

Mitchell: Education is paramount in District 5

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Newcomer attempting to unseat an incumbent

TOHATCHI – Serving in a key position on the Gallup-McKinley County School Board has given Kevin Mitchell a birds-eye look at how schools around McKinley County function. That means Mitchell is up front and personal when it comes to things like academic performance and dropout rates.

There are a lot of good things within the system and then there are some that require more attention from school-board members, parents, and even students themselves, Mitchell hinted at during a recent Democratic political forum in Gallup. The forum was conducted by McKinley County Democratic Chairwoman Mary Ann Armijo.

Education is on Kevin Mitchell's mind as he heads into the June 7, New Mexico primary. Mitchell faces incumbent D. Wonda Johnson of Church Rock, an educator and former administrator with the Navajo Nation.

"I think education is important," Mitchell said at the forum. "If I was to point out the most important thing of my platform, it would definitely be education."

A Tohatchi native, Mitchell is vice president of the school board. "There are some of our students that don't graduate," he said. "Some are not ready for college or are not ready to attend a major university. We have to fix that. We cannot continue to give our students waivers for no apparent reason."

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Mitchell, 52, has owned and operated a Gallup pet grooming business for close to 30 years. “I’ve worked since I was a teenager,” he told the 60-plus gathered at the forum.

Now serving his sixth year on the school board, Mitchell said roads and infrastructure are just as important as receiving a good and well-rounded education. He said he’s prepared to do what is necessary from the standpoint of a state legislator to secure funding for McKinley’s mostly rural school system and to keep McKinley County schools at the forefront of the decision-makers in Santa Fe.

“We need funding,” Mitchell said. “Nothing can be done without the proper funding coming from the state. We must improve our graduation rate. There are a lot of our students who are not graduating and who are not completing all of their courses so that they can graduate.”

Mitchell ran for a state representative seat many years ago. He is a secretary for Region I of the New Mexico School Boards Association’s Board of Directors. He’s come under fire over the years for being the eyes and ears of former State Representative Sandra Jeff, who held the District 5 House seat up until a few years ago. He did not respond to the purported Jeff link.

Both Mitchell and Johnson are Democrats. The general election is Nov. 8.

By Bernie Dotson
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