



# 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

- July 24 Board Meeting, Mesa Public Library, noon
- August 21 Lunch with a Leader, Robert Rhatigan, Graves Hall/United Church, 11:45 a.m.
- August 28 Board Meeting, White Rock Public Library, noon
- September 6 Forum on Early Childhood Education, Graves Hall/United Church, 7 p.m.  
(6:30 for refreshments)
- September 18 Lunch with a Leader, TBD, Graves Hall/United Church, 11:45 a.m.
- September 25 Board meeting, White Rock Library, noon
- September 27 Candidate Forum, UNM/LA, 7 p.m. (6:30 for refreshments)
- October 3 Candidate Forum, UNM/LA, 7 p.m. (6:30 for refreshments)

## Lunch with a Leader: Robert Rhatigan

Our much-anticipated speaker on August 21 will be Robert Rhatigan from the University of New Mexico Center for Geospatial Population Studies, the state's data partner for the US Census Bureau. He will be discussing the seriousness of the census and what local governments need to do to make sure every household is counted. New Mexico had the second lowest response rate in the United States in 2010. Rhatigan estimates that a one percent undercount means a loss of \$600 million over 10 years for the state in the programs where dollars are allocated by population.



*Photo of Robert Rhatigan  
courtesy of [UNM](http://UNM).*

IMPORTANT: Mesa Public Library will be closed from August 20 through the end of November for replacement of the HVAC system and lighting. The United Church at 2525 Canyon Road is graciously allowing us to use Graves Hall for our meetings during that time.

*Karyl Ann Armbruster*

## Observer Corps Reports

### County Council

At the June 11 County Council meeting, the councilors chose Morrie Pongratz to replace Councilor James Chrobocinski,

who resigned from the Council for health reasons. There were six applicants, so the councilors had a good field of candidates. Councilor Pongratz will be filling out the term until December 2018. His replacement will be decided in the November general election along with three other Council positions.

On June 12, Council passed a motion allowing Atomic City Transit to use grant money to buy two electric buses. Once that's accomplished, our downtown route will largely be served by these buses. That's good news. Although they cost more initially, they save money in the long run and reduce carbon emissions.

The County's new county-wide business software system went live on July 1. The County will have extra staff available to field questions from citizens if problems arise with billing, payments, or other aspects of the system. Be patient – these transitions are frequently troublesome.

*Lynn Jones*

## **Board of Public Utilities**

The Board of Public Utilities (BPU) met on Wednesday, June 20th. Department of Public Utilities (DPU) staff discussed with board members recommendations for ways to track commercial customers that are required to have a backflow prevention device to avoid cross-connection contamination with drinking water. No solution was reached. The discussion with the BPU will be continued at a future date. Also, at the June 20th meeting the BPU approved an ordinance to authorize and refinance an amended loan and promissory note agreements for the Los Alamos wastewater treatment plant. This will lower interest rates and extend the loan by five years. Council will consider the ordinance for adoption at a public hearing on July 31st.

On Wednesday, July 18th the BPU met again. An early investigation into electric vehicle charging stations was presented by staff. They identified various kinds of charging stations, customer payment options, and locations. Some of the recommended sites were at the White Rock Visitor Center, both county libraries, the parking lot at Ashley Pond, the Municipal Building,

and Pajarito Cliffs site. Staff also discussed the need to raise sewer rates in anticipation of a new loan to replace the White Rock Wastewater Treatment Facility. DPU needs to demonstrate to the lending institution that rates will support monthly payments. At the August 15th public hearing, staff will request that the BPU approve increases for the monthly service fee from \$10.27 to \$11.09. If approved, the fixed sewer rate for single-family residential customers will increase from \$37.18 to \$40.15. The variable rate for commercial customers would increase from \$17.50 to \$18.90 per thousand gallons based on their average winter water consumption.

