

## Primary certified; District 1 candidate pending

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 01 July 2022 04:36

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Primary election results for McKinley County have been finalized and certified, but who will appear on the November ballot for County Commission District 1 is still a mystery.

“The [county] canvass is finished and to my understanding is finished by the Secretary of State and the State Canvassing Board,” County Attorney Doug Decker said.

Even that routine procedure, in which county commissioners certify the votes for their counties, was momentarily in doubt, but not because of anything in McKinley County.

The three-member Otero County Commission initially refused to certify that county’s votes, based on unsubstantiated suspicion of Dominion voting machines. Until all counties had certified their votes, the state was unable to certify the election. That included federal and state races as well as county and city offices.

Two of the Otero co-m-m-i-s-s-i-on-ers eventually relented and voted June 18 to certify, after the New Mexico Supreme Court ordered the commission to certify the results and Attorney General Hector Balderas threatened legal action if they didn’t.

The holdout, Couy Griffin, founder of Cowboys for Trump, was sentenced earlier that day in Washington D.C. for participating in the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection. He received a \$3,000 fine and was credited with time served for a 14-day jail sentence for trespassing.

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Meanwhile on the home front, Ernest C. “Charles” Becenti III, who withdrew from the race after the deadline for the county to submit ballot information to Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver’s office. That meant his name was still on the primary ballot, and he won with 44% of the vote.

Becenti has until Aug. 30 to withdraw from the general election in November. He released a statement thanking voters but saying he still plans to withdraw.

“First, I want to thank all the voters in McKinley County District 1, who placed their votes behind my candidacy,” he wrote. “As much as I want to serve the community through the next four years as McKinley County Commissioner, I had to withdraw my candidacy due to unforeseen circumstances. I plan to pursue this position again in the future, but for now I must stand aside in support of the other candidates.”

The process of replacing him on November’s ballot can’t begin until Oliver’s office receives his formal withdrawal, according to McKinley County Democrats Vice Chair Maryann Armijo.

When it does, any registered Democrat in District 1 is eligible to be considered. Aspirants need only submit their names to the McKinley County Democratic Party for consideration.

“It is up to the State Central Committee of McKinley County to make that determination,” she said, adding that in McKinley and many other counties, the 15-member State Central Committee and the County Central Committee “are one and the same.”

The schedule for all this is still up in the air until Becenti formally withdraws. At that point, Armijo said, the committee will move to find a replacement within a couple of weeks.

Since there is no Republican challenger for the race, whoever the committee picks is effectively the winner and will be on the November ballot as a formality and sworn in as commissioner in January.

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