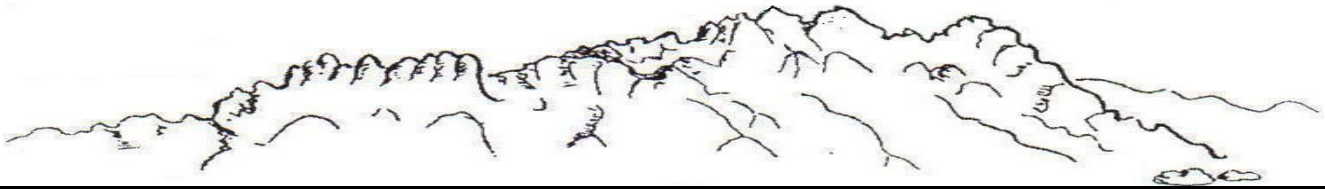


The VOTER

League of Women Voters
of Greater Las Cruces
(575) 524-VOTE (8683)
Web Site: www.lwvglc.org
May 2010



Lunch With a Leader - May 10, 2010

New Mexico State University: Teaching Excellence and National Research in Your Backyard

Barbara Couture, Ph.D., President

As a comprehensive research and land-grant university, New Mexico State University (NMSU) fulfills many functions that contribute value to our community, state, nation and beyond. President Couture will speak about the unique mission of NMSU and goals for the future.

Dr. Couture joined the university on November 2009, as the 25th president. Educated at the University of Michigan, she earned her bachelor's, master's and doctor of arts degrees in English language and literature. She arrived from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she served as the senior vice chancellor for academic affairs and professor of English. She was previously the dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Washington State University. Early in her career at Wayne State University in Detroit, she was an assistant professor of English and later served as an associate dean for curriculum in the College of Liberal Arts and associate dean for metropolitan programs and summer sessions in the College of Lifelong Learning.

We welcome Dr. Couture to our community and appreciate having this opportunity to meet her. Please join us for this special occasion.

CALENDAR

April 28 (Wednesday) - **Board Planning Meeting**, 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., Picacho Hills Country Club

May 3 (Monday) - **Deadline for Reservations for Lunch with a Leader**. RSVP Sharon Burbano (526-2860). **Reservations are required.**

May 10 (Monday) - 11:30 a.m., **Lunch with a Leader** at Good Samaritan Village, Social Center, Creative Arts Room, 3011 Buena Vida Circle. **Topic: NMSU: Teaching Excellence and National Research in Your Backyard.** Speaker is Dr. Barbara Couture. Lunch is \$8. **Reservation required.**

MARK Your Calendar:

May 15 - LWVNM State Council, Santa Fe

June 11-15 - LWVUS Convention, Atlanta Marriott Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia

Notable Dates:

May 17—Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

The VOTER

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**The League of Women Voters of
Greater Las Cruces**

P.O. Box 8322
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(575) 524-VOTE (8683)
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Vice President & Program
Sharon Burbano

Secretary - Martha Duran

Treasurer - Barbara Goedecke

Director, Membership
Susan Schmutge

Director, Voter Services
Erika Graf-Webster

Nominating Committee
Donna Tate, Chair
Jane Carter, Elected Member

Director, Public Relations
Roberta Gran

Director, Special Projects
Dolores Archuleta

STUDY GROUPS

**Mental Illness Services
in Doña Ana County**
Becky Beckett - 522-8171
Mickey Curtis - 532-5655

**Election Procedures and
Voter Turnout**
Marnie Leverett—522-0347

Metropolitan Court
Marjorie Burr - 522-2528

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The League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces, 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.

President's Message

Beginning a new year offers anticipation of what may come and excitement about plans for the next 12 months. We had a very successful annual meeting. A nice mix of new and seasoned members attended. And the submission of a revised budget afforded some practice with motions and amendments. In the June issue we will publish more biographical information about the new Board members.

We are holding our first planning meeting on April 28, and I look forward to working with everyone. News from that meeting also will be reported in the June issue.



We adopted an exciting program for study and action that focuses on the issues of affordable housing and education. This is an opportunity for our new members to become involved with program and experience a study that leads to consensus. Our seasoned members can sharpen their skills in guiding this effort. We will continue to focus on our ongoing program items as well, and take advocacy action at appropriate times.

