

LWVAZ News You Need to Know Nov. 9, 2015



News You Need To Know

The League of Women Voters of Arizona is the state organization for the 5 Leagues in Arizona.

This is our monthly newsletter where you can find the News You Need To Know about the League of Women Voters in Arizona.

Arizona School Money COMPROMISE

After weeks and months of proposals to aid the lack of adequate funding for Arizona Schools from the Arizona Legislature, a “compromise” was arrived at and passed on October 29th by the Legislature.

“Governor Ducey called the lawmakers into a special session Oct. 28 to vote on a settlement agreement worked out between schools and the Legislature to end the 5 years of litigation over K-12 education funding.” AZ Capitol Times

The Legislature has set May 2016 for a Special Election to have the Voters approve several Propositions. We have not seen the wording at this time. However the League of Women Voters of Arizona Board will study the propositions and take a Pro or Con or No position on the Propositions before the Special Election.

The COMPROMISE according to the Arizona Capitol Times:

SCHOOLS Get

- Guarantee to get money and get it sooner.

Background: Arizona Appellate court ruled the Legislature should pay the \$331 million owed the schools. If schools won their lawsuit, it would probably take years for the appeals.

Republicans lawmakers had argued the courts could not force the legislature, and that they could ignore a ruling. (That source of money in contest came from a 2000 Voter Approved Proposition 301 that provided “a state sales tax dedicated to education plus mandated cost of living increases for school budgets. The sales

tax is to end in 2021).

Current proposals

“Janice Palmer, Arizona School Boards Association, plaintiff in the lawsuit, said that it is “a partial payment,” as the deal would reset the base level of education funding, to 72% of what a court ruled it should be set at. Thus a partial payment and it is stated to get back to full inflation funding in 2 years.

The deal offers \$3.5 billion of the \$3.8 billion lawmakers would owe over the next decade if the Maricopa Judge’s ruling held on appeal.

- **Guaranteed funding for 10 years.**

Schools agreed to drop the part of the lawsuit where schools had argued they were owed \$1.3 billion in back payments.

The Legislature would guarantee another \$50 million in supplemental funding per year for five (5) years and \$75 million per year for the following five (5) years. (Totals \$625 million in 10 years—but not subject to inflationary increases.)

THE STATE Gets:

- **Economic triggers**

The Legislature has the option to temporarily suspend the annual inflationary payments owed the schools if sales tax and employment growth for a calendar year are below 2%, but still above 1%, for the next fiscal year. If both metrics fall below 1%, a one-year halt to the inflation funding is mandatory. This would prevent school districts from filing suit in response to budget cuts.

- **Lawmakers saved from future litigation**

If there is a suspension of the inflation funding for a year, the Legislature will not have to repay it when economic conditions improve. (Stated to be consolation to Republican lawmakers for what the Court had previously ruled.)

- **Aggregate triggers**

The lawmakers can make some cuts to K-12, if education spending comprises at least 49% of general fund spending. They can reduce education funding by the amount of the previous year’s inflation payment. If K-12 becomes 50% of budget, they can reduce education spending by twice that amount.

- **No back payments to schools**

State does not have to pay the \$1.3 billion in back payments that schools argued they were owed.

- **Ending high costs of litigation**

Nor make payments higher if they lost the court appeals.

What Voters will have to consider?

For Schools that don't get all the money subject to inflation increases, have a reset on the base funding level, do not get \$1.3 billion in back payments, but do get money in 2016.

Critics state that the amount of money will not make a major difference in the quality of education.

The State of Arizona is agreeing to pay substantial sums of money that could be less than possible with future court rulings.

Where does the money come from?

Critics see the deal as raiding the State Endowment Land Trust.

The Compromise is supported by the Arizona School Board Association and the Arizona Education Association as it supplies immediate money for schools.

State Treasurer Jeff DeWit has stated that the plan using ENDOWMENT LAND TRUST FUND proceeds is irresponsible and likely illegal.

DeWit contends that the State has enough money in the bank to finance the deal.

The major share of the 10-year COMPROMISE comes from boosting the distribution from the Endowment Land Trust Fund from the current 2.5 percent of the value of the fund (about \$87 million a year to \$6.9 million 10 years.)

The fund is currently worth about \$5 billion, is estimated to be worth \$9.6 billion in 2026, but with a heavier withdrawal for a decade would be worth around \$6.5 billion.

What happens in 2026 for school funding? And the following years?

Changes in the Land Endowment Trust Fund distribution need 1) VOTER APPROVAL and 2) Congressional approval. There is disagreement regarding this Congressional approval and lawsuits may follow, according to DeWit.

Land Trust Funds for Schools

A review on the Arizona Land Trust tells us that in 1912, when Arizona became a state, the federal government gave land to Arizona. The intent of the land was that it was to be managed for benefit of public institutions. 8.1 million of the total 9.2 million acres of the land is to benefit K-12 education.

Two kinds of revenue annually for schools and other beneficiaries:

- Revenues from lease and fee revenues from State Land Department
- Revenues from earnings on investments managed by the State Treasurer

In 2014, the total Land Trust funds for schools was \$125.1 million in three ways:
1) debt service for school facilities,
2) basic state aid for schools (replaces general fund dollars),
3) Classroom Site Fund for teacher pay and classroom size reduction.

