

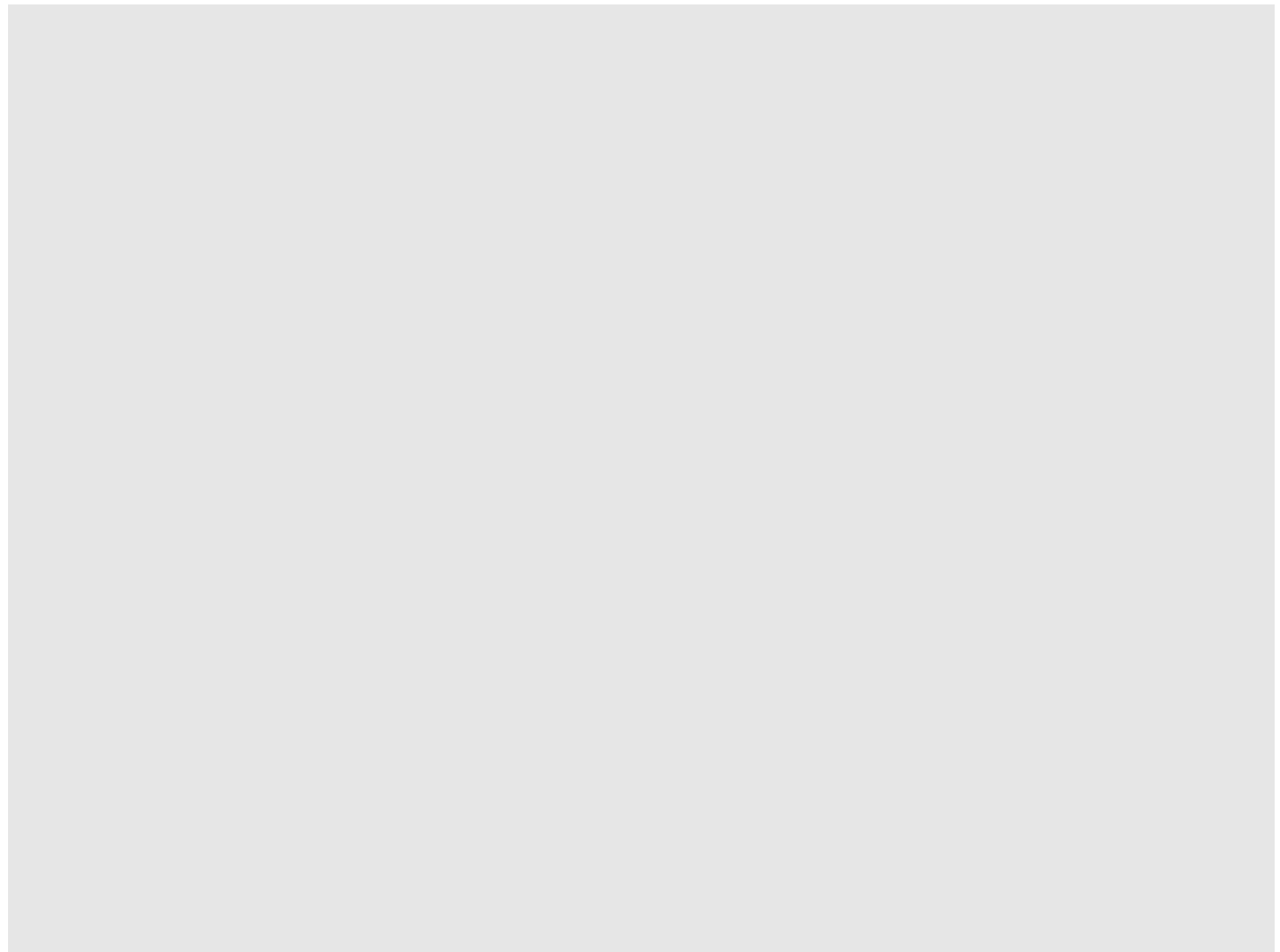
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## Q&A: Governor and lieutenant governor candidates on New Mexico economy

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Bernalillo County District Attorney Sam Bregman addresses an audience during the state party's preprimary convention March 7.

Cormac Dodd/New Mexican file photo



The candidates vying to be the state's next governor have different ideas to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans, from raising the minimum wage to expanding career and technical education, and eliminating certain taxes.

Affordability is an issue affecting a large segment of the population in New Mexico, which persistently has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation.

The next governor will succeed Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat who has made making life more affordable for New Mexicans a cornerstone of her administration.