This is an important election year, and the League will be involved. We need volunteers to register voters, to help with candidates' forums, and to participate in a fund drive to raise the remaining money we need to publish a *Voters' Guide* before the November General Election and a *Who's Who* afterwards. We also want to focus attention on members by ensuring that new members receive the mentoring they need and seasoned members are involved and receive educational information about issues relevant to the three levels of the League.

It sounds like there is a lot to do, and I'm counting on you to help me make the League year successful.

Bonnie Burn

Lynette Schurdevin Branigan Library Administrator

Marjorie Burr, Committee Member



The library director search committee concluded its work on March 31 when members recommended that Lynette Schurdevin, acting interim director, be named the permanent director. The announcement was made by City Manager Terrence Moore.

The committee members were Ford Ballard, chair, Library Advisory Board; Earl Phillips, recently retired media director, Las Cruces Public Schools, Lori Grumet, director of Public Services, City of Las Cruces, who chaired the Committee; and I, representing the League of Women Voters.

Of the 15 applicants, five met the minimum qualifications for the position. Two withdrew before interviews, three were interviewed by phone, two were then interviewed in person, and Lynette was selected by the Committee.

Congratulations

Annual Meeting Wrap Up

The 41st Annual Meeting of the Greater Las Cruces League convened at Good Samaritan's Social Center on Saturday, April 17, at 9 a.m. Forty members gathered to conduct the annual business of the League. Approximately 10 were new, having been members for a year or less. The group was convivial and questions and new ideas were the norm.

Barbara Myers and Marjorie Burr served as parliamentarians. The nonpartisan policy and the bylaws were readopted without change. A revised proposed operating budget in the amount of \$9,940 and an education fund budget in the amount of \$8,500 were adopted. The fund raising goal for 2010-2011 is \$6,199. The slate of officers and directors submitted by the Nominating Committee was amended to accommodate the withdrawal of Louise Tracey-Hosa from her nomination as Treasurer. The elected leaders are as follows:

For Two Year Terms (2010-2012)

Vice President Program Sharon Burbano
 Secretary Martha Duran
 Director, Voter Services Erika Graf-Webster

To complete One-Year Term (2010-2011)

Treasurer Barbara Goedecke
 Director of Membership Susan Schmutge

One Year Term (2010-2011)

Nominating Committee Chair Donna Tate
 Elected Member Jane Carter

All of the League's positions, including the position on mental illness services in Doña Ana County, were adopted. Additionally, the two recommended new program items for study and action, education and affordable housing, were adopted. None of the non-recommended program items was adopted. Among our current ongoing program studies and committees (see p. 7 Annual Meeting VOTER) all were of equal significance and a priority was not assigned to them. Action will be taken on these as the need arises.

No delegates were identified to attend the LWVUS Convention. Becky Beckett will be one of our two delegates going to LWVNM Council on May 15 in Santa Fe. A second candidate is being sought. Directions to the Board included: (a) meet with an accountant to help the Treasurer produce an income statement and balance sheet; (b) post the League's job descriptions on the web site; and (c) increase the League's involvement with immigration.

The final part of the meeting involved members in a fund raising exercise. Part of the goal was to generate ideas for fund raising and to increase awareness of the need for extra funds during an election year.

Welcome



New Members

Nancy and Ken Hall
 2220 Laguna Dr.
 Las Cruces, 88005
 Tel: 647-3392
 E-mail: nancyhall49@gmail.com

Diane and Michael Lilley
 7024 Raasaf Dr.
 Las Cruces, 88005
 Tel: 526-1526
 E-mail: diane.lilley@gmail.com

Wanda and William Mattiace
 2812 Buena Vida Court
 Las Cruces, 88011
 Tel: 522-1182
 E-mail: williammattiace@yahoo.com

Marie McCallum
 2975 Terrace Dr (#320)
 Las Cruces, 88011
 Tel: 521-9125
 Cell: 405-0503
 E-mail: mariamccallum@gmail.com

Email Correction

Tom Schmutge -
 tschmutge@gmail.com



TIME TO PAY DUES

\$50 - Individual and 1st Household
 \$25 - Additional Household Member

Make Checks Payable to:
 LWV of Greater Las Cruces

Mail to:
 League of Women Voters
 of Greater Las Cruces
 P.O. Box 8322
 Las Cruces, NM 88006-8322

Donations are appreciated.

