

# Vote yes for PRC reform

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During the 2019 legislative session, we co-sponsored the joint resolution proposing a restructuring of the Public Regulation Commission, the powerful body responsible for regulating utilities, transportation, telecommunication and other industries in the state.

The measure passed both chambers with sweeping, bipartisan support and now comes before voters as a constitutional amendment in the upcoming election. We strongly urge all New Mexicans to vote in favor of this measure.

Currently, the PRC is led by five elected members. Under the proposal, the commission would have three appointed members. New candidates would be vetted and submitted to the governor by a nominating committee, then appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state Senate. No more than two commissioners could be members of the same party, and they would serve six-year staggered terms with a two-term limit.

So, why the change, why now and why is this good for New Mexico? The scope of the PRC is complex and wide-ranging. Commissioners have the power to set utility rates and will shoulder much of the responsibility of guiding the state through its transition to a renewable energy portfolio. To do their jobs well, commissioners must have a rare combination of skills: technological expertise, legal acumen and a keen knowledge of regulatory matters.

The current structure of the PRC is not delivering for New Mexicans. Special interests and big money, rather than professional qualifications, too often determine who serves on the commission. This is not a position conducive to on-the-job training. In the words of current commission Chairman Steve Fischmann and Commissioner Cynthia Hall, who both support the amendment, “Commissioners should be experts at the outset, not rookies.”

A lack of professional qualifications isn't the only issue keeping the PRC from functioning as it should. For years the PRC has been plagued by infighting and nonstop controversy, difficulties in managing the agency ethically and efficiently, and flat-out criminal behavior, leading to charges and convictions. New Mexicans deserve better.

In crafting the constitutional amendment reimagining the PRC, a bipartisan working group in the state Senate consulted with a broad range of interest groups who appear before the commission. This vital input underscored the call for change, reflected by the final votes on each floor. (It passed 59-8 in the House and 36-5 in the Senate.) If passed by the voters, New Mexico would join a majority of states that have commissions with similar models. The structure has been tested and proven to work well across the country.

Experience and expertise matter. The decisions made by the PRC affect every New Mexican, every day. We strongly encourage you to vote yes in support of changing the PRC from an elected five-member commission to an appointed three-member commission and bringing much-needed reform to this important regulatory authority.