

TAOS UNITED COMMUNITY FORUM
Kit Carson Electric Cooperative Boardroom
May 1, 2018, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

TU Community Forums are held on the first Tuesday of each month. Our next forum will be June 5, which we know is Election Day. Come share your hopes and fears with us that evening!

DISCLAIMER: The opinions and comments below are those of the speaker and not official positions of Taos United, a non-partisan, nonprofit community information and education group.

RECAP

Bea Balsamo, member of the Action Alert Support Team and the Elections Issue Group of TU, opened and chaired the meeting. 48-50 people attended.

Two 10-minute slots began the forum:

1. Todd Wynward, Interfaith Power and Light, Roots and Wings, Poor Peoples' Campaign of New Mexico

Following in the footsteps of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rev. William Barber, with his Moral Mondays, a 2018 Poor People's Campaign has been initiated. The underlying principle is that "when the tide rises, all boats rise." Four pillars of injustice are being tackled: Poverty (with a focus on child poverty in NM), systemic racism, the war economy, and environmental degradation.

In 30 states, 40 days of action are being planned from May 14 through June. For these six weeks, Monday will be a Day of Action.

In Santa Fe, actions at the Roundhouse include: Planting a poor peoples' garden in a public space, with the message that "if you're not going to take care of our children, we will", and showing our "invisible children", by having 50-80 mannequins placed around town.

Also in NM will be some actions around the proposed storage of the nation's nuclear waste.

Everyone is urged to come on **Sunday, May 13 at 2 p.m. to the First Presbyterian Church**. Visual and voice training: will be provided, including learning songs and making the mannikin children.

Go to: <https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicoPPC/> and <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/> for more information.

Send a message to Todd at toddwynward@gmail.com with offers of support or questions.

2. Jay Levine, State Central Committee of the Democratic Party- Jay and other committee members began in June 2017 to visit New Mexico cities/communities to define the Party's platform for 2018 and

beyond. Please see <http://www.dpnm-sparc.org/> for the Core Values of the Party around 19 issues. Gubernatorial candidates Jeff Apodaca and Joe Cervantes have signed onto the citizen-driven platform. Michelle Lujan Grisham has endorsed the Core Values, not the full platform. As voters, we must hold our elected officials and candidates accountable, through visits to their offices, phone calls and letters. Taos County Democratic Party is planning to hold a training session on how to approach our legislators.

A new caucus has also been established: the Adelante Progressive Caucus. See <https://www.facebook.com/Adelante-Progressive-Caucus-160581201326991/> One of Adelante's goals is to end the use of dark money to influence elections. Some 17 other states have progressive caucuses. Join them!

Jay took the floor a second time to urge everyone to vote in the June 5 primary, making a pitch for Susan Herrera in District 41 (to replace Debbie Rodella). See <https://susanherrera.com/> for more information. He noted that Debbie Rodella has A+ rating from NRA, a "0" rating by Conservation Voters and regularly votes with Republicans. She forced an important health security act which would have afforded New Mexicans with better health care back into committee and refused to vote it out. "Her committee (Business & Industry) is where good bills go to die," he explained.

Participants in the forum then provided 2-minute statements:

3. Luis Reyes, CEO of KCEC

Luis provided an update on Kit Carson's plans to provide 100% renewable energy by 2022. They already have 8 megawatts; by the end of 2018, it will be 10 MW provided by renewables. KCEC was invited to join a very few other (and much larger) cooperatives/cities in the "Innovative Network of Natural Renewable Energy Lab".

4. Mary Lane Leslie, Representative of the Michelle Lujan Grisham Campaign

Mary Lane announced that Phone Banking will start on May 8 from 4-8 p.m. at the new Democratic Party headquarters (the former Obama headquarters at the corner of Cruz Alta and Paseo, across from Walgreens) There will be training, with materials provided. She called Michelle a "firecracker" and "energetic person." Need volunteers to help get out the vote. Early voting begins on May 8.

5. Ronald Mascareñas, Candidate for County Commissioner for District 5

Ronald described his background in cattle ranching and in the semi-conductor industry. He is running to preserve culture, tradition, water, keeping alive what's precious to Taoseños. Of concern to him are maintaining Holy Cross Hospital's solvency and to keep MDs and RNs who come here to pay off their loans, then leave. He wants to help make the Juvenile Detention Center solvent and to work with other agencies in supporting our youth. He will also prioritize veterans' needs and providing for the elderly. He can be reached at ronaldmascarenas@aol.com

6. Marjorie Luckey, Chairperson of the Elections Issues Group of Taos United

Marji noted that the County Clerk could not be present, but sent forms to be used to request an absentee ballot so you can vote by mail. By completing the form and mailing it back by end of May, you will receive a ballot for the Primary election. If you know any elderly voters or someone who is working several jobs and would find it hard to go to the polls—take a request for absentee ballot for them or pick one up at the County Clerks office.