*Julie Williams-Hill*

## **Co-President's Message: Plastic: Progress and Problems, Steps Forward and Back**

2009, take one giant step forward. The elementary school kids of the Kinnikinnick Club at PEEC (Pajarito Environmental Education Center) approached Smith's and showed their PowerPoint about the environmental dangers of single-use, thin plastic bags. Smith's responded by giving them several hundred reusable bags and putting up the signs you see



*Photo of Zero Waste Subcommittee members courtesy of Kirsten Laskey/ladaily.com.*

today: “Did you leave your reusable bags in the car?” They also gave extra points to those who brought their own bags, and they reported a dramatic decrease in the number of plastic bags used in the following year.

2015, take one giant step backward. The Sierra Club and the League partnered to ask the County to ban those same plastic bags given out at grocery stores. When people complained, we modified our request to a charge of 5 cents per bag. But a shrill public outcry led to the Environmental Sustainability Board rejecting the idea. (Meanwhile, Santa Fe had voted to ban plastic grocery bags and charge for paper bags, leading one County councilor to refer to the “socialist republic of Santa Fe.”)

Now, articles about Styrofoam and plastic of all kinds on the land and in the ocean have begun to appear as if they are conspiring to make me do something. Suddenly it’s no longer plastic grocery bags and plastic straws—ALL plastic seems to be strangling living creatures in our environment. How can passionate plastic-haters manage to get entirely off this addictive drug? I am reminded of the waterproof cloth sandwich bags I had sewed for my family 10 years ago, and now the Los Alamos Nature Center, run by PEEC, is selling Zero-Waste Starter Kits.

We may see some progress in 2018. The high school Environmental Club has started a petition to charge for plastic bags in Los Alamos. Maybe people will listen to the youth who have a stake in the future of the world.

In addition, all citizens of Los Alamos are invited to take a giant step forward with a new initiative called Zero Waste, led by a subcommittee of the Environmental Sustainability Board. They are truly thinking giant thoughts: not just plastic, but energy use, transportation, electronics, water. Baby step by baby step, we can all become part of the progress.

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What you can do:

- Sign the [high school kids’ petition](#).
- Join the County’s Zero Waste group with information from [this article in the Los Alamos Daily Post](#).
- Enjoy a success story: “[How one woman cut her weekly trash down so much it fits into a jar.](#)”
- Find out more by reading “[How to Use Less Plastic without Fully Going ‘Zero Waste.’](#)”
- Get a Zero-Waste Starter Kit at the Los Alamos Nature Center.

*Rebecca Shankland*

## ***June Lunch with a Leader: Bill Hargraves Discusses Polaris Charter School***

At the June Lunch with a Leader, Bill Hargraves outlined a proposed charter school for Los Alamos for grades six to eight. Hargraves is a LAPS School Board member, but his exploration of this charter school proposal is done as a private citizen. His talk

focused on the history, philosophy, structure, and possible schedule for this initiative.

The idea for a charter school grew out of the XQ Competition to design a new kind of school. Over 400 students were interviewed and a model school was designed; the Los Alamos proposal became one of the 50 finalists, but was not one of the final five winners. Still, the idea persisted in many minds and eventually the decision was made to pursue it in the form of a state-funded charter school outside of the local school system.

Numerous problems arose. The Public Education Department



*Photo of Bill Hargraves courtesy of [Los Alamos Public Schools](#).*

(PED) doesn't supply any funds until the doors are opened, so any planning money needs to come from outside foundations—that requires lengthy applications. To be a state charter, one must have a leader with an administrative license, and initially the group lacked that position.

The schedule for the application is to declare intent in January 2019, submit an application in June 2019, receive approval in August 2019, spend the next year finding a location, creating a budget and curriculum, hiring staff, and enrolling students, then opening in August 2020.

The philosophy behind the Polaris school is to use place-based education that focuses on projects using local resources like fire ecology, local culture, and the laboratory. Teachers design the curriculum, but the community is involved in sharing ideas and judging projects. The culture of the school would emphasize citizenship, curiosity, empathy, and questioning. Students become agents of their own learning. Students can train for work positions in technology by thinking for themselves, taking initiative, and figuring things out rather than waiting for answers.

