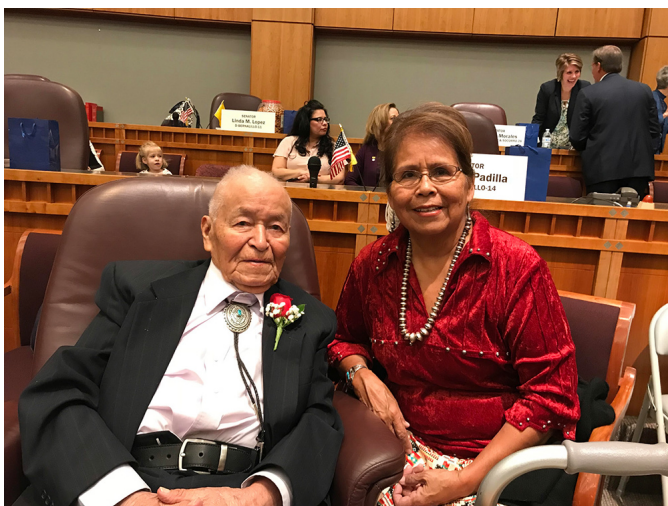


Jackson returns to County Commission

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent
Friday, 12 February 2021 07:31



Will work to complete Tommy Nelson's projects

Genevieve Jackson is back on the McKinley County Board of Commissioners.

The retired educator and administrator who has spent most of her life in the county had already served as one of three commissioners for two terms before she stepped aside for two years, as is required by state statute.

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Then, late last year, a vacancy for the seat was created by the death of Commissioner Tommy Nelson. So Jackson said “[I] threw my scarf into the ring” and applied to fill the opening. Then, New Mexico’s governor chose her.

Jackson, a retired educator and administrator both with the Navajo Nation and Gallup-McKinley County Schools District, could not answer the question of how she felt about the appointment without reflecting on the circumstances.

“I’m very sad that he passed and I’m looking into what projects, what priorities he may have made or was in the process of completing, so I’m going to try to assist in that manner,” she said.

To her constituents, she pledged to continue the work she had been doing on county roads, as well as alcohol and drug addiction, while not forgetting the new priority: COVID-19.

Within the last month, the county commissioners borrowed and budgeted money from McKinley’s general fund for two grants awarded from the state: McKinley County CARES Act Local Government Grant (\$16.1 million) and McKinley County Small Business Grant (\$2.4 million).

But there’s so much more county commissioners can do to address the pandemic, Jackson said. This includes providing educational outreach to residents “who are hesitant” to receive the vaccines available; providing more support to COVID-19 vaccination sites; and making sure teachers get vaccinated, like health care workers.

School districts throughout the state, including GMCS, return to some in-person learning on Feb. 9.

Aside from tackling the coronavirus, Jackson’s top priorities include improving roads, about three-quarters of which are in “very poor condition.”

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“Roads lead to everything: health [care], education, employment,” she said. “If there is a lack of roads, it makes it extremely hard for us.”

Speaking of roads, Jackson added, “rural addressing” is another priority of hers.

“Because we don’t have roads named, we’re not on the map,” she said. “I myself live in a very rural area over a mile from my house to the highway. I have to deal with the mud and snow and all of those things. If we need emergency services or law enforcement, many times they can’t find us, so we need that addressed.”

Counties can’t name roads; only states can. However, Jackson hopes to use her clout as a commissioner to jumpstart talks on the subject between McKinley County, the Navajo Nation and New Mexico.

Other issues Jackson would like to see “come to fruition” over the next two years are related to alcohol abuse and drug addiction. The county sponsors or is involved in some way with numerous programs related to those issues, be it Battered Families Services or the Hotel Wellness Program.

Though she did not name specific programs, the new commissioner would like to either pull them together or combine funding in one way or another. Jackson called the current approach “hit and miss” because “everyone is doing their own thing with their own program.”

Whatever the case, “We have to address the mental, the emotional and the physical needs of our people,” she said.

Jackson was born in Arizona, but considers Tse Bonito, N.M., where she currently resides, her life-long home.

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With her appointment now official, she joins two other county commissioners: Billy Moore (Dist. 1) and Robert Baca (Dist. 3).

Moore applauded Jackson's ascent to the commission, noting what it was like for the last three months without Nelson.

"Two commissioners could get things done, but it's a lot more difficult," he said.

Jackson will bring experience from her previous years of service on the board, which will "be a big plus," according to Moore.

"A lot of things change," over the years, he noted. "So you have to get back up to speed and move on. The key is all of us working together for the citizens of McKinley County."

By Kevin Opsahl
Sun Correspondent