Important dates:

- May 8 (Tuesday) – Voter registration in time for primary closes and absentee voting begins
- May 19 (Saturday) – Early in-person voting begins
- June 1 (Friday) – Last day to mail absentee ballots
- June 2 (Saturday) – Early in-person voting ends
- June 5 (Tuesday) – Election Day (and the next TU Community Forum!)

7. Bob Bresnahan, Renewable Taos

Bob made a pitch for supporting renewable energy. He supports KCEC's solar project and Taos is well "on our way to 100% daytime coverage in summer." Even so, it is only 40% of total load, so we also need to increase wind energy that "will take us to over 60 or 70% by 2022." He urged everyone to talk to county commissioners and other managers, asking them to expedite the transition to renewal energy through these projects.

8. Karen Monson

The NM Public Regulatory Commission's upcoming election for 2 new Commissioners (on June 5, Election Day statewide) was Karen's focus. She urged support for Janene Yazzie in District 4 and for Steve Fischmann in District 5. Having enlightened commissioners in these positions are critical for and fostering renewable energy and mitigating the effects of climate change. She urged everyone to support these candidates with donations if possible and to contact friends and families living in these districts to ask them get out and vote!

See <http://www.nmprc.state.nm.us/> and go to the websites of Janene and Steve, at www.janeneyazzieform.com and steveforprc.com.

The physical areas for these Districts are:

District 4: Cibola, McKinley, and San Juan counties as well as parts of Bernalillo, Rio Arriba, Socorro, Sandoval, and Santa Fe Counties.

District 5: City of Las Cruces and Dona Ana County.

9. George Brown, Treasurer of Taos County Democratic Party

George reported on a recent event in Santa Fe for Sen. Martin Heinrich. Martin stressed the importance of electing Democrats this year, especially to the NM House. It is a critical year to have a Legislature that will vote for the changes so needed by NM. To this end, Martin will commit resources to getting Democrats elected!

10. Danielle Freeman, Elections Issue Group- Calling all writers!

Danielle said that, "Being active makes you feel better to be an American." A new writer's group is forming to motivate everyone to turn out to vote for all elections by writing letters, articles and PSA's for the media and preparing flyers and handouts to educate the public about government and the importance of voting. Writers and volunteers wishing to help, please write to her at danfree24@gmail.com.

11. Mya Coursey, Unitarian Universalist congregation and Elections Issue Group

The UU and TU groups are considering applying for a grant from the national UU Association to increase voter participation this year especially amongst 18-35 year olds, a group with low registration and very low voting rates. The grant will be used increase voting participation among these young voters.

12. Del Endres, Elections Issue Group

Del followed on Mya's comments, noting that voting rates are astonishingly low among Taos County youth. In 2016, 80% of 18-24 year olds and 62% of 25-34 year old group did not vote. The youth voting record was even worse for the mid-term election in 2014 when 92% and 81% respectively, failed to vote. We need to flip those figures! She noted the difficulty of getting into schools and UNM and is approaching Dream Tree and Common Grounds about motivating a group of young people to work on getting others out to vote, with the potential grant and matching funds providing stipends to the youth leaders of this initiative.

13. Alexandra Rose- Support our Hospital

Alexandra announced an art exhibit at Stables Gallery, opening on May 17 from 5-8 p.m. 15% of all proceeds of profits will go to keeping Holy Cross Hospital solvent. Percentage of purchases are tax deductible. Encouraged everyone to assist HCH. The exhibit will remain open until May 21. Please go! (Even a Whistler painting will be on the market.)

14. Jean Stevens, Coordinator of the Taos Environmental Film Festival

This year's film festival raised over \$1,800 for 5 local non-profits! While pleased with that, Jean noted that Taos, with all its multiculturalism should be a shining light in the country. She urged support for developing the media arts at UNM, as film makers can and do make important social statements. She also stated that we must get rid of our outmoded, outdated Electoral College election system. The US is not a democracy; we do not have a one person-one vote system, as other democracies do. Contact her at jeanstevens@hotmail.com with thoughts and ideas.

