

Taos News 2012 political endorsements

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Taos County voters will discover their ballot for the Nov. 6 general election contains few races. The June primary settled the majority of the local contests.

Nonetheless we have important choices to weigh, including races for U.S. president, senator and representative, plus district and magistrate judges, constitutional amendments and bond questions.

To prepare for our endorsements, we interviewed candidates and researched their records. We also consulted our colleagues at the Santa Fe New Mexican for assistance with the ballot questions and judicial posts at the state level.

Here are our recommendations.

President of the United States

President Barack Obama inherited a big, stinking mess from the Republicans: an economy plummeting toward another Great Depression and two foreign wars.

We certainly aren't out of it yet, in part thanks to the Republicans who have put elitist party politics ahead of people's needs, but we believe Obama deserves another four years to continue the slow but steady progress our nation is making.

Notable accomplishments during the Obama administration include badly needed health-care reform and the rescue of the nation's auto industry. He has also worked to weaken Al Qaeda significantly.

Calling upon his modest early life, he has kept the interests of all Americans in his plans. We would hate to see all this good work undone. We endorse Barack Obama for president.

U.S. Senate

New Mexico and certainly Taos County lose a great deal of experience and seniority with the retirement of Sen. Jeff Bingaman.

So we are gratified Martin Heinrich, a Democrat who represents the Albuquerque area in the U.S. House, is running for that post. We have been encouraged by Heinrich's record during his four years in the House and his issues-based campaign. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee he opposed the war in Iraq and supports an end to our involvement in Afghanistan.

As an active hiker and hunter who has enjoyed Taos' great outdoors, Heinrich is a proponent of the environment and renewable energy. For U.S. Senate, we endorse Martin Heinrich.

U.S. House of Representatives

Ben Ray Luján has demonstrated he "gets" Taos County during his first two terms representing the 3rd Congressional District.

Lujan has been an effective advocate for renewable energy, conservation and workforce training programs at UNM-Taos and the Taos Economic Development Corp. — all significant opportunities for local economic development. He has been a consistent advocate for tribal entities in Washington and was instrumental in the establishment of a VA clinic in Taos.

We endorse Ben Ray Luján to continue representing Taos County's interests as its congressman.

Eighth Judicial District Judge Division 3

The voters of three counties — Taos, Colfax and Union — are fortunate to have two qualified candidates for district judge. However, we believe Andria Cooper, a Republican who was appointed judge last November by Gov. Susana Martinez, has the definitive advantage.

Cooper has well-rounded experience working as a prosecutor and defense attorney. She taught law at the college level and, importantly, has served on the bench for nearly a year. She is highly organized and thorough in her proceedings.

Andria Cooper earns our endorsement, and we urge Democratic and Independent voters to cross party lines to choose her.

Magistrate Judge Division 2

Again, we have two candidates eager to serve as Taos County's magistrate judge. By law, such judges are not required to have law degrees, and non-lawyers have served the county well.

However, we believe Jeffrey Shannon's background as a lawyer makes him the better and more qualified candidate for this position. Shannon, a Democrat, is another governor appointee following the retirement of Betty Martínez. He was appointed in May.

Shannon's legal career will ensure that those who appear in magistrate court will have a judge with extensive legal experience hearing their case. We endorse Jeffrey Shannon for magistrate judge.

Other courts

Court of Appeals: Republican J. Miles Hanisee, appointed to the state Court of Appeals by Gov. Martinez, has been on the bench since July 2011. He has a background in private practice and as a federal prosecutor for the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Mexico. His chief qualification for the job is his knowledge of the appeals process. We recommend J. Miles Hanisee for the Court of Appeals.

Retention Supreme Court: Justice Richard C. Bosson has received very high marks from appellate judges, attorneys and court staff, the Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission reports. He has served on the Supreme Court since 2002 and also has eight years of experience as a Court of Appeals judge. We recommend retention of Richard C. Bosson to the Supreme Court.

Court of Appeals: Judge Michael Vigil received appointment to the Court of Appeals in 2003. According to the Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission, Vigil has received positive ratings from attorneys for demeanor, conduct and knowledge of the law. From court staff and other judges, he has

received high ratings. We recommend retention of Michael Vigil to the Court of Appeals.

Court of Appeals: Judge Roderick T. Kennedy has spent 11 years on the Court of Appeals, and has 23 years experience as a judge total. His ratings from court staff, other judges and attorneys are mixed, but the Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission recommends his retention because his overall performance remains at the satisfactory level. We recommend retention of Roderick T. Kennedy to the Court of Appeals.

Bonds A, B and C

Voters will decide whether the state should issue general obligation bonds to finance projects for senior centers, libraries and higher education across the state. Of the three, we want to emphasize how essential Bond Question C is this year — it authorizes the issuance and sale of nearly \$120 million in bonds to make capital acquisitions and repair buildings at secondary schools across New Mexico.

In Taos, passage of the bond would bring \$3 million to the University of New Mexico-Taos for capital improvements at its Klauer Campus. The continued growth of our community college is essential to our local economy.

The bonds are critically important, especially since an earlier higher education bond failed in 2010. Best of all, approving Bond Question C will not result in higher taxes since it is replacing retiring debt. We recommend a yes vote on Bond Question C.

The other two statewide bond proposals also are worthy of support. Bond Question A would authorize issuance and sale of \$10.3 million in general obligation bonds for senior citizens centers. Bond Question B supports state libraries, raising \$9.8 million for state, academic, tribal and public libraries, whether for construction or library resources. We recommend a “yes” vote on Bond Question A and Bond Question B.

Constitutional amendments

New Mexicans will have a number of amendments to the state constitution. Here are our recommendations.

Amendment 1 would require the Judicial Standards Commission to add two members, increasing it to 13 people. One would be a municipal judge, the other a member of the community. The reason, according to supporters, is to ensure that the commission has an expert on the operations of municipal courts. Because the commission considers the complaints against judges, conducts hearings and recommends sanctions to the state Supreme Court, it makes sense to have an expert who is familiar with such courts. However, it is possible to include a municipal judge without resorting to a constitutional amendment. Vote no on Amendment 1.

Amendments 2, 3 and 4: These three amendments deal with the scandal-plagued Public Regulation Commission. Our position is that change is needed to improve the PRC. These three amendments will bring about a better, more efficient agency, while removing potential for corruption.

Amendment 2 is a simple amendment but one that could have immense impact. It simply amends the constitution to allow the Legislature to require qualifications of PRC members and to call for continuing education once they are in office. Commissioners deal with technical and complex issues, ones that require intelligence, experience and the ability to analyze data, understand economics and engineering, all while maintaining a judicial-like impartiality about the goings on. More experience and education will help bring about a better PRC. Vote yes on Amendment 2.

Amendment 3 is designed to help the PRC streamline its operations. Currently, the responsibility to process registering corporations is at the PRC in the Corporations Bureau, while other functions are at the Secretary of State's Office. The amendment would move all functions of registering and reporting for businesses to one place. It's a good move. Vote yes on Amendment 3.

Also essential is Amendment 4, which would remove the Insurance Division from under the PRC. By doing so, the superintendents of insurance would be free of the pressure from commissioners who are lobbying for their pet causes. Making the Insurance Division independent is a good move for consumers. Vote yes on Amendment 4.

Under Amendment 5, the Office of the Public Defender would be removed from the executive branch and the control of the governor. Setting up an independent agency would remove politics from the office. Public defenders, supervised by an independent commission and its appointee (details would be worked out by the Legislature), would be able to do the work they are charged to do without political interference. We think this will strengthen the court system in New Mexico and help ensure justice for all. Vote yes on Amendment 5.