Climate Change Refresher - *Bonnie Burn, Writer*

Climate change legislation is beginning to percolate to the top of the “to do list” in the U.S. Senate. Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and making alternative energy economically practical are the goals. To remind you of the models being considered, information is offered below.

Cap-and-trade is most often heard in the media, and two bills currently awaiting action in the U.S. Senate (H.R. 2454 and S. 1733) propose using this model in the U.S. In this system, governments determine a cap, the total amount of pollution that may be emitted into the air, and then issue allowances, credits or permits to individual companies. These allowances or credits may be either given away, auctioned, or traded in a market environment. If companies come in under their emission allowances, they may sell their extra allowances to companies that have exceeded their allowances. This model was implemented in Europe in 2005.

Lessons learned from the European experience that can be applied to a U.S. model were (1) “giving away” credits did not encourage companies to invest or innovate, (2) increased cost to consumers occurred, and (3) there was profit taking by some companies. Europe continues to pursue a cap-and-trade, market-based system. Finding a price that is high enough and stable enough (e.g., perhaps mandating a floor price) to encourage industrial investment is its challenge.¹

In the U.S., a cap-and-trade system has been used in the past to control acid rain. This market, however, involved fewer players. On the pro side, cap-and-trade does offer the government flexibility by adjusting allocations between utilities and businesses that are heavily dependent on fossil fuel. On the con side, serious pricing has to be established to make it work. The system would be complicated to implement. Because cap-and-trade would occur in a market environment, the system would be subject to the ups and downs of trading. A derivatives market could result that would involve complex trading negotiations, and a “cap-n-trade bubble” such as the current housing bubble could result. This model also hides the pain of actually investing in new technology and addressing the issue. It pretends that a tax is not being imposed. Systemic change is, in fact, needed.²

Carbon offsets is another method that allows companies to offset their emissions by financing rain forest conservation, making renewable energy investments, and sponsoring other low-carbon projects in developing countries, all of which affect global climate change. Choosing this option delays needed systemic changes and weakens the price of allowances, credits, or permits.³

Cap tax is paid by everyone and is fixed by the government using scientific information about the level of emissions that need to be achieved to protect the climate. All of us leave a carbon footprint, and including everyone seems a more equitable way to reduce emissions and the cost of cleaning up the air. On the con side, many people may just pay the tax as they do now for gasoline, and they may not change their habits (e.g., continuing to purchase gas guzzlers). In reality, new taxes are very difficult to get through Congress. Others argue that it might disadvantage the American economy by making U.S. exports more expensive and less competitive. On the pro side, it is simple, more transparent, and easier to calculate. It cuts across the whole economy. It could easily be adjusted to ease the burden on low-income workers by lowering or eliminating their payroll taxes.⁴

Cap and dividend is a market-based system that offsets the increases in prices felt by the consumer. Under this system, allowances or credits would be auctioned to carbon suppliers (e.g., first sellers of oil, coal, and natural gas). The revenues are given back to the people in the form of dividends rather than being returned to the government. The dividends are distributed equally to everyone, and wire transfers to bank accounts or debit cards could be one method of distribution. Carbon suppliers would pass the cost of allowances on to consumers who would pay in proportion to their individual carbon consumption. This plan is modeled after the Alaska Permanent Fund that pays equal dividends to Alaskan residents from the proceeds generated from state oil leases.⁵ The system is simple to understand and to administer. It treats the air as a common commodity: everyone owns a share. According to Peter Barnes, “It creates a virtuous circle in which how people fare depends on what they do. The more carbon any company or individual burns (directly or indirectly), the more the company or individual pays. Because everyone gets

(Continued on page 5)

Climate Change Refresher *(Continued from page 4)*

the same dividend, people gain if they conserve and lose if they guzzle. This is fair to all and the poor come out ahead because they burn less carbon than other people do.”⁶

The following federal legislation is in progress:

- H.R. 2454, American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (ACES) sponsored by Representatives Waxman and Markey. This bill passed in the U.S. House and was sent to the U.S. Senate for further action.
- S. 1733, Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act sponsored by Senators Kerry and Boxer.
- S. 1462, American Clean Energy Leadership Act of 2009 sponsored by Senator Bingaman.
- S. 2877 CLEAR Act: the Carbon Limits and Energy for America Renewal Act sponsored by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-Wash) and Susan Collins (R-Maine).
- Senators Kerry, Graham and Lieberman are working on separate global warming legislation as yet to be released.

