



## **Op Ed: Perspectives on the NM Legislative Session March 2022**

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan organization, monitors the progress of bills on selected topics as they move through the legislature. This year the League advocated for topics such as voting rights, election security, public education, natural resources, budget and tax reform, and transparency. Advocacy occurs only when the League has adopted a position after study and consensus on the part of members.

Public education has long been a focus of the League, so approval by both houses of increases in pay rates for public school teachers is noteworthy. This legislation adds to the tools available to school districts in addressing serious shortages of personnel as a result of pandemic-fueled stress and retirements. In addition, opportunity scholarships will provide free tuition and fees at any of New Mexico's public post-secondary institutions for qualified residents, contributing to their quality of life, as well as economic success.

In making progress on the lack of sufficient affordable housing in the state and in our community, the League was heartened by passage of recurring funding for the state's Housing Trust Fund. Other actions supported by the League were the interest cap on certain loans, establishment of an Attorney General's Office for Missing Indigenous Persons, and the solar market and child tax credit. The state budget, as the main focus of the session, was also monitored by League members. The League's goal was to avoid cuts in recurring revenues until the legislature is prepared to address tax reform.

The League has supported proposals for a constitutional amendment that would move responsibility for decennial redistricting from the legislature to an independent commission. In 2021, a Citizens Redistricting Committee made recommendations to the legislature concerning new districts but, under the Constitution, legislators had ultimate authority to draw the district boundaries – and they made use of it. While the proposal for a Constitutional amendment did not pass, discussion was initiated when the subject was fresh in the minds of legislators and the public. The call for an independent commission reflects concerns about the conflict of interest that arises when legislators decide what their districts should look like – choosing their voters rather than letting the voters choose their representatives. Redistricting issues may arise at the county level as well and may be addressed by future legislation.

Disappointments included procedural maneuvers making it difficult to provide public input. The original hydrogen hub bill, supported by the Governor and opposed by many environmental groups, was heard in several committees and then replaced by so-called "dummy bills." The practice of introducing generic bills, with titles such as "Peace, Health, Safety, or Welfare" and no content before the deadline for submission of bills, is intended to allow for "emergency" measures. However, these types of bills often become a plan to circumvent the public's right to know and understand what is under consideration. Lack of knowledge inhibits informed action and diminishes public trust. The League thanks our legislators for the work they do and hopes they will strive to strengthen transparency for all proposed legislation and procedures.

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