2000 had resulted from the low cost of natural gas. However, domestic energy demands have resulted in restarting reactors that were previously shut down. The nuclear power plants: Palisades in Michigan, Duane Arnold in Iowa, and Unit 1 of Three Miles Island in Pennsylvania are all restarting. NRC has initiated rules accelerating these initiatives. Diablo Canyon Power Plant in California canceled plans to shut down in 2025 and its license has been extended to 2045 to meet carbon reduction guidelines while providing sufficient power.

DOE initiative for Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campuses (NLIC) – Twenty-eight applications for nuclear lifecycle innovation campuses were received from 26 states. Of those, five were selected: Idaho, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Utah. West Virginia was added later. LWVNM member Karen Douglas serves as a stakeholder on the Collaboration Council of the NLIC initiative. South Carolina was previously engaging with DOE and planning to influence nuclear waste policy before the next Congress. The Campuses will host facilities supporting all stages of the nuclear fuel supply chain, reactor operation, and used fuel disposition. Each of the selected states has agreed to accept used fuel from other states for reprocessing or disposal.

DOE also initiated discussion with states hosting final repositories, including WIPP in New Mexico, concerning reprocessing residue, vitrified, or spent nuclear fuel (UNF). Revision of the 1987 Nuclear Waste Policy Act specifying Yucca Mountain, NV as the only final geological repository would be essential. Borehole disposal of UNF is also being considered as an alternative.

Local League News

LWVLA Report

By Leslie Wallstrom, President

In Los Alamos the summer months were spent dealing with some of the hottest seasonal temperatures on record, while dodging the hungry bears and the feral cows that wander through our neighborhoods and forests. The Los Alamos League participated in the Day of Action on August 8 by marching in the annual Rodeo/County Fair Parade and then tabling at the downtown craft fair by Ashley Pond. We joined in the national League's efforts to mobilize 8.5 million people on this day to fight for voter's rights. Fourteen volunteers helped during this nation-wide day of civic action. We applied for and received funding from the LWVUS national office to help pay for these activities. Los Alamos now has 113 members.

Our Voter Guide Committee has worked very hard to assemble information on all the local candidates, the local charter amendments, the state constitution changes, and the bond issues. This lengthy document will be mailed to every household in Los Alamos County on October 1st. This is also the day we will sponsor a Candidate Forum for the local candidates to explain their positions to the voters. These forums are usually very well-attended.

We have held two "Lunch with a Leader" meetings since the last State Board meeting. Approximately 25 to 30 people attend these monthly lunch time gatherings. In August we heard from Mr. Ramón García, the director of the County's Senior Center, and in September we heard from Los Alamos County Fire Chief Erik Litzenberg. Chief Litzenberg spent much of his career in the City of Santa Fe Fire Department and also served as Santa Fe City Manager. Each speaker had important insights on local and regional issues. Their presentations are recorded and can be found on the LWVLA website.

Southern New Mexico

By Liz Rodriguez-Johnson, President

LWVSNM started our 2026 Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) strategy by focusing on the rural voting initiative back in April. We began to encourage the use of absentee ballots as a way to get more low-propensity voters in our rural areas to vote in the primary election. We developed a flyer with the message in Spanish and English, "Vote at Home." Absentee ballots are the easiest way for citizens to vote, especially citizens who might not have the time or transportation to vote at polling stations. Fortunately, the New Mexico Voting Rights Act has made everyone in the state eligible for permanent absentee ballots.

Throughout the Spring, we met with different civic organizations whose leaders have numerous contacts and large distribution lists, including the Early Childhood Education Coalition facilitated by Ngage New Mexico and the Hatch Valley Coalition. We also had conversations with leaders at the various rural branches of Doña Ana Community College. All of these groups agreed to share the "Vote at Home" flyers with their distribution lists and to encourage their members to vote via absentee ballot in the primary election.

Did these contacts and conversations have any effect on voting in the primary election in these rural areas? We are collaborating with a Government Professor at New Mexico State University who analyzed voting data that LWVSNM purchased from the County Clerk's office. Along with an increase in voting turnout countywide, ab-

sentee ballot use climbed, especially in rural areas farthest from polling places. It is certainly possible that our "Vote at Home" message had a positive impact on voter turnout.