¹ Fairley, Peter, “Carbon Trading on the Cheap,” *Technology Review* (July/August 2009), pp. 72-76.

² Friedman, Thomas L., *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, (2008), pp. 261-262.

³ Fairley, Peter, “Carbon Trading on the Cheap,” *Technology Review* (July/August 2009), pp. 72-76.

⁴ Friedman, Thomas L., *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, (2008), pp. 261-262.

⁵ Barnes, Peter, “Cap and Dividend, Not Trade: Making Polluters Pay, Earth 3.0 (December 2008).

⁶ Ibid

LOOK BACK - Marjorie Burr

If you attended the March 8th lunch at which Dr. Jorge Garcia, utilities director for the City of Las Cruces, spoke, you will be able to answer these questions.

- Does Las Cruces have enough water for the projected population in 2050?
- What sector uses the most water in the Lower Rio Grande region?
- Do we have a facility to reclaim water?
- Can water run uphill?
- Does the wastewater treatment plant on West Amador stink?

The City of Las Cruces has a 40-year water plan finalized in 2008 that assesses water supply and quality, and projects future water demand. At the high estimate of 267,000 population in 2045, there will be a demand for 54,000 acre feet of water. The city currently has water rights to 22,000 acre feet in the Mesilla Bolson and 10,000 acre feet in the Jornada Bolson. The difference of 22,000 acre feet will be made up with the city’s acquisition of water rights (surface and ground water) from developers at the time of development and by a water conservation plan.

The irrigated agriculture sector is the biggest user of water in the region, consuming 90 percent of the supply, while municipal and industrial uses consume seven percent. As water is converted from agriculture to municipal use, some irrigated agriculture will be lost, but at a low conversion rate, the valley will be able to sustain both agriculture and population growth.

(Continued on page 7)

Pinciples to help you think about model design for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

1. The simpler a system is, the more likely it is to work.
2. The fairer a system is, the more likely it is to last.
3. In the future, polluters should pay for the right to pollute.

Peter Barnes

Evaluating Good Policies for reducing greenhouse emissions

1. How effectively do they solve the problem?
2. Whose interest do they serve?
3. What principles do they advance?

Peter Barnes

HEALTH CARE REFORM - Vicki Simons, chair, LWVNM

Following a tumultuous year, Congress finally passed health care insurance reform legislation, the Health Care and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act of 2010. While many proponents of reform who favored single payer or Medicare for all, including the League of Women Voters, were disappointed with the bill, it is a start on reform that can be improved upon in the coming years. What is positive and what is unhelpful about the plan follow:

Positive Parts of the New Legislation:

Effective 6 months after enactment (September 23, 2010):

1. Insurance companies who offer individual policies must accept children regardless of health status. Children will be able to stay on their parents' health plans to age 26.
2. Group health plans and insurance companies will be prohibited from revoking coverage when people become ill and from imposing lifetime limits on benefits.

Effective for the 2010 tax period: Small businesses with average wages under \$50,000 and fewer than 25 employees will be eligible for new tax credits to offset their premium costs. Larger businesses will be eligible in subsequent years.

Effective 90 days after enactment (around June 23, 2010): People with preexisting conditions and who have been uninsured for at least six months will be eligible for subsidized coverage through a national high-risk pool. (New Mexico will need to decide whether to join this national pool.)

Effective in 2010:

1. Medicare will provide \$250 rebates to beneficiaries who reach the doughnut hole in prescription coverage (which happens when beneficiaries, with their plan, have spent \$2,830 on prescriptions). The gap is phased out completely by 2020. Medicare will eliminate cost-sharing for preventive services in Medicare and private plans. In 2011 Medicare beneficiaries will be eligible for a "wellness visit" with no co-pay.
2. Insurance companies are required to report the proportion of premiums that is spent on nonmedical services. Beginning in 2011, companies that spend less than 85% of their

premiums on medical care in the large group market and 80% in the small and individual market will be required to offer rebates to their enrollees. (New Mexico passed a law during the 2010 30-day session that sets an 85% standard for all group policies and a 75% standard for individual policies.)

