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New Mexico Democratic Primary Recap

Tuesday, June 2nd was unequivocally an historic night for progressive women of color in the state of New Mexico. While the state features a Democratic supermajority in the legislature, the New Mexico state house has seen years of stagnation and active hostility regarding issues of reproductive and environmental justice. In particular the State Senate, with four-year terms, had become a poster child for the ills of incumbency. The primary elections held on Tuesday dealt a crushing blow to those ills, with progressive women of color delivering decisive victories over Democratic incumbents in the State Senate.

Neomi Martinez-Parra, an early Maria's List endorsee in 2019, captured the most stunning upset of the evening, defeating thirty-two-year incumbent John Smith in Senate District 35. As Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Smith is considered perhaps the most powerful legislator in state government. His anti-choice and pro-austerity positions made him infamous within progressive circles. With his financial power and industry connections, Smith raised over \$80,000 in 2020, and entered the final weeks of the election with over \$100,000 in his campaign account. Martinez-Parra, driven by grassroots energy, defeated Smith with only \$35,000 raised over the entirety of the campaign. Her victory is emblematic of the historic gains made in the Senate on Tuesday.

Fellow Maria's List endorsee Brenda McKenna won a competitive three-way primary for the Democratic nomination in Senate District 9 and is on her way to being only the 2nd women of Native American descent in the State Senate. A first-time candidate focused on issues of equity, education, and environmental justice, McKenna defeated a former male State Rep. in what is considered the most competitive purple district in the state. McKenna closed strong in fundraising, raising over \$17,000 in the final month of the campaign. That, combined with support from Maria's List, positioned her for a robust get-out-the-vote effort that saw her nearly double the support of her two competitors.

Federally, Maria's List endorsee Teresa Leger Fernandez scored a decisive victory to become the Democratic nominee in the state's 3rd Congressional district, putting New Mexico on track to become the first state to send an all women-of-color delegation to the United States House of Representatives.

These three Maria's List candidates joined several other notable victories for progressive women and women of color across New Mexico on Tuesday. Below is a snapshot of those races and the results that changed the face of New Mexico politics.

New Mexico 3rd Congressional District – Democratic Primary

Candidate: Teresa Leger Fernandez

Result: WON with 41.15% of the vote in a seven-person open seat primary

Maria's List Candidate: Yes (5/19/20)

Amount Given: \$5,600

In a crowded seven-person primary, Fernandez gained an impressive 41% of the total vote. Her closest competitor, former CIA agent Valerie Plame, came in a distant second with less than 25%. Despite being outraised by nearly \$600,000, Fernandez rode a wave of progressive and activist endorsements with a campaign centered on reproductive, environmental, and immigrant justice. Her victory was geographically sweeping as well, winning 13 of the 16 counties within the district. As of this writing, 37% of registered Democratic voters participated in the primary with thousands of absentee ballots still outstanding. That likely places it right in line with statewide turnout. Unsurprisingly as one of the first competitive primaries in a generation, it is the largest voter turnout for the district in recent memory.

As a Democratic +8 PVI district, it is all but ensured that Fernandez will be sworn in as a Congresswoman for the district in January of 2021.

New Mexico 35th Senate District – Democratic Primary

Candidate: Neomi Martinez-Parra

Result: WON with 54.92% of the vote in an incumbent challenge two-person primary

Maria's List Candidate: Yes (11/19/19)

Amount Given: \$6,000 total (\$4,000 in 2019, \$2,000 in May 2020)

Martinez-Parra's victory over thirty-two-year incumbent John Arthur Smith marks a turning point for women of color and progressive politics in the New Mexico Senate. As the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Smith became a high-profile proponent of austerity measures, recently slashing a proposed Democratic spending bill that would have provided teacher pay raises and infrastructure improvements. He also voted against HB51, a bill that would have repealed the 1969 state law banning abortion. Martinez-Parra, a woman of color and longtime

educator, focused on these drastic cuts to public education and was vocal in her support of a constitutional amendment to increase funding for early childhood education.

Smith is a prolific fundraiser, with this cycle being no exception. Smith raised over \$110,000 in 2020 alone and had over \$80,000 cash-on-hand in the final weeks of the campaign. Martinez-Parra, as a first-time candidate, managed a total raise of \$50,000. This means Maria's List contributions accounted for 12% of the campaign's entire fundraising effort.

Martinez-Parra held her own in Hidalgo and Luna counties, gaining 48% of the vote in each. She more than made up the difference in the counties of Dona Ana and Sierra, securing 71% and 60% in each respectively. Turnout in the district far outpaced the statewide average of 37%, with 44% of Democratic voters participating in the primary.

This district supported Donald Trump in the 2016 election, making Martinez-Parra a Republican target in the November general election, where she faces a Republican opponent.