For our Days of Action in August, we continued our initiative to promote absentee voting in rural areas. On August 6, conversations about increasing voter participation were held with the Doña Ana County Early Childhood Education Coalition. Similar conversations were held on August 12 with the Doña Ana Community College Director for Southern Doña Ana County and on August 27 with the Village of Hatch Coalition. The focus of these conversations was how to continue the "Vote at Home" campaign for the November General Election.
As we move forward to the November election, we are continuing our initiative to promote voting throughout Doña Ana County. Because of its convenience, absentee voting tends to increase voter participation; voters don't have to worry about transportation to polls, they can vote on their own time, and so on.

We are also implementing a bilingual streaming and social media video initiative to promote absentee voting throughout Doña Ana County along with four electronic billboards promoting **VOTE411.org** and absentee voting. Use of Facebook, Instagram and other online platforms will add to the messaging as we promote the League's **VOTE411.org** website.

Finally, as of this writing, the print version of our Voter Guide is being completed and will be printed and distributed throughout Doña Ana County by League volunteers.

Santa Fe County

By Debbie Helper, President

• At our Annual Meeting in May, we elected a new Board and Nominating Committee. The membership approved the recommendation by the Board of a new leadership Structure, which is a return to a traditional leadership model. Officers include: President Debbie Helper, President Elect Joann Volinski, Treasurer Deann Lichtenstein, Secretary Mary Hall, VP Voter Services Kelly Davis, VP Program/Action and Advocacy Carol Parker.

Directors include Voter Outreach Susan Pfeifer, Vote411 Dorothy Marchand, Communications Stephanie Schlanger, Media Judy Gibbs Robinson and Development Hannah Burling. Anne McDonald Culp agreed to chair the Nominating Committee again and Val Brooker and Donna Reynolds agreed to serve again on the committee.

Off-Board positions include Chair of Candidate Forums Sarah Schlanger, Chair of Membership Jesse Ryker-Crawford, Roster Manager Randi Lowenthal, Arrangements Danis Kelly, Events and Calendar Mary Beth Brady, High School Civic Engagement Program Anne McDonald Culp and Social Media Claire Jordy.

• To improve the ability for working and younger members to attend Board meetings, we have changed the time to 5:30-7:30 p.m. om the third Wednesday of the month. Membership remains stable. We will hold a New Member event in October to get new members involved.

• Action and Advocacy Committee under the direction of Carol Parker has developed its annual matrix, which focuses on Governmental efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency, Water, Affordable housing, Schools, Community health, City/county resource. There is a new water subcommittee. The committee continues to monitor all governmental bodies and report back to the committee, which meets monthly. Carol Parker and Jody Larson met with Mayor Garcia to discuss confusing issues concerning city council voting procedures.

• Voter Services has been tabling at two locations every weekend under the direction of Susan Pfeifer and attending unique events. Voter Guide and Vote 411 questions have gone out (thanks to Dorothy Marchand and her team) and the responses are being assembled. Our Voter Information Guide has also been produced and will be

published in the New Mexican soon. Sarah Schlanger and Signa Laralde or**ganized** a candidate forum for competitive district representatives as well as the magistrate judges. Another forum is scheduled. Collaboration with The Santa Fe New Mexican continues to expand our audience and allow for live streaming as well as recording. Collaboration with the Food Depot likewise expands and diversifies our reach. We are deciding how to show our appreciation for these excellent collaborations.

• Voter Registration Agent (re) training has taken place and Anne McDonald Culp continues to work with the high schools to get the student VRAs to register students for voting.

• VP Voter Services Kelly Davis and Secretary Mary Hall have developed the LowPropensity Voter Project to be implemented in collaboration with the Food Depot andthe arts department at Highlands University. A survey will determine reasons whyeligible voters decline to vote as well as their areas of greatest concern in thecommunity. Then materials will be developed to address how those issues can beimpacted by voting. The materials will be distributed by the Food Depot and will bemade available to food banks and Leagues throughout the state. The project is beingfunded through a grant from the LWVNM Ed Fund.

• We are holding a leadership team retreat in October to be facilitated by Felicia Orth.Its purpose will be the development of a 2-year strategic plan. Director of Communications Stephanie Schlanger is assembling a team to update and revise the website after our retreatdetermines our direction over the next couple of years.

• Stephanie has also started a monthly Book Club open to all members and guests.

• Media Director Judy Gibbs Robinson wrote a press release for the launch of the Voter Guide and Vote411 as well as for the candidate forums (which already get greatpress in the New Mexican). She is training members to participate in the IPRA auditand will analyze the results to be presented during Sunshine Week. President Debbie Helper attended and made a statement at the NMDOJ's IPRA Task Force meeting held in Santa Fe County and continues to monitor their activity virtually.

