

LWVCNM Observer's Report

Sandoval County Commission regular meeting

September 27, 2023

Mary Templeton, observer (by video recording)

Present: David Heil (Chair), Michael Meek (Vice Chair, video), Katherine Bruch, Jay Block, Joshua Jones

Description of Issues Relevant to the League

No agenda items of interest to the League were taken up in this meeting.

Additional Comments

Announcements (Procedure)

The Chair reminded those present that County property may not be used for campaigning. The County Ethics Ordinance states that "public servants shall not use any County property or resource for any political activity for the benefits of any campaign for elected office or any political organization.

Regarding discussion in commission meetings, "unless comments are specifically along the lines of, 'This is who I am; I have done all these good things for the community; Vote for me' or 'Don't vote for me,' speakers are voicing opinions during the part of the meeting expressly set aside for that purpose. Attempting to reign in content that is at its core political speech has first amendment implications. However, the chair is given a great deal of latitude. In behaviors such as personal attacks or commissioners or employees or commission addressing other members of the Board directly, (because, by the way, all communication between the commission and other commissioners must come through the Chair), the Chair will gavel down such comments."

Public Comment

Seven of 15 speakers commented on the vote regarding support of the Referendum Project taken in the September 13, 2023 meeting.

Commissioners Discussion

The Chair spoke in support of the proposed federal plan to permanently protect the Buffalo Tract from new oil drilling and mining for 50 years. This 4000-acre tract near Placitas is sacred to the Santa Ana and San Felipe Pueblos, a site of archeological significance, and a popular area

for outdoor recreation. There has been widespread community support for the ban. One current concern is with gravel mining on this land - the Chair has been working with others to help an active gravel mining company relocate from the Buffalo Tract to another area.

As background, a 90-day public comment period for this proposed plan began on September 18th. For more about this plan, see <https://www.heinrich.senate.gov/newsroom/in-the-news/new-plan-will-protect-buffalo-tract-near-placitas-from-mining>.

Sandoval County Commission Website

<https://www.sandovalcountynm.gov/commission/>