Other reforms by 2014: There are other insurance market regulations that will go into effect in 2014. For example: prohibiting annual limits on benefits, requiring insurers to accept everyone who applies for coverage (guaranteed issue and renewability), and prohibiting setting premium prices based on health status. (New Mexico passed a law this past session that prohibits setting premium prices based on gender. The gender prohibition is to be phased in and will be completely in effect by 2014.)

Negative Parts of the New Legislation:

Premiums: There is no ability for states or the federal government to control premiums. Keep in mind that Massachusetts, which has already set up a health insurance exchange, has the highest average health insurance family premiums in the nation. (www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/Data-Briefs/2009/Aug/Paying-the-Price-How-Health-Insurance-Premiums-Are-Eating-Up-Middle-Class-Incomes.aspx). In response to the recent dramatic increases in health insurance premiums around the country, President Obama proposed that the federal government be granted the power to determine whether premium increases are justified and, if they are not, to be able to mandate that insurers reduce them. However, that provision is NOT in the new law. All that is required in the new law is that premium increases be reviewed each year to see if they are "reasonable" and that companies justify those increases. Thus, the federal government has no power to control premium increases. That role is still left to the states, and although in theory the states have the authority to control premiums, in actuality they have been unable to do so. The recent Massachusetts effort to disapprove rate increases is raising flags, and it will be interesting to see whether the rate increase denials hold up in court. (For more information, see www.nytimes.com/2010/04/02/health/policy/02rates.html?emc=tnt&tntemail0=y).

(Continued on page 7)

Health Care Reform *(Continued from page 6)*

The most troubling part of the new law is the one-size-fits-all insurance exchange requirement. By 2014 the national law requires the following:

1. All the uninsured, with the exception of those eligible for public programs, must purchase private insurance.
2. Every state must set up a health insurance exchange (an entity that will offer private insurance policies to the uninsured, the self-employed, and small businesses with up to 100 employees). This, in essence, is the Massachusetts model.
3. Federal subsidies will be available to help these individuals purchase private insurance through the state insurance exchange.

In sum, taxpayers are footing the bill so private insurers can get more customers without any premium price controls.

No exceptions until 2017:

The national law does include waiver language (thanks to grassroots efforts of Health Security for New Mexicans and reform groups in other states) that allows states to set up something other than the health insurance exchange. There are clear criteria that would have to be met to qualify for a waiver, so no state could be granted a waiver and then not engage in serious health care reform.

HOWEVER, states cannot request a waiver until 2017.

Thus, states will have to develop and invest in a health insurance exchange and wait three more years to persuade the US Department of Health and Human Services that there are alternatives that will control costs more effectively and cover even more people than the national plan expects to cover.

Why shouldn't states be allowed to experiment with alternatives rather than be forced into a Massachusetts-type approach? States like California, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and New Mexico have come up with viable alternatives to this insurance model. The Health Security for New Mexicans Act is an alternative plan that has been endorsed by League of Women Voters of New Mexico. The effort in the near future will be to convince Congress to remove the 2017 date. Remember, states have always been innovators for change.

Source: This information primarily comes from the Commonwealth Fund. For more details, visit www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/Other/2010/Timeline-for-Health-Care-Reform-Implementation.aspx

Look Back—Water *(Continued from page 5)*

Dr. Garcia said, "Increasing efficient use is the least expensive way to enhance water supplies." The goal of the City's initial water conservation effort was to reduce water use by five percent between 2005 and 2010, but the actual reduction has been 9.7 percent through 2008, almost double the anticipated reduction. A ten-percent reduction means a reduction of 20 gallons per consumer per day.

The water reclamation facility on the East Mesa has recently been completed at a cost of \$9 million. The tertiary treated water from it will be used to irrigate landscapes, golf courses and medians, offsetting fresh water demands. On the East Mesa where the Jornada Bolson is a mined basin and is more limited than the Mesilla Bolson, the city is pumping water up the hill to storage facilities to supplement the water available from the aquifer there.

