

CANDIDATE SPOTLIGHT February 2020

[Neomi Martinez-Parra, NM State Senate](#)

[Melissa Ontiveros, NM State Senate 31](#)

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Neomi Martinez-Parra, NM State Senate
Progressive Democratic Pick Up
Primary Election: June 2nd, 2020

Neomi Martinez-Parra is a former chair of the Hidalgo County Democratic party, a special education teacher, and caretaker of her elderly mother. She lives in Lordsburg with her husband, daughter and elderly mother. She has decided to run against John Arthur Smith, a longtime conservative Democrat and Chairman of the Finance committee. Neomi is a first time candidate and was formerly the Vice Chair of the New Mexico Democratic party for six years. She is running to break up the conservative bloc in the State Senate because she understands how difficult life is for families and working class people in rural New Mexico.

On the Issues

- **Education:** As a Special Education Teacher in the Lordsburg Public Schools District, **Neomi** has seen first-hand the struggles that her students and their families face every day. From issues of poverty to homelessness, **Neomi** has always made it a point to offer a safe haven in her classroom. **Neomi** supports our educators and unions, and will fight for all students in New Mexico to have equal access to quality education and resources to be competitive with the rest of the world.
- **Health Care:** **Neomi** is the full-time caretaker of her elderly mother. As a caregiver, she has experienced how inadequate access to proper healthcare has stood in the way of her Mother's needs. **Neomi** understands that a change is needed. With hospitals understaffed and underfunded, rural communities deserve equitable access to quality healthcare. Healthcare is a right, and in order for New Mexicans to thrive, proper access to healthcare and services is something she will fight for in the Senate.
- **Housing & Infrastructure:** **Neomi** wants to address the lack of infrastructure in her district. She believes protecting access to clean water, regulating land use, and providing affordable housing in her district is critical. The waiting list for Public Housing is long, and homes are in poor

condition. Because of these conditions, the local economy is unable to thrive, creating a vicious cycle of degradation that stifles socioeconomic mobility. **Neomi** vows to fight for equal and better housing for district communities which have suffered due to harsh and ineffective policies in the Senate.

Status of Race: [New Mexico's 35th Senate District](#) is composed of Dona, Ana, Hildago, Luna and Sierra County. The district has a population of 49,365 people and is majority Latino. 77.2% of the population is of voting age. It lies on the US/Mexico border, and is one of the poorest districts in the state. The total population is nearly fifty thousand residents, with a primary demographic breakdown 45.6% white and 51.3% Latino. **Neomi** is challenging powerful conservative Democratic [incumbent John Arthur Smith](#), a proponent of major corporate tax breaks, especially for the fossil fuel industry. Under his leadership, the Senate Finance Committee has killed progressive tax and education legislation. Additionally, he is pro-life. This race can change the course of the state given the power of the incumbent and his current political positioning as the financial steward of New Mexico.

Senator Smith has been in New Mexico politics since 1982. He unsuccessfully ran for Congress in 2002, but returned to the State Senate in 2004. In 2012, he had a primary opponent that he defeated 56% (2,031 votes) to 44% (1,596 votes). In cycles in which he faced a primary opponent, Senator Smith raised \$140,000. In races that only featured a general election opponent, he has raised an average of \$100,000.

Deep Democracy Dynamics of Race: The New Mexico Bluewave, mostly led by women and women of color, has transformed the local legislative and Congressional landscape. In responding to Anti-Trump sentiment, the progressive community has been able to grow their political infrastructure to create real results in a border state. The New Mexico electorate has been increasing its level of voter turnout for federal state-wide elections since 2012 to the benefit of an increasing Democratic majority in both state and federal offices. In 2018, the state gained a progressive majority in the State House, and are subsequently targeting five state senate seats in 2020 to build on this progressive wave. Additionally, donors decided over two decades ago to commit to building progressive infrastructure in New Mexico. They have developed unique leaders that have become critical to a nationwide strategy to also build the party's bench. Similar to other southern states, New Mexico has a smaller donor class and requires out of state investment to enact their vision. In spite of progressives flipping the House and winning the Governor's office in 2018—all of which were key 2018 Maria's List priorities—to overcome this donor barrier in 2020, organizations like the [Center for Civic Action](#) are prioritizing flipping two out of five senate seats to recalibrate the policymaking process for 2021. Further, Maria's List will also be supporting freshman pioneers from 2018: Congresswoman Deb Haaland of NM-01 and Congresswoman Xochitl Small-Torres of NM-02. New Mexico utilizes a closed primary process, with participation in each party's primary limited to registered party members.

Campaign Status: **Neomi's** campaign manager has been working within the Democratic Party and has played a role in the long-term progressive infrastructure building ecosystem. He is also managing other primary challengers, including Melissa Ontiveros, our second state senate Maria's List endorsee. With the Primary in June of 2020, **Neomi** has to raise \$20,000 a month to remain competitive against her entrenched incumbent opponent. She is projected to need approximately seven thousand votes to win the June primary and plans to do so through a relational and persuasive canvassing strategy. Given that 2020 is an even numbered year, the legislative session ends in January, giving both candidates about 4 months for a full-time campaign.

