

A Democrat's take on the Democratic Forum

Written by Mike Daly Guest Columnist
Thursday, 28 November 2019 09:50



Recently, the McKinley County Democrats hosted the Democratic candidates for Congress at a congenial Town Hall in Gallup. Seven of the nine candidates were available to answer questions. An estimated 100 people attended.

The candidates in attendance were Teresa Leger Fernandez, a Santa Fe attorney whose work is assisting tribes and pueblos securing infrastructure improvements, Marco Serna, the Santa Fe District Attorney, Kyle Tisdell, a public interest environmental attorney, Valerie Plame, a former CIA Operations Officer who was outed by the Bush II administration, Laura Montoya, Sandoval County Treasurer, Joseph Sanchez, a State Representative and an electrical engineer working at Los Alamos National Laboratory and Gavin Kaiser from Santa Cruz. According to LinkedIn, he is founder and executive director of the Oratory of Mystical Sacraments. Mr. Kaiser arrived late and so answered only some of the questions.

The format was for the public to write questions and several moderators Senator George Muñoz, D-Gallup, and Tony Sanchez of Gallup's iHeart Media would vet and ask the questions. Three of the questions and the candidates' responses follow:

What experience do you have working with tribes?

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Montoya: "As County Treasurer, I currently serve seven Pueblos, two Navajo Chapters, and the Apaches. I am Vice Chair of a national organization that includes Tribal Government and policy. I've organized pueblos and stakeholders, to be aware of the issues that affect them, including an Oil and Gas Ordinance. I drafted policy that became law that permits tribes and land grants to have the right-of-first offer to land that is delinquent and up for auction."

Sanchez: "I won a seat on the Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative which serves the Apache Nation. I deal with the Apaches and with Navajos as the Cooperative lines run through the Navajo Nation."

Fernandez: "I spent 30 years working as council and special council with tribes and pueblos. The district is 18% Native American. Any candidate must understand tribal sovereignty, self determination, and the importance of cultural grounding that tribes and indigenous people have. I have endorsements from many of our tribes."

Serna: "I attended a Jicarilla Apache Nation Camp as a teenager, giving me an early introduction to tribal culture. As district attorney I work with the Jicarilla Apache Nation on domestic violence issues and missing women."

Tisdell: "As an environmental attorney, I was the lead attorney to protect Chaco from oil and gas. I talk at chapter houses about fossil fuel extraction which tears up roads and reduces air quality."

Plame: "I was asked to join with Native women to bring into focus the issue of missing women on the reservations. The tribes have had decades of being ignored. Forty percent lack water and many tribal areas suffer from uranium contamination."

Water is life. People still haul water in trucks. The Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project. The project's cost has escalated, more than doubling to over \$1 billion and there is no cost cap on the City of Gallup's share. Would you support a bill to place a cap on Gallup's cost?

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Sanchez: "I support the project and want to make sure the plan goes through."

Fernandez: "What is the job of government? To provide basic infrastructure. We cannot do without water. I would support that because it is the key element of what government should do - and it should do it across the board. Water, wastewater, broadband, bridges that kids need to get to school and other infrastructure is the best infrastructure we can have."

Serna: "I would support a bill to place a price cap on Gallup's share. We have issues with water storage in New Mexico."

Tisdell: "I would support the project. Every oil well takes 1 to 2 million gallons of water. We need to deal with water scarcity."

Plame: "The water situation on the Navajo Nation is tragic."

Montoya: "The water from the San Juan River comes via a 124 mile pipeline. We are not properly valuing the project. Its cost was \$500 million in 2017, now it's \$1.1 billion because of their phasing of the project. I would support the bill and want to make the project a federal priority to require it connect Gallup and all Navajo chapters and be completed immediately."

Kaiser: "I just arrived. We live on a beautiful planet. I was indoctrinated to believe in liberty and justice for all. I'm sickened that suicide is the second leading cause of death."

When New Mexico oil and gas revenues decline, how will you help us get funds for infrastructure?

Fernandez: "We have to transition, but we also have to recognize the importance oil and gas (sic) [gas] revenues have for New Mexico and for jobs. We need someone in Washington that is familiar with federal agencies and what they can do. We need to create a new economic model for New Mexico."

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Serna: "We are now dependent on the oil and gas industry. We need to invest and transition to clean energy."

Tisdell: "The oil and gas income will end. Our economy goes up and down with the price of oil. The oil wells in the Permian Basin are being constructed on credit."

Plame: "It's a question of leadership. Look at neighboring states. Being able to work together is the key."

Montoya: "Focus one-third of earnings on education, one-third on infrastructure, and invest the other one-third, so that you can have recurring income to sustain both. Don't just throw money at education. Change education so funding dollars include the trades like mechanics and plumbing, as well as farming and ranching, and require life skills classes."

Sanchez: "Figure out how to draw Facebook and Amazon to New Mexico. We need jobs for prosperity. The proposed Indian Health Service Hospital will create more jobs."

Kaiser: "We should legalize cannabis. It will draw income and keep people out of jail. Also develop our solar and wind potential."

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