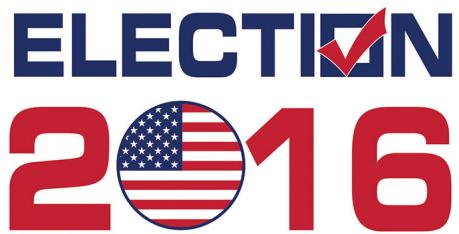
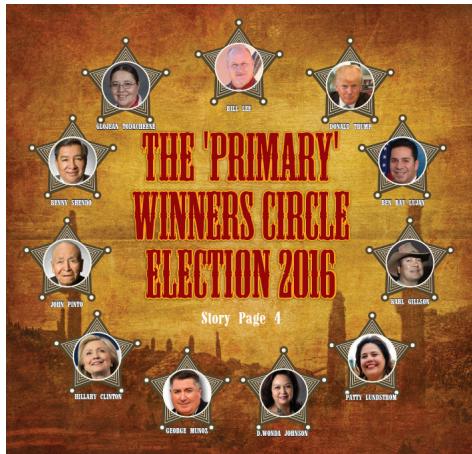


## Former manager squeaks by to win District 3 primary race

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent  
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### **Lee: 'I'm blessed, thankful'**

Former McKinley County Manager Bill Lee beat David Dallago, Johnny Greene, Jr., and Gerald O'Hara in the June 7 primary race for the District 3 seat of the McKinley County Board of Commissioners. Lee — county manager for 18 months up until May 13 and now the chief executive officer of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce — garnered 36 percent of the vote.

Dallago finished second with 33 percent. Dallago is a former two-term county commissioner. The seat became available when Tony Tanner decided not to run again.

"I'm thankful and appreciative of the people who backed me and voted for me," Lee said. Asked if he was riding a wave of success since obtaining the county manager job, Lee said, "I'm blessed. I have a wonderful family and I am thankful to the people who helped me get elected."

Lee resigned the \$93,000 county job to take over for the second time as CEO at the chamber, a job he held for six years prior to the county manager post. Lee had never held public office prior to June 7. Lee has said he wants to do what is necessary to solidify a consistent funding stream for Na'nizhoozhi Center, Inc., and keep property taxes from going up.

In addition, Harriett Becenti retained her McKinley County Clerk seat over challengers Jackie Sloan and Vanessa Begay-Lee. Becenti won with 47 percent of the vote. Sloan served consecutive clerk terms prior to Becenti's win four years ago.

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### ***The House, Senate, Judgeships***

Elsewhere, incumbent D. Wonda Johnson of Church Rock defeated challenger Kevin Mitchell of Tohatchi, picking up 52 percent of the vote and (preliminarily) winning the District 5 House of Representatives seat by 160 votes. Johnson, an educator and former Navajo Nation and Gallup-McKinley Schools administrator, was the subject of a January 2016 lawsuit filed by a former campaign manager who alleged that \$26,000 was never paid to him by Johnson.

"It was a close race," Mitchell, a local pet-grooming business owner, who is also vice president of the Gallup-McKinley County School Board, said. "We'll see what happens when the certification is completed. I don't consider the results final until the certification is done."

George Muñoz of New Mexico Senate District 4 retained his seat with an easy victory over challengers Felisha Adams of Iyanbito and Jordon Johnson of Vanderwagen. Muñoz won with about 62 percent of the vote.

"It's having trust in the people," Muñoz said. "I'm pleased with the win."

Still outstanding in the District 4 Senate race is a determination by the attorney generals of McKinley, Cibola, and San Juan counties on the outcome of an investigation initiated by Muñoz about faulty signatures on a petition form of Adams. The District 4 race took several negative turns, including a charge of racism by Adams against Muñoz for not attending a political forum in Thoreau. Adams is Native American, and Muñoz, the son of a former Gallup mayor, is Hispanic.

Incumbent McKinley County District Attorney Karl Gillson beat Bernadine Martin with 53 percent of the vote for the 11<sup>th</sup> District post. Martin ran a stinging campaign suggesting Gillson's office was soft on prosecuting crime.

In Senate District 22, incumbent Benny Shendo beat former District 5 State Representative and

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former Public Regulation Commission staff assistant Sandra Jeff with 57 percent of the vote. Jeff started the race with a disqualified designation, but got back on the ballot and quickly made up ground with some strong campaigning.

Incumbents Patricia Lundstrom of Gallup, Eliseo Alcon of Milan, and John Pinto of Tohatchi — all democrats — won their respective seats. Each was unopposed in the primary and head solo into the general election.

“I am very thankful to the voters,” Lundstrom said.

Pinto, 91, is a former Navajo Code Talker and was first elected to the New Mexico Senate in 1977. He is the longest serving legislator in the history of New Mexico.

### ***Ben Shelly ousted***

Former Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly, listed on the ballot as “Bennie Shelly” due to a ballot-name snafu, lost to political newcomer Harry Garcia of Grants in the House of Representatives District 69 seat. That seat became available when W. Ken Martinez — also of Grants, and an attorney and former Speaker of the House of Representatives — retired. Garcia is a US Marine Corps veteran who fought in the Vietnam War. Part of Garcia’s political platform included job creation.

### ***San Juan County***

GloJean Todacheene of Shiprock beat incumbent Sharon Clahchischilliage of Kirtland by a vote margin of less than 300. Todacheene is a retired teacher from Shiprock. Clahchischilliage is an Ivy League-educated Republican and one of a small number of conservatives to serve the state legislature. Both Todacheene and Clahchischilliage are Navajo and possess graduate degrees from major research universities.

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“I am just so happy,” Todacheene, a University of New Mexico graduate, said. “It’s now time to get to work.”

### ***Certification June 10; Ben-King advances to general election***

McKinley County Bureau of Elections Director Rick Palochak said there will be an election certification on June 10. He said the certification process could take a number of days.

“This isn’t a one-day thing,” Palochak said. “There’s still quite a bit of work to be done.”

Palochak added that Marcela Ben-King, a write-in candidate challenging Republican incumbent Lindy Bennett for the District Judge Division 5 seat got more than the required 315 votes to advance to the general election in November.

He said a final vote count for Ben-King would be available Friday after the certification. Palochak said there are 322 “declined to state” ballots that could reconfigure the final vote tallies of various candidates.

Each of the primary winners is a democrat, except Bennet who is a republican. The general election is Nov. 8.

US Representative Ben Ray Luján, the son of the late New Mexico Speaker of the House Ben Luján, D-Nambe, will face Republican challenger Michael Romero in the general election.

Presidential hopefuls, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump, readily beat out their opponents. Both are on track to secure their party’s nomination for President of the United States.

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