Campaign Contribution Limits: \$5,000 for individuals and PAC for non-state wide candidates ([New Mexico secretary of state office](#)).

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**Melissa Ontiveros, New Mexico State Senate 31
Progressive Democratic Pick Up
Democratic Primary Election: June 2nd, 2020**

Melissa Toledo-Ontiveros is a first-time candidate and a Special Operations Coordinator for the Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico, the largest nonprofit agency in the state. As an accounting and operations professional, Melissa developed programs that are trauma-informed whole family approaches that leverages resources to meet families' needs, strengths, and goals. As a human health services professional, she has held various direct service roles such as case manager, school counselor, mental & behavioral therapist, multi-systemic sexual therapist, developmental specialist, and Registered Behavioral Technician. She is running to be a convener and advocate for policy change that helps families and communities thrive in New Mexico. Her goal is to promote public policies that facilitate and allocate resources for collaboration and partnership with state and local representatives, the Department of Health and related state agencies, New Mexico State University, University of New Mexico, and both for-profit and nonprofit agencies.

On the Issues:

- **Environmental Justice:** As an advocate, **Melissa** works with environmental and conservation groups, local and state departments, and state and federal lawmakers to address and devise collaborative solutions to climate change and the protection of New Mexico's environment. **Melissa** will continue to advocate and support New Mexico's transition to renewable energy. She is committed to working collaboratively with diverse stakeholders on economic development and a just transition to a healthier future for New Mexico.
- **Affordable Healthcare:** **Melissa** has experienced the need for affordable health insurance, access to healthcare, and access to specialists firsthand. She knows what it feels like to worry if she will be able to afford surgery or worry if there is a specialist that will understand her needs and not

have to travel across the state or to another state for services. She centers her advocacy in the understanding that everyone—regardless of age, gender or where they come from—should have the right to equal access to healthcare without fear of poverty, bankruptcy, chronic illness, or death. Access to health care in rural parts of New Mexico is of particular importance to her, and she will continue her advocacy to recruit and retain highly trained health care clinicians in New Mexico.

- **Gun Violence: Melissa** has an extensive background working directly with gangs and understands that gun violence is generational and systemic. If elected, she will bring a trauma centered lens to her gun control advocacy and will fight to bring evidenced programs that will reduce adverse childhood trauma, bullying, and mental health issues.

Status of Race: As of the 2010 census, a total of 48,856 people resides within New Mexico's thirty-first state senate district. Democratic Incumbent Joseph Cervantes was first elected in 2012. He ran in a Democratic primary for Governor in 2018 and lost handedly, only receiving 11% of the vote. In 2012, the incumbent won the primary election by 300 votes, with only 1,200 voters turning out for the primary. He won the general election against a Republican opponent by 4,020 votes. In 2016, Joseph ran unopposed in the primary and general election, and received 9,443 votes. It is unconfirmed whether Representative Cervantes will run for re-election in 2020, as he has not filed with the New Mexico Secretary of State. By announcing early, **Melissa** has deterred other potential primary candidates.

Deep Democracy Dynamics of Race: New Mexico progressives are targeting two state senate pickups to remove the conservative Democratic hold on powerful committees, and this is one of them. The New Mexico Bluewave has transformed the local legislative landscape. Seizing on Anti-Trump sentiment, the progressive community has been able to grow their political infrastructure to create real results. The New Mexico electorate has been increasing its volume of voter turnout for federal state-wide elections since 2012 to the benefit of an increasing Democratic majority of state-wide and federal offices. In 2018, they gained a progressive majority in the State House and are targeting five state senate seats in 2020 to complete this progressive wave. Additionally, donors decided over two decades ago to commit to building progressive infrastructure in New Mexico. We have developed unique leaders that have become critical to a nationwide strategy to also build the party's bench. In 2018, Dona Ana County had a 61% voter turnout, with 61,342 voters turning out. With 59% of Democratic primary voters in the state being women, this can only benefit women challenging entrenched incumbents. Further, Maria's List will also be supporting freshman pioneers from 2018: Congresswoman Deb Haaland of NM-01 and Congresswoman Xochitl Small-Torres of NM-02. New Mexico utilizes a closed primary process, with participation in each party's primary limited to registered party members.

Campaign Status: **Melissa** plans to raise \$100,000 by the June primary. Currently, Senator Cervantes' current cash on hand is likely close to \$219,991. **Melissa** is an EMERGE alum, which could lead to endorsements from women's organizations

like Planned Parenthood and EMILY's List. **Melissa** has worked at the intersection of public health and equity for her entire career, lending herself to a diverse community of advocates for specific issues like trauma informed social services and broad issues like community informed health initiatives. The professional base she has developed as a public health advocate and counselor is unique for politics. She has worked closely with families dealing with trauma, and built relationships with some of New Mexico's most vulnerable populations. Her direct work with people at moments of extreme vulnerability lends itself to the dynamics that create a successful movement building campaign.