Central New Mexico

By Starlyn Brown, President

Valencia County Fair

We tabled for 6 days at the Valencia County Fair. Our goal was to introduce LWVCNM and what we offer to Valencia County. Many had no idea we existed and had never seen any of our materials. The fair supports 4-H participants and teaches them many life skills including communication, business, organization, winning and losing, composure, and responsibility.

We used the civics wheel, and it was a big hit with the kids. Kids from two years old to high school age would spin the wheel, answer a question and get candy. We had to get creative with questions for the younger children! Many came back repeatedly; I called them frequent flyers. I think some liked talking to us and learning as much as we liked talking to, learning from, and educating them. It was a fantastic way to learn about life in more rural communities.

Bernalillo County Commission

We have observed the Bernalillo County Commission meetings for many years. In June a commissioner introduced a proposed charter amendment for public financing to be placed on the November Ballot. While LWV strongly supports public financing, the amendment was presented without an estimate of the program's cost or meaningful details about how it would be implemented. An accompanying resolution would create a committee to conduct the study after the voters approved.

We wrote to all five County Commissioners and the County Manger expressing our concerns about the process. At their August meeting the commissioners withdrew the charter amendment and proceeded with the resolution to form a committee. The resolution passed.

Membership
We currently have 214 members.

Voter Services/Outreach
We continue to be very busy tabling at events such as Healthcare for the Homeless, Roadrunner Food Bank and Pantry, Transgender Resource Center, Rio Rancho Pride, and Naturalization ceremonies. We are continuing our efforts to have more of a presence in Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia counties. We recently met with the Center for Democracy and Civic Education (CDCE) to discuss partnerships and collaboration. This is the group that is involved in the We The People program in public schools. They would like to expand civic education further and include grades 1-12 statewide.

Hyperscale Data Center and Microgrid Study
The study committee is in the process of consolidating the research and documents that they have gathered. It is a very complex issue. It is almost impossible to talk about the issues without addressing New Mexico impacts. Decisions made in one county do not just affect that county when water, air quality, and power generation and cost decisions are made.

Forums
We were timekeepers at the Roadrunner Food Bank gubernatorial candidate forums. The candidates were interviewed separately on different days. We participated in a candidate Meet and Greet for Valenica County. All state office candidates and county candidates were invited. However, the statewide candidates were scarce; many Republican candidates chose not to participate. The event was well attended and gave Valencia County voters an opportunity to hear from and talk to the candidates. You can find links to the recordings at lwvcnm.org/2026-candidate-forums/.

Voter Guide
We are going to print two versions of the Voter Guide, one for Bernalillo/Sandoval and one for Torrance/Valencia Counties. This approach worked well for the primary. The distribution team is hard at work on locations, guide numbers, and volunteers. Through focused effort we have increased the number of sites in Valencia County and the South Valley.
Our final emails and calls to candidates have been made. We spent a lot of time contacting and trying to contact judges for the election. We made a special effort with the retention judges.

Partnerships/Coalitions/Collaborations
The Freedom to Read New Mexico Coalition is again meeting and preparing for the 2027 Legislative session. Two Senate bills and one House bill are being prepared. We are working on determining how to collaborate with the NM Center for Democracy.

We are working with Dr. Burnley, a professor in the University of New Mexico's School of Public Administration on defining ways to partner. Dr. Burnley is the academic advisor for the Next Generation Service Corps, a nonpartisan program that prepares college students for civic engagement and public service through community projects, public policy, and advocacy. Common Cause and LWVCNM are both present at many of the meetings. We are working on the best ways to support each other without duplicating efforts.

Membership Meetings
We continue to have Drop in Coffees, Happy Hours, and Book Club.

Our September education meeting topic was Immigrant Detention in New Mexico. Links to the recording can be found on our website under Meeting Recordings.

If you are on Facebook, please make it a point to visit our state Facebook page to like and share our posts.

League of Women Voters of NM
6739 Academy Rd. NE, Suite 124
Albuquerque, NM 87109-3352

Please consider helping your local League or LWVNM to pay for our voter guides and candidate forums. You can send a tax-deductible gift by check to your local League or to LWVNM. See www.lwvnm.org for more information and links to our local Leagues. Thank you for making democracy work!