

Editorial: Journal says keep these 5 moderate NM Democrats

BY ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD

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Today, the Journal is breaking with tradition and endorsing in several key contested legislative primary races outside Bernalillo County. For information including candidate Q&As, district maps and news stories as they are published, go to [ABQJournal.com/election2020](https://www.abqjournal.com/election2020).

NEW MEXICO SENATE, Democratic primary

District 38 – Sen. Mary Kay Papen

This year marks the first time in 20 years Papen has faced a primary opponent, an indication she has served her constituents well. The top-ranking Senate Democrat from Las Cruces describes herself as socially liberal and fiscally conservative – a description that fits many New Mexicans, especially those not tethered to either major political party. She has many accomplishments to tout, including her work on an assisted outpatient treatment law that balances civil liberties with safety, and passing laws to combat violence against women.

The winner of the primary will face Republican Charles Wendler of Las Cruces to represent the district that includes parts of Las Cruces and a large swath of Doña Ana County.

District 35 – Sen. John Arthur Smith

Smith has served in the state Senate since 1989, and he's never been more needed as the state faces an economic calamity. The Deming Democrat and chairman of the Senate Finance Committee is the Legislature's most influential voice on budgetary matters, and his understanding of the struggles families face along with his fiscal realism will be key in the coming months as lawmakers grapple with a massive budget shortfall and look to curtail spending. Smith's work with colleagues of all political stripes is why we have full-day kindergarten, and on his watch spending on early childhood education has increased hundreds of millions of dollars.

The winner of the primary will face Republican Crystal Diamond of Elephant Butte to represent the district that includes all or parts of Hidalgo, Sierra, Luna and Doña Ana counties.

District 30 – Sen. Clemente Sanchez

In an op-ed published in the Journal last June, Sanchez wrote that ideological purity has distanced the Democratic Party from moderate and independent voters. Former state Sen. Eric Griego wrote an op-ed in response, saying Sanchez has undermined Democrats' efforts and then taken credit for compromises. When did compromising become a political sin? As chairman of the Senate's Corporations and Transportation Committee, Sanchez has a proven record of working with people on all sides to get things done, including his support of a minimum wage bill that phases in a \$12 minimum wage by 2023.

The winner of the primary will face the Republican primary winner to represent the district that includes Grants and parts of Valencia and three other counties.

District 28 – Sen. Gabriel Ramos

Citing his religious beliefs and the Catholic Church, Ramos is one of a handful of Senate Democrats who have opposed repealing the state's 1969 anti-abortion law. That symbolic dissent hasn't sat well with left-leaning groups that are seeking to purge the state Senate of moderate Democrats. Only in his second year in the Senate, Ramos has shown an interest in protecting New Mexicans and working across the aisle. Earlier this year, the Silver City Democrat cosponsored bipartisan public safety legislation that licenses tobacco retailers and raises the age to purchase tobacco products to 21.

The winner of the primary will face Republican James Williams of Catron in the general election to represent the district that stretches from Socorro to Silver City.

District 4 – Sen. George Muñoz

Muñoz used his own money recently to pay for a radio ad in Diné, the Navajo language, to notify tribal members of a telephone help line amid the coronavirus pandemic. The Gallup Democrat has shown real leadership amid the crisis, calling for a lockdown of the city to stem the virus' spread. Muñoz has also shown bipartisan ability, joining a House Republican earlier this year in sponsoring sweeping changes to New Mexico's retirement system for public employees so pensions are a promise kept.

The winner of the primary will face Republican Angela Olive in the general election to represent the district that includes much of McKinley County and portions of San Juan and Cibola counties.

This editorial first appeared in the Albuquerque Journal. It was written by members of the editorial board and is unsigned as it represents the opinion of the newspaper rather than the writers.