With the recent expansion and renovation of the wastewater treatment plant on West Amador, the "stink" has been eliminated. What your nose is detecting is the aroma from the piles of sludge from the wastewater treatment plant. Sludge/compost is a free resource used by landscapers and farmers. The sludge will be transported to an area more out of the range of people.

KNOW YOUR STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT - Bonnie Burn & Marjorie Burr, Co-Chairs

We met with Adrian Edwards, M.D., president, Academy for Learning in Retirement (ALR) and Mary Paulson, member of the Curriculum Committee, in the summer of 2009, and inquired about collaboration in a government course. During March 2010, Spring Term, the course was presented on March 15, 17, 22, and 24. It was an educational, interesting experience that attracted a total of 300 people for the four 1-1/2 hour sessions. It is impossible to include all of the information that was presented, so a brief summary and introduction of speakers follows.



Jess Williams, public information director, Doña Ana County, opened the first session with a quiz about county government—24 multiple choice questions. This was an entertaining method for imparting fairly “dry” information. His job requires that he orient all new county employees, so his acquired experience was evident. We had lots of laughs that morning, but came to understand the size, operations, and obligations of our county government. Did you know that the County owns an airport located in Santa Teresa that alleviates traffic from the El Paso airport by accepting cargo planes? Is your street sign red or green? Red means privately owned, you maintain it; green means county owned, county maintains.

An overview of the City of Las Cruces government was presented by city manager, Terrence Moore. A brief history of the evolution of the council-manager model of government, along with a short presentation of the city’s organization chart, details of the budget process and a slide presentation that updated all of the ongoing projects gave us new insights into the vitality of city government.



The state portion of the course was broken into two separate sessions: Jose Garcia, Ph.D., Department of Government, NMSU, gave an overview of state government including the judicial system, taxes, the two-party system and current issues (e.g., corruption and budget shortfalls). Two focal points, however, were the State Constitution that provides for independently elected officers (e.g., a governor,

attorney general, treasurer, and many agencies). Direct lines of control, communication, and policy coordination do not always exist. The second interesting point is the news media. The Albuquerque media market covers 45% of the state. In southern New Mexico, there is no single market. El Paso media covers southern New Mexico, and local political news is sometimes omitted. The predominant Hispanic population has no unified presence in the media. Nationally, local news is left out. In the current markets where reporting is shifting from in-depth to byte-sized, and bloggers, twitters, and other forms of new electronic media are taking hold, there is no money for paying reporters to carry out in-depth reporting. All of this affects the quality of government.



The state budget process and achieving funding for legislation that passes the hurdles of the legislature were the focus for Ruth Hoffman, director, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry, Santa Fe. She described the components of the budget, outlined the budget cycle, explained the executive and legislative budget formation, identified the various committees in the House and Senate that are involved with the budget, and gave details about two significant bills: HB1 – Feed Bill that pays the expenses for a legislative session, and HB2 that includes all of the House Appropriation and Finance Committee (HAFC) recommendations for general funding.



At the end of the four sessions, we came away with a broad overview of government in New Mexico. Two recommended books for further education are:

1. *Governing New Mexico*, edited by F. Chris Garcia, Paul L. Hairs, Gilbert K. St. Clair, and Kim Seckler, 2006, New Mexico Press, 314 pages, paperback.
2. *Citizen’s Guide to the New Mexico State Budget*, New Mexico Voices for Children, (2008), 33 pages.

Democracy is not a spectator sport!

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Program: Summary Joint Las Cruces City and Dona Ana County Work Session - April 15, 2010

Bob Burn, Reporting

The purpose of the PACE program is to promote installation of small-scale, renewable energy systems on individual homes with the objective of long-term energy savings for home owners and promoting growth in local clean-energy businesses.

The enabling legislation for the PACE program is New Mexico Senate bill 647, Renewable Energy Finance Districts (REFD) sponsored by Senator Peter Wirth (D-Santa Fe). Under the REFD bill, financing districts to support renewable energy system installations can be established throughout the state. In our area, the city and county believe that a single, county-wide district would be administratively and financially most efficient. While the REFD would be administered by the county, it is a separate entity from the city and county governments.