New Mexico 9th Senate District – Democratic Primary

Candidate: Brenda McKenna

Result: WON with 49.8% of the vote in an open seat three-person primary

Maria's List Candidate: Yes (5/19/20)

Amount Given: \$4,000

McKenna's victory puts in motion an historic opportunity for the progressive movement in New Mexico. Senate District 9 has long been the most competitive seat in the state, with Democrats barely securing victories in 2012 and 2016 by identical margins of .6%. With this in mind, the seat had been held by conservative Democrat John Sapien since 2008. Now New Mexicans have the opportunity to elect to the seat a progressive woman of color who would become only the 2nd Native American women elected to the senate chamber.

The three-person open seat primary was considered highly competitive by most, but McKenna displayed incredible momentum in the final weeks of the campaign to ultimately pull away on election night. She raised over \$20,000 in the final three weeks of the campaign as progressive donors seized on the opportunity to push McKenna over the top. It brought her final raise for the campaign to over \$56,000, essentially reaching her budget goal of \$60,000 set at the beginning of 2020.

McKenna's victory was all encompassing across the district. Of the 55 precincts across Sandoval and Bernalillo county on Tuesday, McKenna won a remarkable 49. Perhaps even more impressive was the district wide turnout. Just under 50% of registered Democrats voted on Tuesday in the district, far outpacing the statewide turnout rate of 37%.

With this nomination secured, McKenna moves on to a general election that will once again be considered a prime target for Republicans.

New Mexico 31st Senate District – Democratic Primary

Candidate: Melissa Ontiveros

Result: LOST with 28.53% of the vote in an incumbent challenge three-person primary

Maria's List Candidate: Yes (11/19/20)

Amount Given: \$4,000 (March 2020)

In one of the few disappointing results of the evening, challenger Melissa Ontiveros was easily defeated by sitting State Senator John Cervantes. Ontiveros struggled to fundraise in the final two months of the campaign, only raising \$1,300. The district itself had a paltry turnout rate of only 20%, well below the statewide average of 37%. This was most likely due to a lack of passion for unseating Cervantes, who is generally well-liked in Democratic circles. The district is also 80% Hispanic, a potential red flag for Hispanic voter enthusiasm in rural New Mexico for the rest of the 2020 election cycle.

New Mexico 28th Senate District – Democratic Primary

Candidate: Siah Correa Hamphill

Result: WON with 61.8% of the vote in an incumbent challenge two-person primary

Maria's List Candidate: No

Educator Siah Correa Hamphill defeated Democratic incumbent Gabriel Ramos easily on Tuesday evening. Ramos, like other incumbents defeated on Tuesday, voted against HB 51 to repeal New Mexico's statewide abortion ban. He also was largely funded by oil companies that have a large stake in the New Mexico economy. Hamphill herself was a prolific fundraiser, raising over \$110,000 primarily through small individual donations. District wide turnout was impressive at 47%, far outpacing the statewide turnout of 37%.

Hamphill faces a Republican in November for what is considered a relatively safe Democratic seat.

New Mexico 30th Senate District – Democratic Primary

Candidate: Pamela Cordova

Result: WON with 61.3% of the vote in an incumbent challenge two-person primary

Maria's List Candidate: No

Retired schoolteacher Pam Cordova easily ousted incumbent Democratic Senator Clemente Sanchez. Similar to Hamphill, Cordova's campaign was driven by issues of reproductive justice, with Sanchez voting against the repeal of the 1969 statewide abortion ban. Cordova's victory was all-encompassing, winning every county in the district. She was driven by small individual donations that ultimately totaled over \$100,000.

New Mexico 38th Senate District – Democratic Primary

Candidate: Carrie Hamblen

Result: WON with 49.1% of the vote in an incumbent challenge three-person primary

Maria's List Candidate: No

Along with Martinez-Parra, Carrie Hamblen scored perhaps the other biggest upset of the evening, defeating Senate President Pro Tem Mary Papan. Like others, Hamblen ran against Papan's opposition to the repeal of the state's 1969 abortion ban. And like other defeated incumbents, Papan received much of her campaign funds from industry, including oil behemoth Chevron. Hamblen was driven by small donor donations as well as pro-choice political action committees.

Just two weeks prior to the primary, Professor Lonna Atkeson of the University of New Mexico reflected on the potential historic nature of the upcoming election in the [New Mexico Political Reporter](#):

A win for these mostly first-time women candidates who are ideologically left running to defeat these mostly male Democrats who lean more to the right could be a shift in New Mexico politics, according to political analyst Lonna Atkeson, a political science professor at the University of New Mexico.

"The two things we don't talk about (in New Mexico) are abortion and immigration," Atkeson said. "In New Mexico, it's complex because it divides the (Democratic) party. We tend to stay away from the culture issues because they are divisive. Is there a place for conservative values in the Democratic party or are they (conservative Democrats) not their voters anymore?"

New Mexico Democratic voters answered that question in full on Tuesday evening.