15. Darien Fernandez, Chair, Taos County Democratic Party – Dark Money Comes to Taos

The Koch brothers (David and Charles) are making statewide efforts to decimate unions and take down voters' rights. They have already had success in passing Right to Work laws in 2 NM counties and are targeting all others including Taos County.

Two of the Koch Brothers' front groups, Americans for Prosperity and Concerned Veterans of America came to Taos to recruit and train Taosenos to promote their right-wing causes on April 28-29. Taos United, Taos Progressives, the Democratic Party and the Green Party staged a grassroots protest outside the Quality Inn where their workshop was being held to demonstrate opposition to their agenda. While a bigger turnout would have sent a stronger message, we definitely got their attention and our message was clear.

This election cycle is critical to keep Steve Pearce, a Koch favorite and Tea Party Republican, out of the Governor's seat. Taos County can be the wall to protect the state from a Pearce victory. THE TCDP office is now open and will be a community office for outreach and meet & greet events. Staff are looking for used computers & laptops that will be used to operate phone banking.

16. Bea Balsamo, TU's new Issue Group on gun sense

Bea announced the formation of a new TU Issue Group to help end gun violence. It is called Taoseños United for Gun Sense (aka TUGS) and has about 40 people on the list. Amongst its foreseen activities are: (1) Supporting students in any actions they continue to take. One idea is to invite the students to ask all political candidates to sign a pledge committing themselves to seeking sensible gun laws; (2) Advocacy with legislators in Santa Fe (NM has very, very loose gun purchase laws) and also in Taos, by standing in the back of the rooms of Town and County meetings; and (3) Organizing a regular vigil, perhaps with drumming followed by silence. Once the vigils get underway, everyone is urged to share with their families

and friends elsewhere for possibly doing the same thing in their own communities. Write to paula.claycomb@gmail.com if you want to be included on the TUGS mailing list.

17. Mary Lane Leslie

Mary Lane took the floor a second time to describe the damage that the “incredibly powerful” Koch brothers have been wreaking for the past 40 years. She noted their extreme wealth, behind only Jeff Bezos of Amazon, in the US. Former Texas Senator Jim Hightower and long-time liberal activist produces an excellent newsletter, *Hightower Lowdown*. The past 2 issues have been dedicated to the Koch brothers. See <https://hightowerlowdown.org/issue/march-april-2018/> for the March/April issue which everyone is encouraged to read. Mary Lane noted their use of seemingly benign names (like Americans for Prosperity and Concerned Veterans of America) and terminology (like “fragile communities” and “common sense” and “right to work”) to promote their elitist, wealthy-friendly, totally undemocratic agenda.

18. Melanie Baca, Green Party

Melanie, who is familiar with the Americans for Prosperity talking points reported that her biggest concern is that this group colors their statements and trainings in such a way that they ensnare gullible or uninformed people, including young people. She said AFP is training people to “place them very carefully” in such a way as to coerce people into supporting their anti-union, anti-environmental and anti-universal health care agenda. She suggested strategizing a plan of action to combat AFP and other Koch-funded “front” organizations.

19. Marianne Furedi, TENT (Taos Elders and Neighbors Together)

Marianne agreed with Mary Lane, Darien and Melanie regarding the insidious methods of dark money and the Koch brothers in particular. She noted the slickness and sophistication of their commercials of which we will see many in support of Steve Pearce.

She also announced that TENT is launching their “virtual village”—one that will support elders in their homes and community—in October. See <http://www.taoselders.org/>.

20. Marjorie Luckey, Taos United Treasurer

Marji took the floor again to pass “the bucket” for contributions. She noted that TU is entirely funded through voluntary contributions. Re-vamping the website is underway, there are costs to be covered for the Forum and Taos United is hoping to support youth voting initiatives and other civic projects. Be on the lookout for other fund raising projects such as t-shirts, bumper stickers and yard signs.

She urged everyone to attend county commissioner candidate meet and greets to be held in the Democratic headquarters and an upcoming candidate’s forum sponsored by *Taos News*. She suggested asking candidates if they are members of Americans for Prosperity or Concerned Veterans of America since it was reported that at least 2 candidates were seen at their workshop.

21. Darien Fernandez announced a meeting of Taos County Precinct Chairpersons and precinct members on Saturday, May 5, at 12:00 at the new TCDP office. Please come.

22. Jean Stevens noted the low levels of the Rio Grande. She asked how we can all conserve water. Suggestions were made to:

- Urge the school system to install low-flush toilets in the schools, as the toilets flush automatically every 30 seconds or so and waste A LOT OF WATER;
- Everyone stick to 3-minute showers;
- Use dish washer only when necessary and use the short cycle.