## Gubernatorial candidates

### Sam Bregman

**Party affiliation:** Democratic Party

#### **What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

We should put money back in people's pockets. I've proposed using the oil and gas windfall to send up to \$500 per person to families earning under \$200,000. At the same time, we must lower costs by expanding housing, child care, and good-paying jobs, so families can get ahead, not just get by.

#### **What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

We should provide targeted relief for working families while making sure the system is fair. That includes expanding tax credits like the Working Families Tax Credit and closing loopholes that benefit large corporations. We should look to simplify our gross receipts tax system where there are already more than 200 different exemptions. Our goal should be to ease the burden on middle- and lower-income households and to promote the growth of our local small businesses.

#### **What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

There are so many contributing factors to our high poverty rates here in the state. Our governor accomplished one of the best tools in fighting this issue when she signed universal child care into law. The best anti-poverty program is a good-paying job. We need to invest in workforce development, education and industries that create sustainable careers. At the same time, we must

strengthen the safety net — especially child care, health care and housing so families have the stability to move up. We also must ensure that all families have equal access to a high-quality education.



Deb Haaland

Nathan Burton/New Mexican file photo

## Deb Haaland

**Party affiliation:** Democratic Party

### **What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

New Mexicans are doing everything right and still struggling to make ends meet — I know what that's like. They deserve stability and to be able to pay for their groceries and rent in the same month. We need to lower everyday costs for families, increase the minimum wage, crack down on rent fixing, and make bold investments in New Mexicans who are ready to build businesses, create good-paying jobs and expand the industries that power our state's future. As governor, New Mexico will lead as our country's energy capital and will aggressively build more housing.

**What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

To put more money in New Mexican's pockets, I plan to expand the Child Tax Credit and the Working Families Tax Credit. I also am aware there are concerns over gross receipts tax — in industries where we have shortages, like health care, along with other changes, I will work to adjust the gross receipts tax to incentivize more doctors to stay in the state. I want to ensure that New Mexicans have access to the tax credits they qualify for by streamlining application processes, and setting up one-stop shops for families and businesses.

**What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

We need to build a more affordable New Mexico while investing in good-paying jobs. That means raising the minimum wage and ensuring it keeps pace with inflation. It also means taking bold action to expand affordable housing, keep energy prices stable for the long term and lower the cost of health care. Finally, we should back the New Mexicans who are starting businesses and creating good jobs here at home. That includes investing in the skilled trades and bringing those pathways back into our middle and high schools, so more young people can graduate with a path to a good-paying career.

## Gregg Hull

**Party affiliation:** Republican Party

**What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

Affordability starts with good jobs and a government that gets out of the way. I'll diversify our economy by attracting advanced manufacturing, aerospace and energy businesses. I'll cut unnecessary occupational licensing red tape so skilled workers can earn a living faster. I'll expand career and technical education so New Mexicans can step into high-paying trades without taking on years of debt. And I'll work to eliminate property taxes for New Mexicans 60 and older — giving seniors real relief and the ability to stay in their homes.

**What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

I will pursue eliminating property taxes for New Mexicans 60 and older. Seniors on fixed incomes shouldn't be taxed out of their own homes. Here's how we pay for it: by responsibly expanding oil and natural gas production at the state level, we generate new severance and royalty revenues — a

portion of which will be allocated directly to local communities to replace any lost property tax revenue. We grow the energy economy, protect local services and give seniors the financial relief they've earned. Everyone wins.

**What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

Poverty is not solved by government programs alone — it's solved by growing an economy where people can earn their way up. I'll cut red tape and occupational licensing

barriers that keep hardworking New Mexicans from getting to work. I'll invest in career and technical education so students graduate with real, marketable skills in trades that cannot be outsourced. By diversifying our economy, attracting investment, and holding our education system accountable for results, we give every New Mexican a genuine path out of poverty.