Once the county establishes the program, a property owner who wishes to install a renewable energy system such as photovoltaic electric panels obtains a quote from a supplier/installer. The home owner applies to the county for financing. An REFD board, established by the county, reviews the application and, if it is satisfactory, approves it. The approved homeowner's property is added to the county's REFD. The property owner obtains a final contract with the supplier/installer which he or she returns to the county with a request for a loan. Under Senate bill 647, the REFD records a notice of special tax lien on the homeowner's property for the amount of the loan. The REFD issues a bond for the amount of the loan, and the bond is purchased by an investor that may be an individual, a bank, or any other financial institution. Once the bond is purchased, the REFD issues funds to the homeowner for purchase of the renewable energy system. The county levies the special tax on the homeowner that is paid annually along with property taxes, and the amount of the special tax is passed along to the bond holder as part of repayment.

The cost to the homeowner is the amount of the basic loan, some administrative costs to the county for managing the REFD program, and interest paid to the bond holder. It is anticipated that repayment will span 20-25 years. If a homeowner sells his or

her home, the repayment of the loan is passed on to the new owner who will benefit for the savings associated with the renewable energy system. If a homeowner defaults on repayment of the loan, the onus falls on the REFD and bond holder, not the city or county because the REFD is an autonomous district that is totally independent from city or county government.

Homeowner savings under an REFD program could be significant. First are the tax credits: federal, 30% of system cost and state, 10%. It is estimated the homeowner savings from reduced electric bills for a photovoltaic panel system will equal the annual loan payment if the annual interest rate on the bond is 7.7%. So, an interest rate below 7.7% will save the homeowner money. Finally, any excess electricity generated by the system will automatically be sold back to El Paso Electric at a very favorable rate of 12 cents per kilowatt-hour.

At the joint meeting, councilors and commissioners directed staff to introduce an ordinance to form the District in the very near future. No funding was identified. The ordinance to form the district will cost very little to draft—the real expenditures are for bond counsel, when the bonds are issued and applications accepted. Before applications from property owners may be accepted, grant money or methods to significantly reduce start up costs will have to be found.

(Source: PowerPoint presentation by Chuck McMahon, director, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Dona Ana County, and Tom Schuster, Sustainability Officer, City of Las Cruces, Joint Meeting of City of Las Cruces Council and Dona Ana County Commissioners, April 15, 2010, City of Las Cruces Council Chambers.)



LEAGUE OBSERVER REPORTS

The League's Observer Corps enables greater coverage and information gathering, can provide early warning of upcoming issues of concern, can increase League's visibility, and can assist in networking with other groups. We appreciate the reports that are submitted by Observers. Following the League practice of publishing nonpartisan, objective reports, the information submitted may be edited for content and brevity.

Las Cruces School Board Meeting - February 23, 2010, 6:30 p.m. - Nancy Phillips, Observer

President Connie Phillips called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. All members of the Board were present. Minutes of the January 19 Board meeting and the work session were approved unanimously. President Phillips reported that no action was taken at the closed session on personnel matters. She also reported that Superintendent Rounds' contract had been continued and that the Board appreciated his refusal of a 2.3% raise in salary in these difficult economic times.

Public Input: Sam Bone, president of the local NAACP, expressed concern over the fact that the schools had not honored Black History month with any special instruction or acknowledgement. He is concerned that minority students are not treated equally.

Superintendent's Report

1. Kim O'Byrne presented a group of students from Mayfield High School who demonstrated parliamentary procedure by taking the seats of School Board members and performing a mock Board meeting.
2. Leslie Cervantes reported on LCPS Foundation Teacher Grants. This year, \$20,000 in grants were awarded to teachers, ranging from books to a greenhouse at Fairacres. The Foundation is back on track financially. Other projects underway include a new SUV for Special Ed students at Mayfield, exercise equipment for all middle schools and sending one student to Space Camp in the Alabama NASA facility.
3. Legislature session that Mr. Rounds attended in Santa Fe: Many bills were passed including a) requiring health education and financial literacy for graduation, b) establishing an Hispanic education office, c) establishing intervention for students with dyslexia, d) using an alternative

curriculum for student teachers, and e) identifying a committee to oversee expenditures of federal funds. Bills that were NOT passed include the budget: there is not enough money to follow laws mandated by the State and there is a \$9.3 million loss to schools in New Mexico. Mr. Rounds was told to "go back to the basics," just teach the three Rs, no athletics, fine arts or Future Farmers of America. He urged the public to contact legislators, asking them to invest in kids, especially since that is a constitutional mandate.