The need for such a school comes from two considerations: an overcrowded middle school (the current enrollment is 643 students in grades seven and eight) and feelings of stress experienced by some students in Los Alamos Public Schools (LAPS). Having 100 to 150 students from 6th to 8th grade in a charter school would relieve overcrowding and provide a friendly atmosphere to students who may feel lost in the larger middle school. The proponents hope that after three years of the charter school, students would be well prepared to

return to public schools in 9th grade.

Polaris would have open enrollment (not selective) and, if oversubscribed, would have a lottery and wait list. Just as with all NM public schools, traditional teacher evaluations and PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) tests would be given.

LAPS would feel a financial impact since the state funding that follows each student would be lost and budgets would have to be adjusted.

*Rebecca Shankland*

## ***July Lunch with a Leader: Jorge Rodriguez and Nia Rucker Describe Treatment of Immigrants***

At the July Lunch with a Leader meeting, the speakers were Jorge Rodriguez, a field organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and Nia Rucker, a former federal public defender who is now



*Photo of Jorge Rodriguez courtesy of [American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico](#)*

policy counsel and regional manager of the ACLU office in Las Cruces, NM.

Rodriguez described what it means to live in the border region, which extends 100 miles into the US. Vehicles travelling in that area are routinely stopped at Border Patrol checkpoints and the driver and passengers are questioned. Rodriguez recounted how an officer harassed him, repeating the same questions over and over, until he proposed recording the conversation. Meanwhile, he felt that exercising his civil rights put his life and that of his passenger at risk.

Rodriguez maintains that the goal of the border police is to achieve social control within the country as well as to keep foreigners out. So, their activities affect everyone in the nation.

He said it is important for us to know our rights and to stand against policies that infringe on our rights. He praised the sanctuary cities for refusing to cooperate with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE). During the next legislative session the ACLU will seek a state-wide sanctuary policy. Everyone should be able to live with dignity and respect.

The ACLU did succeed in one case, Rucker told the group. Ms. L, a Congolese woman, arrived at a port of entry and requested asylum. Even though she had followed the law, she was separated from her child. Mother and daughter were only reunited four months later after the ACLU filed a lawsuit. But of the 2,000 children taken from their parents, only 50 have been reunited so far.

Rucker reported that immigrants seeking asylum are routinely put in detention. If they entered the country illegally, they are charged with a misdemeanor the first time, and with a felony if they were previously deported. Many are incarcerated in private prisons, where conditions are notoriously bad. "The solution," she said, "is to decriminalize immigration."

*Barbara Calef*

## **LWVUS Convention Report**

Barbara Calef and I attended the LWVUS National Convention in Chicago last month as the delegates from LWVLA. I got to hear some excellent speeches and attend some useful caucuses with good ideas about how we in NM can advocate for things we care about, especially redistricting.

One of the highlights of the convention was a talk by Rosie Rios, the 43rd US Treasurer. One of her main themes was under-representation of women in public venues. How many US bank notes feature women? None, though Rios has managed to arrange for an upcoming series of state quarters showing famous women.

Look at statues in public places. There are more statues of men than of women, yes, but it's more than that. How many statues of a man -- "up there on his high horse, literally" -- portray a real person? Okay, now look at the statues of women. How often do they portray a real person? More often it's an abstract figure like Lady Liberty, Alice in Wonderland, Mother Goose, a goddess. Rios had a lot more to say about public art and about setting examples for girls. I wish I'd taken more notes or could get a video.

The second outstanding speaker was Elaine Weiss, author of *The Women's Hour*. At the convention



*Photo of LWVUS President Chris Carson speaking at the national convention courtesy of Dale Yeo.*

banquet Weiss gave an entertaining history of women's suffrage over the years.

The convention program began with a talk on Thursday night, "A Conversation on Redistricting" by Nick Stephanopoulos and Ruth Greenwood. They discussed their efforts to expose gerrymandering inequities, bringing statistical and symmetry metrics and the "efficiency gap," a mathematical measure of districting fairness, into play.