Gregg Hull

Courtesy photo

## Duke Rodriguez

**Party affiliation:** Republican Party

**What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

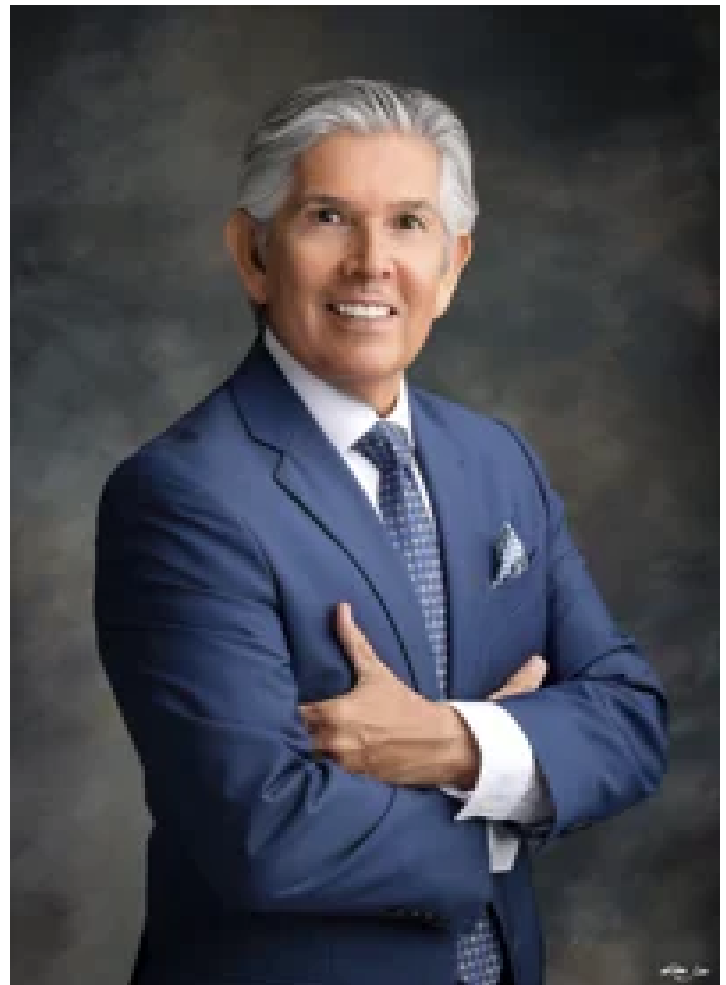
Eliminate personal income tax. Eliminate gross receipts tax on retail sales. Reduce property tax. Review all unspent capital outlay funds, sweep the capital outlay suspension accounts and redirect that money to fixing New Mexico's roads. Bring feuding health care entities to the Governor's Office and negotiate a truce so people can make a doctor's appointment. Appoint an energy czar, headquartered in southeastern New Mexico, to ensure New Mexico gets the best return on its oil investment. Publicize New Mexico's natural and human resources to large private employers looking to relocate from California and other states.

**What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

Eliminate personal income tax. Eliminate gross receipts tax on retail sales. Reduce property tax. Review and actually fix tax pyramiding problems.

**What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

Eliminate personal income tax. Eliminate gross receipts tax on retail sales. Reduce property tax. Create a cushion or bridge to soften the "benefits cliff" fall and encourage individuals to transition off public benefits. Offer bright children in public education the chance to attend a higher-achieving school. Consider education vouchers so parents have more education options. Work to bring private-sector employers, especially manufacturers, to New Mexico.



Duke Rodriguez

## Doug Turner

**Party affiliation:** Republican Party

**What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

Everywhere I go in New Mexico I hear the same thing: Everything costs too much, and paychecks don't go far enough. Inflation has come down, but there's more work to be done at the national level to bring down prices and interest rates. Regardless, costs of living will continue to rise, which means we must have an educated and prepared workforce who can command higher wages and salaries to support their families.

**What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

As the 33rd governor, I will dramatically cut gross receipts taxes and personal income taxes. My plan will put money back into the pockets of New Mexicans. Right now, our rates are not competitive in the region, and our [gross receipts tax] is a regressive tax that disproportionately impacts low-income households and stifles small business growth. We can pay for these tax cuts initially through the incredible growth of our permanent fund, and the economic growth created by the cuts will eventually generate more revenue for the state than was lost.



Doug Turner

Courtesy photo

### **What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

We can't end poverty by expanding dependency on the government. The way to reduce poverty is to help more New Mexicans become self-sufficient through good-paying jobs, strong schools, safe communities and an economy that rewards work. I'd cut red tape for small businesses, support vocational training and apprenticeships, improve literacy and math outcomes, and make sure public benefits are a bridge to work, not a trap.

If people choose me to be their next governor, I say state programs should help people rise; not stay stuck in poverty generation to generation.

## Lieutenant governor candidates

### David Gallegos

**Party affiliation:** Republican Party

### **What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

We have to lower the cost of living by reducing the tax burden and cutting unnecessary regulations that drive up prices. That starts with addressing the gross receipts tax, which gets passed on to consumers at every stage. We should also focus on energy development, which creates jobs and

keeps costs down. Families need relief, not more government-driven expenses.

### **What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

New Mexico's tax system is overly complicated and burdensome, especially the gross receipts tax. I support meaningful reform that reduces rates and simplifies the system so businesses can grow and families can keep more of what they earn. We should also be cautious about any new taxes that could further strain working families.

### **What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

The best way to reduce poverty is through economic opportunity. That means creating jobs by supporting small businesses, expanding energy development, and cutting regulations that hold back growth. We also need to improve education and workforce training so people are prepared for good-paying jobs. Government programs alleviate immediate pain, but they never solve poverty: opportunity will.