4. All construction projects are essentially on schedule. There were some delays caused by bad weather.
5. The Board approved two names out of a possible eight for the new elementary school to be placed on the ballot for voters from that district: J. Paul Taylor and Monte Vista. Voters will also be able to write in other names of their choice.

I left the meeting at 8:30.

Las Cruces School Board Meeting - March 16, 2010, 6:30 p.m. - Pat Pedersen Observer

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m. Present were members Chuck Davis, Maria Flores, Dr. Bonnie Votaw, Dr. Connie Phillips, and Stan Rounds, superintendent. Serena Schoop was absent.

After the initial preliminaries, a representative from the White Sands Missile Range read a statement that the post appreciates the special attention to the students of deployed military personnel who have many difficulties adjusting to their parents' absences, and its effects on their school performance.

Superintendent's Report:

1. Budget: Cuts to the school budget are still being discussed, and won't be known until later. He will return to Santa Fe to attend any additional special sessions regarding school budget issues.

2. A college preparatory high school will be built on the grounds of NMSU. It will be a cooperative effort between the university and the Las Cruces school system. It will consist of five buildings and have a lease/purchase option from the university. Road improvements to the facility location are already underway.

There was a discussion of shared facilities between the school district and the public. Fees were discussed, including the need for groups to have their own insurance to use the school facilities.

A remodeling report was read by Gloria Martinez, including a report on three new schools under construction. The new elementary school is 60% complete, but the new middle school is only 10% complete.

Much time was spent on the issue of the name for the new elementary school. School personnel and the public requested that the name of the school be "Monte Vista" Elementary school. Chuck Davis stated he wished to honor J. Paul Taylor by naming the school after him. After much discussion it was decided to find another school, perhaps in Mesilla to name after J. Paul Taylor, and the new school will be named Monte Vista.

There was a brief discussion led by Tracie O'Hara about the school satisfaction survey which is mailed to all parents and guardians of students around the end of the school year. The normal return rate for the survey is 50%. The state requires these to be sent, returned, and the results tabulated.

At a May 25th raffle, there will be another car giveaway to eligible high school students who have 90% attendance records.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

NMSU Regents Board Meeting April 1, 2010 - John Lazaruk, Observer

An increase in tuition (8%), meal plan (3%), and parking permits (\$3.50 to help fund maintenance) was approved. The regents approved various committee assignments. Next meeting is Friday, May 7, NMSU Educational Services Building.

City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County Commissioners - April 15, 2010

Bonnie Burn, Observer

Led by David Weir, CLC Community Development Director, and Chuck McMahon, DAC Community Development Director, this joint work session focused on the latest draft regional plan documents received from the peter j. smith, inc., consultants, in February 2010. Focus on the city and county comprehensive plans will resume once the regional documents are farther along.

Goals for the meeting were to:

- gather additional comments
- share the Table of Contents and to receive direction.
- review and adopt vision and values statements.
- reactivate and expand to 40 members the Advisory Committee and identify members.
- adopt a milestone calendar and meeting schedule to move the document to final adoption.

The consultant's work is completed. The councilors and commissioners were assured that their comments presented at the January 14 work session were incorporated into the documents prepared by staff. Three options for a vision statement were presented. A milestone calendar was reviewed that shows a completion date, March or April 2011, for the regional plan documents. A discussion about the Advisory Committee and its membership was offered.

Staff were directed to shorten, but not act in haste, the length of anticipated time for conclusion. As the meeting drew to an end, councilors and commissioners adopted Option 3 of the Vision Statement:

"We envision a future that respects and balances the natural environment with new economic opportunities and addresses our unique historical and cultural connection."

Also, staff were asked to clarify several of the Guiding Principles (e.g., network should be clarified to relate to transportation). Praise for the reorganization of the Table of Contents was expressed.

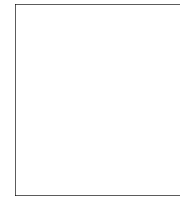
The final draft documents offered by the consultant are on the City's web site.



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