

Hello from COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh Egypt! It has been an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to represent the League of Women Voters of the United States, and to join in the activities and issues at this world climate conference. This is the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP) convened to discuss and find solutions for the climate crisis that we are now living. The Paris agreement aimed to reduce carbon emissions with a goal of well below 2.0 degrees Celsius rise in temperature from preindustrial temperatures and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The focus is now on reducing dependency on and use of fossil fuels and building sustainable renewable energy sources as a replacement. The goal is to strengthen countries' ability to deal with the impacts of climate change and support them in their efforts.

Listening to multiple perspectives on the issues and learning about new issues, and most importantly, solutions to the issues, was fascinating. Networking with the health-focused community based on my interest and commitment to healthy environments as a nurse and following US politics in my role as the Chief UN Observer for the LWV by joining briefings by groups of US mayors representing healthy cities and a briefing by the US Department of Energy Secretary Granholm, as well as following the daily the progress in negotiations for an outcome document was both energizing and overwhelming. I had the opportunity to join a focused meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur Neem Alsaleem for Violence Against Women and Girls.

Navigating the logistics of COP was challenging for a first-time attendee. However I feel I made a significant impact with participation and conversations. One day I joined a health community protest "1.5 to Survive" where we role-played giving CPR to our planet Earth. I advanced my video communication and reporting skills by doing short interviews of our League members who were with me and interviews with people from at least ten different parts of the world asking what message they wanted to send from COP27. In my role as an elected Director on the Global NGO Executive Committee at the UN, I think these interviews will promote inclusivity in our work and our perspectives. I look forward to sharing my stories with you in key take aways from the days I attended in person. For me, the pre-work started with the UNGA in September where I attended as many climate-related events as possible to gain insight and make contacts with others who were attending COP. I arrived for week 2 of COP. My report will begin there.

Day 8:(11/14/22) the themes for today are Gender and Water. I attended a panel discussion with US mayors from Coalition of Cities of Climate Mayors, "Cities Prepare for Climate Migration." The speakers were from the Conference of Mayors USA and the Climate Migration Council. The mayors gave highlights of challenges and solutions from their cities which included welcoming environments and the need for inclusive early warning systems for disaster risk reduction and evacuation strategies. In 2021, 22 Million people were displaced according to the Climate Migration Council. Are these climate refugees to be given the same consideration as other refugees? Anticipate the need for services as people experience mental health grief from climate migration. The question was raised: What can the federal and state government do to assist with migration? The consensus among the mayors was for the government to stay out of it and let cities do their own thing without government oversight as each solution is best

decided locally. Reflecting on the themes of the day, gender and water, I spent some time in the health pavilion and discovered a new perspective on "connecting the dots" between mental health and a decreasing food supply as fertility and water to grow plants is diminishing with climate change. I considered the connection between climate disasters and mental health due to loss of land, homes and livelihood, but did not consider the threat of starvation that is a mental health stressor for many, especially those in the global South. Women and girls are more vulnerable to violence and premature births when temperatures rise and water is scarce, therefore climate change disproportionately affects them. Women and girls face increased violence in areas affected by climate disasters and are disadvantaged when it comes to crucial issues such as land rights and receiving investments and aid. Mary Robinson, the first female president of Ireland, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002, spoke about the value of female leadership. There was a call from Kids First to adopt the new WHO guidelines related to air pollution and have the equal voice of women as decision makers and health policymakers. Robinson said "Women, where are they?" noting that only 72 out of 193 countries sent women in their negotiating delegations. She called for putting women in the lead for adaptation and mitigation because 90 million women will be food starved by 2050 in Africa. Robinson is the chair of the Elders, a group started to get more women into leadership positions with gender parity at the highest levels. She chose the dandelion as its symbol to spread the message about the urgency of women's leadership because it grows on all 7 continents and it is impossible get rid of it. She closed calling for 3 actions: Climate Carbon, (transparent knowledge of the carbon footprint of everything), green hydrogen, and elevating the voice of women. I ended my day by meeting one of our LWVUS delegates, Kimberly, for dinner and a recap of the day's events.

