**NMPBS 2020 Citizens’ Agenda**

**U.S. Senate Race**

***Vision Statement:*** *Elections have largely become an exercise in separating voters into polarizing camps instead of inspiring collaboration and unity. The recent Democratic and Republican National Conventions, and presidential and vice-presidential debates have made that abundantly clear. Substantive discussions about platforms and issue statements have all but disappeared. Instead, voters are put in a position to “ride or die” with the extremes on one side or the other of the current political divide. This evolution leaves a lot of voters and potential voters ostracized and disillusioned with the process. It also means many important voices are silenced and not included in election debates and candidate conversations.*

*Here at New Mexico PBS, we want to engage our traditional audiences in new ways to create a Citizens' Agenda that will inform and drive our election coverage. We also want to seek out new and diverse community and media partnerships in that Citizens' Agenda, to ensure our election coverage is more representative and inclusive. If we are successful, voters and potential voters will be more empowered and informed, thereby re-establishing their engagement in the democratic process. This will also allow them to have more impact. Candidates will also be compelled to be more responsive to the voters’ questions and needs, as well as more accountable to those constituencies should they win their election.*

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New Mexico PBS is unveiling a new approach to covering elections this year. We are building a Citizens' Agenda that will inform and drive our coverage of the U.S. Senate race between Republican Mark Ronchetti, Democrat Ben Ray Lujan and Libertarian Bob Walsh. We worked with our community partners, the New Mexico Black Voters Collaborative and New Mexico Native Vote, to build this agenda by asking them what issues they want the candidates to be talking about as they compete for votes. Respondents filled out surveys, and the New Mexico in Focus editorial team then synthesized those responses into top priorities and issues that we will use in our coverage including the upcoming October 18th debate between the candidates. This is a working document and can change as we get more information and insights from the public. If you haven’t already participated in the project, there’s still time. Fill out the short questionnaire [**here**](https://forms.gle/h1y1hUrDYdLTUNfb6). You can tell us about the top issues for you as you head to the polls, and leave specific questions you want the candidates to answer.

**The NMPBS Citizens’ Agenda**

**Survey respondents want solutions and innovative approaches to improving health care for all New Mexicans. They also want specific plans and approaches to battling the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes answers to questions like:**

\*Is COVID-19 a legitimate threat to the health and safety of New Mexicans, or is it under control?

\*What can be done to improve the United States’ response to the novel coronavirus?

\*Do you support the current administration’s attempt at dismantling the Affordable Care Act? If so, what would you replace it with? If not, are there any tweaks to the ACA that you would like to see?

\*What is your plan for increasing the number of health providers of color in rural communities?

\*Do you think people are more free when they get their insurance not from their employer, but from a third party or the government?

\*How can we provide accessible inpatient substance misuse/mental health treatment for those who are in need?

**Survey respondents are concerned about inequities in public education and challenges with making sure that all students have the same opportunity for success. They want the candidates to address concrete ways to bridge those gaps, especially during a time of virtual and hybrid school necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes questions like:**

\*How do we improve broadband internet access, especially in rural communities?

\*What are your ideas on making funding for public schools equal?

\*Do you support any loan forgiveness programs for college students in New Mexico? What would that look like and what else can you do to help college students who are saddled with increasingly higher debt once they graduate?

\*What do you think about the Yazzie-Martinez case, in which a judge ruled that New Mexico is not living up to its constitutional obligation to deliver a quality education to all its students? And what would you do in the Senate to address the inequalities that this lawsuit pointed out, especially for at-risk students?

**Respondents are very concerned about the economy as the COVID-19 outbreak continues and public health orders remain in effect. They want answers as to what can be done to get our state back on its feet and get people back to work. Questions include ones like these:**

**\***How do you balance a public health emergency and the proven need for social distancing and mask-wearing with the negative economic impacts that come from restrictions on businesses?

\*Do you think another COVID-19 relief package is necessary? Why or why not? What more should Congress be doing to help kickstart the economy and help especially small business hit hard by public health order restrictions?

\*How will you increase wages of working people?

\*Food insecurity is a big issue for a lot of New Mexicans. What successful programs have you seen or heard of that we can model here in New Mexico to help families keep food on the table?

**Climate change continues to be a top priority of respondents as well. They want to see urgency from the candidates and innovative solutions to curbing the negative effects of a warming planet and warming New Mexico. Proposed questions include ones like:**

\*Do you believe that humans have an impact on the change in climate? If you do, what would you do to address it?

\*New Mexico remains very reliant on the oil and gas industry, especially when it comes to school funding. But the effects of climate change are definitely hitting home in our state, with longer fire seasons, higher temperatures and a drying Rio Grande. How will you balance those two things, when it comes to issues like banning fracking or the state’s new Energy Transition Act that will move us away from fossil fuels as a state?

\*Climate change is an urgent issue in our state and the country. What is one unpopular change or reform that you would be willing to support as we strive to curb the negative effects of climate change?

**Respondents are concerned about the integrity of the election, given attempts from outside the U.S. to affect our election and lots of confusing information about mail-in voting and the credibility of the U.S. Postal Service. Voters want answers to how we bolster the entire election system and also make it accessible to all potential voters in New Mexico. Questions offered includes ones like these:**

\*How do you plan to ensure every New Mexican, regardless of skin color, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, has equal access to vote between now and November 3rd, 2020?

\*Do you care or believe that Russians have and are meddling in our election? What would you do about it, if so?

\* What would you do to protect the U.S. Postal Service from political interference?

\*Misinformation seems to be everywhere these days, which often leads people to question whether or not their vote matters as at all. Some even say this is intentional on the part of President Trump to try and suppress voter participation. What can you say and do to clear up misinformation and restore trust in the process?

**Respondents are concerned about the racial unrest in the country and here in New Mexico, which has a diverse and complicated history. They want an acknowledgement of work to be done on racial equality issues, examples of positive engagement around these emotional questions and at least a discussion on potential police reforms. Questions submitted by respondents include ones like these:**

\*What are your views on racial unrest and plans for police reform? Are there any police reform measures, from mandatory lapel cameras and chokehold bans to reforming qualified immunity, that you would support?

\*How does America actually change its racist, authoritarian police culture beyond legislation? Does that require something deeper, such as a change in hearts and minds?

**Respondents are also interested in immigration reform and what candidates can do to get immediate movement on this issue, given that Congress has largely been unable to pass significant immigration reform in recent years. Submitted questions include ones like these:**

\* How do you plan to bring immigration law reform to fruition?

\*Would you continue the detainment of migrant children at ICE detention facilities?

\*What do you think should happen with the DACA students moving forward?

**Lastly, respondents feel like corruption is running rampant through all levels of government and want to see what the candidates support in terms of cleaning up that corruption and making government more transparent and responsive to the public. Possible questions include:**

\*Our government is very corrupt. How do you plan on removing the amount of corruption at every level?

\*Does truth matter? If so, why, and how do you restore the public’s faith in facts and science?