They discussed current cases in several states where they've been able to prove clear partisan intent, like an official caught saying "The maps we pass will determine who's here ten years from now," and an official state document that said the intent of their map was to keep the same Republican/Democrat ratio: to "maintain the current partisan makeup." They caught officials trying to destroy hard drives, the FBI was able to recover the evidence, and spoke of cases where officials lied about who had produced their new map.

For more information, visit [PlanScore.org](http://PlanScore.org) and [All About Redistricting](#). How can the LWV help? We can advocate for a fair census and offer forums where people talk about their communities, since the intent is to draw districts that keep communities together.

LWVUS business is conducted during the plenary sessions. There I got a shocking and discouraging view of how the LWV conducts its business on a national scale. National tells us we shouldn't be working on anything beyond "Making Democracy Work" -- but then their own process is anything but democratic.

The first order of business during the first session was to adopt the rules for the convention. At that time the president of the Oregon League (LWVOR) proposed a motion that would have enabled delegates to question internal LWVUS decisions as part of convention business. This would include the controversial new values statement.

LWVUS president Chris Carson stated that the correct parliamentary way to do this was to vote to approve the rest of the rules, not including the one in question. That motion passed easily. Then she stated that the motion on the table would require a 2/3 vote, because it was an amendment to the rules that had just been

passed, despite the fact that she had told us we were voting to pass all the rules except that one.

The LWVOR delegate pointed out that the convention handbook clearly stated that amendment of the rules only requires a simple majority. Carson responded that would have been true before the convention rules were adopted, but now that we'd voted to adopt them, it now required a 2/3 vote to amend them due to some other rule somewhere else, not in the handbook. She was adamant that the motion could not now pass with a simple majority.

The Oregon delegate was incredulous. "You mean that if I'd known you were going to do this, I should have objected to voting to adopt the rules before voting on my motion?" But that's the way plenaries go at the LWVUS. They make up the rules as they go along. The LWVOR motion was defeated, so there was no chance of any member input on the values statement ... or anything else.

With the rules adopted by railroad, we were next presented with the slate of candidates for national positions. It's not really an election since the LWVUS nominating committee has already chosen the new board from the applicants. The delegates are merely asked to approve by acclamation. There is a point where candidates can be nominated from the floor; such a nominee has one minute to make their case to the whole room, after which the vote takes place.

After adopting the slate of officers, we moved on to "Not Recommended Items." How that works: in the run-up to the convention, local leagues propose areas LWVUS should focus on during the upcoming two years. The national board decides what they care about, and marks the rest as "Not Recommended." During the Friday plenary session, delegates can vote to consider these items. Three items that won consideration were Abolishing the Electoral College, Supporting the National Popular Vote Compact (a similar but different way to get around the electoral college), and advocating for implementation of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), should it ever be ratified.

Next we heard speakers on the proposed LWV "Transformation Journey," the LWVUS's plan to revitalize the organization by concentrating on fair

elections, voting rights, voter registration, voter education, and raising money. Then we moved on to the budget. The most interesting part of the budget discussion, I thought, was the question from an eagle-eyed delegate: “What’s this line item about ‘mailing list rental’?” Carson’s response was that LWVUS sells the list of donors who are not LWV members.

On Saturday, the plenaries considered the “not-recommended items” for which the delegates had voted to debate. The abolition of the electoral college failed. Advocacy for the National Popular Vote Compact passed. The ERA proposal also passed.

Following Rosie Rios’s talk, Carson dismissed the delegates who wanted to participate in a rally protesting the treatment of immigrants. Once they’d left the room, she looked over the people remaining, decided we still had a quorum, and announced that we would now begin discussion of the bylaws, in direct denial of what she had announced earlier.

One of the bylaws proposals was controversial, making it easier to withdraw recognition from state or local leagues for violating written principles and unwritten policies. A proposed amendment to remove the reference to the policies had a lot of support; but a lot of that support came from people who were now away at the protest. So, the amendment failed. On Sunday, when the actual proposal came to a vote without the amendment, it was still controversial, but passed by a slim margin. So, now it’s easier to withdraw recognition from a state or local league without any clear guidelines.