Day 9: (11/15/22) the themes for today are ACE and Civil Society, and Energy. What is ACE? ACE is the Action for Climate Empowerment, an initiative that aims to empower all members of society, including children and youth, to engage in climate action through the six ACE elements: climate change education and public awareness, training, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation on these issues. I learned about superhot rock energy that is a visionary geothermal technology that gathers heat from deep in the Earth to power low-carbon electricity production and clean hydrogen generation (green hydrogen). It can serve as an affordable, always-on clean energy source, and it has the potential to transition knowledge, expertise and technologies from oil and gas into clean energy jobs. Superhot rock has low land use requirements, is inexhaustible and extreme weather resistant, and can increase energy security by providing a local source of abundant, clean firm power. Therefore, it is a viable solution to decarbonization. The biggest obstacle in the developing world is the cost of transitioning to renewable energy.

I was able to meet with UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Neem Alsalem, who is originally from Jordan. She was a very good listener as she sat outside in the grass with us, one circle of humanity caring for each other. She was very humble, asking what she could do for members of the group and explaining the process that has to happen from the time an incident is reported to her till she intervenes with the government cited to mitigate the situation. In addition, I attended a briefing with US Department of Energy Secretary Granholm focused on the Inflation Reduction Act, renewable energy and just transition.

The US Center hosted “A Matter of SCALE: Subnational Action and Multi-level Governance for Climate Ambition” focused on the essential role of subnational action at the city and state level. A new USG led partnership, Subnational Climate Action Leaders Exchange (SCALE), supports cities and states in developing and implementing net-zero climate resilient roadmaps. With support from the U.S., the African Adaptation Initiative launched its new Food Security Accelerator. It will dramatically accelerate private sector investments in climate resilient food security in Africa.

I attended a meeting of observers interested in health policy and healthy environments, where I learned that there was a campaign on to include the human right to healthy environments in the outcomes document, and some discussion in the negotiations to eliminate the health language. The group organized a protest for the following day to draw attention to the health risks that accompany climate change with the motto “1.5 to Survive.” In the finale of the dramatic role play by nurses and doctors who identified themselves and the reasons they came to COP as advocates for their patients who are dying of chronic diseases and unmitigated climate disasters, the team performed CPR on the planet. Since I am writing this retrospectively, and I participated in the protest that drew much needed media coverage, I can say it was very powerful in getting this issue into the final outcome document and organizing the health policy group. I was interviewed for a podcast by Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments and for an article about nurses attending COP to be published by the International Council of Nurses. I was able to meet LWVUS delegates Susana and Kathleen for a brief conversation about the events of the day.

Day 10: (11/16/22) the theme for today is Biodiversity. Today I was more comfortable getting around and we were able to meet the other delegates for LWVUS who were at COP for week 2: Lee, Shiva, Susana and myself. I had the idea to make short videos of us asking name, hometown, area of expertise, and what message the person wanted to send from COP 27? I will send these along so you can meet some of our climate action advocates from LWVUS. We are an impressive group with diverse reasons for climate advocacy. I attended a presentation on digital technology, noting that consumers have a choice about what they purchase, not just the best price, but from climate conscious companies, to take a stand about values and actions. Internet sales and advertising were a focus of the talk, with emphasis on the fact that a company like Amazon knows about the origins and production of items they sell but limit the consumer’s access to the same knowledge to make informed decisions.

Protecting biodiversity is protecting the Paris Agreement. There is no viable route to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius without urgently protecting nature. If we invest in nature and its infrastructure, forests, coral reefs, mangroves, coastal forests, we can help to preserve the fragile ecosystems that are being destroyed by rising temperatures. The loss of forests, draining of wetlands, and other environmental degradation contribute to climate change. Restoring ecosystems could contribute to lowering annual greenhouse gas emissions. If we invest in nature’s infrastructure, forests, coral reefs, and mangroves, it protects us from high storms. It provides a habitat for species, but also stores carbon, so has both mitigation and adaptation aspects. 15 of 17 countries with the largest biodiversity are in the global South. Even at 1.5 C degrees of warming, 70 to 90 % of all coral reefs will be lost. The number jumps to 99 % if our planet warms by 2 degrees Celsius. One way to help countries adapt to the impacts of

