

Long ballot? Don't forget amendments and bonds

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All She Wrote

You've probably decided by now how you're voting on candidates at the top of the ballot, but how about farther down? Here are a few thoughts on some of those.

Changes to the state Public Regulation Commission, long overdue, are in Amendments 2, 3 and 4, and deserve our support.

Amendment 2, to increase qualifications and require continuing education for commissioners, is particularly important. Currently, the state doesn't even require a high school diploma. Candidates in District 1 and a few sitting commissioners oppose this amendment. That's because they know squat about utilities, energy, rates or any of the other complex issues that come before the PRC.

As somebody who's sat through rate hearings, I can say there's nothing worse than watching inept commissioners pretend they understand technical language and issues and then stumble toward a decision. New Mexico has urgent business, and we don't have time for on-the-job training.

Amendments 3 and 4 would remove the regulation of corporations and insurance from the PRC. These are also good amendments. The PRC, currently trying to embrace an absurd range of regulatory duties, contributes to the charge that New Mexico is unfriendly to business. Two former insurance superintendents recently said that the office suffers from commissioners' meddling, political pressure, favoritism and instability.

Turning to Bond C, our institutions of higher education are holding their breath.

Two years ago, when the public was furious at spending by the University of New Mexico's president, everybody suffered. This year, we're mad at New Mexico State University and the payout to its departing president.

Go ahead and be mad, but don't take it out on the bond question. Without raising taxes, the bond would provide about \$120 million for 29 projects in 21 counties, good for 1,200 construction jobs. Check out the lengthy list of projects (http://education_bondc.com/), and it largely involves renovating old buildings and upgrading various systems at institutions around the state. One of the few new buildings on the list is a geology facility at New Mexico Tech. Nobody's mad at Tech. Nobody's ever mad at Tech. Not only does it stay out of headlines, the school in Socorro manages so well that it registers year after year on best-value lists. Our libraries also need your support. Bond B would deliver \$9.8 million for New Mexico's libraries. I've visited and/or used libraries all over the state, and I'm always impressed with two qualities: Libraries don't just house books - they function as community centers. And on modest budgets, they keep up with the changing nature of information. Bond money will buy books, audiobooks, ebooks, magazines, databases, genealogy information and more. It's a worthy investment in ourselves. Finally, let's think about judicial retention. Three judges don't have opponents, but by constitutional mandate, they must receive at least 57 percent voter approval. So, yes, you do need to vote for them. In this case, the nonpartisan Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission (JPEC) makes it easy for us by recommending for retention Justice Richard C. Bosson, Supreme Court; and Judges Roderick T. Kennedy and Michael Vigil, Court of Appeals.

The JPEC looks at written opinions, caseload, and independent surveys and also interviews staff, law clerks, lawyers, and other judges to form an opinion. Bosson and Vigil earned high marks for knowledge of the law, proper conduct and timely rulings. Kennedy got mixed reviews; court staff rated him poorly for handling the workload and making timely rulings and considered him so-so in the integrity department. Because his scores were positive in other areas, and he promised to improve, the commission voted for retention. (See www.nmjpec.org for more information.)

Do vote. You may think nothing will change if you vote, but that's a certainty if you don't vote.