The plenaries ended on Sunday with voting on a long list of proclamations. We’re against gun violence, for the ERA, against the electoral college, for pricing carbon emissions, for reproductive rights and privacy, and for climate change assessments that align with scientific principles.

The Redistricting Caucus was terrific, very useful in



*New Mexico delegates gaze upward in the ballroom during the LWVUS Convention banquet.  
Photo courtesy of Janet Blair.*

getting ideas on how to pass redistricting proposals even in states like New Mexico that don't have initiatives, which enable the voters to put a proposal on the ballot without the aid of the legislature.

It's important to leave a role for the legislature while trying to improve the process of redistricting or you'll never get support. Involve people high in the power structure of the legislature. The caucus leaders looked at 50 successful bills and found that most called for a legislature-plus model. For instance, the legislature picks some members of the redistricting committee, someone else picks other members. Most of the bills called for an equal number of Democrats and Republicans plus an expert; only a few included independents. At some point in the process 80% of the bills involved judges. The choice of committee chair is important; often the chair is an independent chosen by the legislature.

The key to success in changing the system is to conduct education campaigns throughout the state to get voters educated and interested enough to put pressure on their legislators. There's overwhelming popular support for redistricting if you can get people to understand the issues. Legislators may be ready to compromise once they feel pressured.

The Caucus on Better Single-Winner Voting Methods for a Better Democracy gave a fairly reasonable overview of the various voting methods. I noticed that they used the terms Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)



*Photo of delegates from across the country gathered for the LWVUS Convention courtesy of Janet Blair.*

and Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) interchangeably, whereas people in New Mexico seem to feel very strongly that they are not the same thing. I've been unclear on the difference and had hoped this caucus might enlighten me, but it looks like people outside NM may not make the same distinction.

The Health Care Caucus was disappointing. The speaker discussed the terrible state of health care in the US and stated that "You don't know if you have good health insurance until you have to use it." She went on to explain that a lot of people who gained insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) did so with a high-deductible plan (Is there any other type on the exchange? I sure haven't seen one.) And, she mentioned that there are three healthcare lobbyists for every member of Congress. A good talk, but preaching to the choir. I wanted to hear tips about advocacy -- how can we more effectively advocate for universal health care?

So the convention was a mixed bag. I did get some tips, especially about redistricting, that I can use; but I flew home feeling discouraged about the LWVUS and how different it is from what I see in our local league.

*Akkana Peck*

## ***Forums in September and October***

The League is planning three forums before the November general election. The first, at the United Church on September 6, will focus on early childhood education and be presented by Searchlight New Mexico. The LWVLA and American Association of University Women (AAUW) are co-sponsors.

There are 20 candidates running for election in November. The League is planning two forums for them, both to be held at UNM-LA. The first is scheduled for Thursday, September 27, and the second will be held on Wednesday, October 3.

Save the dates and watch for more information!

*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: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

- Check here to receive our local newsletter Update as an electronic file, saving us postage
OR Check here if you prefer the newsletter mailed in hard copy.
Check here if you wish to receive occasional—friendly reminders of upcoming events by e-mail.

Membership Categories (All checks for memberships and contributions should be payable to LWV-Los Alamos and all are now tax-deductible.)

- 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
Contribution: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Interests and Ways to Help the League (check as many as apply)

- Topics of Interest: Affordable Housing, Local Government, Education, Elections, Voting Rights, Water Issues, Land Use, Health Care, Money in Politics, Sustainability, Living Wage, Public Transportation, Environment, Other topics (please suggest):
Ways to Help with League Activities: Set up Refreshments at Forums, Observer Corps (County Council, DPU, etc.), Nominating Committee, Voter Guides Committee, Voter Registration, Publicity, Website, Social Media, Newsletter, Membership, Fund-raising, Budget Committee for LWV, Lunch with a Leader (assistance), Fund-raising Committee for LWV, Participate in board meetings or join the board

*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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