extreme weather is to restore forests, mangrove swamps, and coral reefs by building seawalls, and installing early warning systems. I spent some of the day interviewing individuals from countries representing different parts of the world to hear their message from COP, captured in short video clips. I observed some of the negotiations and one of the plenary sessions of the day to learn more about the progress of negotiations, with a large focus on loss and damage. I ended the day with a visit to the WHO pavilion to hear about “The Health Implications of Climate Change and Mitigation Strategies.” Evidence from recent disasters shows that building long-term resilience to environmental risks requires a fundamental shift away from current top-down and expert-driven governance approaches that are often characterized by vertical networks of power and influence and focus on technological quick-fixes and protecting prevailing economic interests. To address the deeply contextual issues facing disaster affected communities, governance must facilitate more bottom-up and multi-stressor-based approaches that build trust through greater transparency and accountability, include diverse stakeholders, incorporate local knowledge and experience, and place greater value on noneconomic assets. There is great value in listening to indigenous people and understanding their connection to the land and nature as a way of life. The final stop was at the Nordic countries pavilion where they held a reception with a film screening and showcased their project of individuals painting vertical blue lines from top to bottom on a white background to symbolize their breath and the need to stop air pollution.

Day 11: (11/17/22) The theme of the day is Solutions. For me, the highlights of today focused on substituting protein sources with plant-based diets, rich in beans to mitigate climate change. Even as we acknowledge that animals emit methane gas, so do we as humans emit more methane gas when we eat animal protein. SDG 3.4.1, Reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, including diabetes was addressed with plant-based diet research providing the evidence for improving outcomes. One in nine South African adults have diabetes and annually the expenditure on treatment is 7.2 billion USD. The considerations in accepting a plant-based diet include cultural factors, affordability, consistent education from health care professionals, and positive attitudes. Interpersonal factors must also be considered such as family dynamics, the social activity of sharing meals, organizational factors, support from a chef to learn how to prepare the meals and the attention of doctors. Group support was also a factor that helped to maintain the change in dietary practices. The take-away was that plant-based diets are a climate mitigation strategy with profound health benefits. Cities should consider policies that increase the availability whole foods for affordable plant-based diets. By 2050, there will not be enough protein sources to meet the need for human sustainability, therefore we need to start producing an alternate protein source, and beans are a very good start. I spoke with some indigenous people, observed a traditional healing practice, and learned about spirituality that connects people to nature.

Ukraine had a pavilion at COP for the first time and I interviewed their media spokesperson about the increase in carbon emissions since the war started and what was being done about it within the country. The answers were focused on the current priority of survival, and then their future of developing more clean energy to supply the EU with green hydrogen. According to Ukraine, “Expediting the process of decarbonization is the way towards making the world

independent of Russian gas, and also a swift reaction to global climate change.” They want to create a Ukraine that will become an innovative and ecological part of the EU’s energy security.

I followed the closing plenary on recapping progress “Global Climate Action High-Level Closing Event COP27 Action Agenda: Progress and Priorities” where the climate champions from COP27 and COP26 reflected on their progress and solutions.

Day 12: (11/18/22) This was the closing day of the conference for me. I followed the negotiations virtually and contributed to social media dialogues as I prepared to travel back to the USA. I explored the environment and wonder of the Red Sea with its still viable and protected coral reefs. I could walk in water that was less than knee-deep and see the wonder of marine life in at least 20 or 30 different species of colorful fish swimming around me. So as not to disturb the sacred space too much, I purchased a face mask snorkel and floated above for a while, just taking in the beauty and serenity of this space. I signed on to a letter urging the inclusion of healthy environments as a human right and was pleased to see health is now formally included in the global goal on Climate Adaptation. This was a wonderful experience and I hope to continue the work of climate action and advocacy with all the League members as we continue to monitor our progress to renewable energy.

When I can figure out how to do it, I will include the relevant photos and videos to document the events of COP 27 from my reflections.

Best wishes,

Connie Sobon Sensor