The Trust was designed to be a permanent asset.



LWVAZ VISIBILITY

On October 24th and January 29-31, Metro Phoenix and Northwest Maricopa County Leaguers staffed several tables for LWVAZ in the Greater Phoenix area. at the Support Our Schools Education Expo at Talking Stick Stadium, where students from public schools all over Arizona brought projects.

Judy Levine and crew including Lillian Barker, Ann Brevard, Cynthia Magazine, David Januez and Sue .

- Barbara Robertson (MP) met the new AZ Dept. of Education Director of K-12 Social Studies Tammy Waller when she staffed at table at Caesar Chavez High School for the Arizona Council of Social Studies.
- Bonnie Saunders (NWMC) and her group staffed tables at 3 sessions of the AAUW, ASU-West, LWVAZ 's "IS AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AT RISK" Conference and Forum where about 20 Leaguers attended the Sat. 31st session.

DEMOCRACY AT RISK CONFERENCE

Dept. of Ed. Tammy Waller and Getting Voter Info Early! with Bonnie Saunders (NWMC), Barbara Robertson (MP), Judy Levine (MP), Assoc. Prof. Eduardo Pagan, and Shirley Sandelands, President of LWVAZ.

Many local leagues staff tables, provide speakers and serve on panels. We are happy that we are providing Voter Information throughout the state of Arizona.



Arizona Official Pushing to Open Uranium Mines near Grand Canyon

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich continues to speak in support of the National Mining Association Case filed against the federal government, 2012, to allow new uranium mining on a million acres surrounding the Grand Canyon.

In 2012, the federal government put a stop to new mines in the area. Arizona and several other states joined the mining association, 250 companies, who want the court to strike down the Northern Arizona Withdrawal, an order Interior Secretary Ken Salazar signed that put a hold on new mining claims in the area. Pre-existing mines continue to operate for the next 20 years.

The U.S. District Court for Arizona upheld the order in 2014 and the mining association appealed.

Supporting the Mining Asso. Brnovich stated “Once we as a state cede that control to the federal government, we’re never going to get it back. There is nothing more permanent than a temporary government program.”

Mining facts in the Arizona Strip, the northern area of the state, as quoted from Curtis Spicer, Cronkite News:

- A newly reopened Canyon Mine, six miles from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, holds 1.63 million pounds of uranium recently valued at about 565 per pound, according to projections from Fission Uranium Corp.
- Brnovich said the Navajo and other tribes’ economies depend on the industry. (energy production and mining)
- Bureau of Land Management predicted that if the government does not pass new regulations, about 728 uranium exploration projects, 30 uranium mines, 317,505 ore haul trips and 22.4 miles of new roads and power lines with about 1,321 acres of disturbed landscape would occur in the Grand Canyon region over the next 20 years.

- The Havasupai Tribe, whose boundaries border the Grand Canyon, and several environmental groups support the Department of the Interior and Grand Canyon Trust in their fight against the mining interests.
- An Environmental Protection Agency report on uranium contamination in the Navajo Nation said companies extracted nearly 4 million tons of uranium ore from Navajo lands between 1944 and 1986. Companies abandoned about 500 uranium mines and left water sources with elevated levels of radiation.
- According to EPA and U.S. Geological Survey estimates, taxpayers already have paid \$15 million to contain the pollution caused by the Orphan Mine on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and now a Superfund site.
- Katie Davis of the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit that advocates for protecting the environment and endangered species said the conversation of how the country uses energy needs to change.. Davis claims “Public officials don’t support the majority of people in Arizona.
- The League of Women Voters of the United States policy “Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest....Promote policies that manage land as a finite resource that incorporate principles of stewardship.”



California Automatic Voter Registration
With Gov. Jerry Brown’s signature

California has become:

The second state to adopt automatic registration, an exciting reform that is gaining momentum across the country.

State officials estimate that with approximately 6.6 million eligible, but unregistered voters, the law could dramatically boost California’s registration rate, which ranked 38th in the country in 2012.

California’s legislature is the third to pass automatic registration, based on a Brennan Center proposal.

Eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are registered to vote, unless they decline, and agencies transfer voter-registration information electronically to election officials. By giving voters the opportunity to decline in person during their DMV interactions, California's law will create a seamless, paperless process that will be more convenient and less error-prone for voters, DMV staff, and election officials.

From: The Brennan Center for

Justice, October 12, 2015

A long list of organizations, including the LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA urged Governor Brown to sign the bill. The law takes place January 1, 2016. We have heard of no "momentum" for this action in Arizona!



Arizona's Independent Redistricting Commission

The U.S. Supreme Court has set December 8, 2015 to hear the Arizona Republican suit asking that they void the state's current legislative redistricting plan established by the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC).

The suit is based on "population differences" among the 30 legislative districts that were created by the IRC in 2011. Secretary Michele Reagan filed her own brief stating the IRC acted unconstitutionally.

If the court rules with the Arizona Republicans it will have to redraw the entire state's legislative districts. The Republicans have a majority of 17 to 13 in the Senate and 36-24 in the House. The IRC was created by a 2000 voter-approved law.

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ARIZONA GIVES DAY will be April 5, 2015. LWVAZEF will register and participate in 2016 for th

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