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Gubernatorial hopefuls shun food tax idea

By Steve Terrell
The New Mexican

All five candidates for governor — four Republicans and one Democrat — oppose the idea of New Mexico reinstating the gross-receipts tax on groceries, although at least one of the Republican contenders has reservations about keeping the tax off food.

The state in 2004 quit taxing most food products. However, as the state's financial crisis deepens, the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce and others have raised the possibility of reviving the tax.

Think New Mexico, a Santa Fe think

tank that pushed for the food tax repeal in the state Legislature, on Monday began releasing names of candidates, officials and organizations — one per hour on its Facebook page and Twitter feed — who also oppose bringing back the food tax.

"This is an opportunity for any New Mexican to watch the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce's campaign to re-impose the food tax be defeated in real time," Think New Mexico director Fred Nathan said Monday.

Among those named Monday were Republican gubernatorial candidates Allen Weh, Doug Turner and Susana Martinez.

Lt. Gov. Diane Denish, the only Democrat currently running for governor, earlier this month came out strongly against returning the food tax. "When families are pinching and scraping to get by, taxing the basics like milk and bread is just not right," Denish said in a news release.

The only other candidate for governor not listed by Think New Mexico on Monday was state Rep. Janice Arnold-Jones, R-Albuquerque.

In an interview Monday, Arnold-Jones said she said she wouldn't vote to bring back food tax — unless the state also repealed the increase in gross-receipts tax on most other items. That

tax — which amounts to .5 percent — was passed to make up for revenues lost by the food-tax repeal.

"I don't believe there are enough votes in the Legislature to remove that tax increase," Arnold-Jones said. She called the 2004 bill "stupid," saying the main beneficiaries have not been the poor, but people who shop at more expensive grocery stores like Whole Foods.

Advocates of keeping the food-tax repeal argue that such a tax hurts lower-income people who spend a larger percentage of their income on groceries.

Other food-tax opponents listed Monday by Think New Mexico

include Brian Colón, a Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor, the group New Mexico Voices for Children, the New Mexico Farmer's Market Association and the *Rio Grande Sun* newspaper.

"Tomorrow we are looking to lead off with Democratic candidates for lieutenant governor and move into legislators who are opposed to the re-imposition of the food tax," said Jason Espinoza, Think New Mexico's field director. The list of legislators will take several days to post, he said.

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