## **Manny Lardizabal**

**Party affiliation:** Republican Party

### **What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

New Mexico must reduce the cost of living by cutting excessive regulations that drive up business costs and housing prices. Lower gas taxes and reduce energy taxes to decrease transportation and utility costs for families. Expand school choice so parents can afford quality education without private tuition. Incentivize affordable housing development by streamlining permitting and limiting zoning restrictions. Protect property owners' rights to rent at market rates. Finally, reduce government spending and waste to lower the tax burden on working families. Free market solutions, not government expansion, will make New Mexico affordable again for everyday citizens.

### **What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

I support reducing taxes for all New Mexicans to stimulate economic growth and keep more money in workers' pockets. First, eliminate the gross receipts tax on small businesses to encourage entrepreneurship and job creation. Second, lower the personal income tax rates, especially for middle-class families struggling with inflation. Third, cap property tax increases to protect

homeowners, particularly retirees on fixed incomes. Finally, reduce corporate taxes to attract businesses to New Mexico. As a Christian and Republican, I believe government should take less, not more, from hardworking families who earn every dollar through honest labor and faith-driven stewardship.

### **What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

New Mexico must focus on work, not just welfare, to reduce poverty. Benefits help temporarily but don't lift families out of generational poverty. We need to boost labor force participation — currently only 57.6% vs. 62.5% nationally. Create jobs by cutting taxes and regulations that stifle business growth. Expand job training and education to increase wages. Support Christian organizations that provide rent/utility assistance while promoting faith-based mentorship and accountability. True prosperity comes from work, purpose, and personal responsibility, not permanent government dependency.

## Harold Pope

**Party affiliation:** Democratic Party

### **What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

We must lower costs where it matters most — in housing, health care, utilities and everyday essentials. I will expand affordable housing, down payment assistance and prescription drug cost relief, cut the gross receipts tax on health care and establish a public option in health care to increase access and affordability. We must also lower utility costs by holding providers accountable and investing in clean, affordable energy. At the same time, we will take on corporate price gouging and invest in infrastructure and industries that provide living-wage jobs in order to reduce costs and to build economic security for New Mexico families.

### **What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

I support targeted tax relief for lower-income, working families and seniors, while ensuring the wealthiest individuals and large corporations pay their fair share. We should close loopholes and modernize our tax code to reduce the burden on everyday New Mexicans without sacrificing essential services. At the same time, we will increase the Working Families Tax Credit and the Low-Income Comprehensive Tax Rebate, while asking top earners to pay their fair share. We must make our tax system more fair, balanced and focused on lifting up those who need it most.

**What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

We must raise wages, strengthen worker protections, and invest in education and workforce training. Continued investments in universal free child care will support working families and economic mobility. We must also tackle food insecurity through targeted nutrition programs and community partnerships. Expanding internship and mentorship opportunities will help connect New Mexicans, especially young people, to career pathways. By supporting small businesses and startups, increasing access to health care and housing, and making strategic, locally tailored, people-first investments, we can create real pathways out of poverty across our state.

## Maggie Toulouse Oliver

**Party affiliation:** Democratic Party

**What should the state do to make life more affordable for everyday New Mexicans?**

Skyrocketing prices are making life even harder for New Mexicans. The Trump administration is ripping health care, food assistance, housing security and energy security away from working people. I will work with the next Democratic governor and the Senate to support legislation that protects earned benefits, closes gaps in federal funding and taps into New Mexico's wealth to invest in our people. We need to raise the minimum wage, pass paid family and medical leave, build and support affordable housing, and invest in trade schools and apprenticeships for great careers for our students.

**What changes do you support to the state's taxes?**

The Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives passed yet another massive tax giveaway to the wealthy that hurt the poorest New Mexicans last year. Here in New Mexico, we've worked to address the revenue gap, but there's long-term work to be done. I support a progressive tax system for New Mexico — the wealthy should pay their fair share. New initiatives like Santa Fe's "mansion tax" are a step in the right direction for balancing the playing field as the cost of living continues to climb.

**What do you think should be done to bring down New Mexico's high poverty rate?**

Poverty in New Mexico is far higher than the national average. A number of factors, like access to transportation, rural health care, access to child care, addiction treatment and more can keep people trapped or help them escape poverty. I believe the state needs to make a concerted effort at every level to integrate programs and practices and share data to tackle poverty. We need to implement Housing First to get people into safe dwellings, boost addiction treatment and behavioral health funding, keep rural hospitals open, and invest in better transportation statewide.

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Reporter