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MY VIEW PAUL CHARLTON

Watch forum for candidates' views on climate change

By Paul Charlton

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New Mexico's social and economic conditions make it one of the most vulnerable states to climate change in the continental United States. Since 1970, our state has warmed by 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit — ranking as the fifth-fastest warming state in the nation.

New Mexico faces severe climate impacts including extreme heat, prolonged droughts, wildfires and smoke, flash flooding and declining agricultural productivity. Issues such as poverty, limited health care access, aging infrastructure and rural isolation amplify these threats. Rio Rancho, Albuquerque and Las Cruces are experiencing steep increases in dangerously hot days, with vulnerable populations facing heightened risk from heat due to inadequate cooling resources and economic constraints.

Healthy Climate New Mexico, a nonpartisan group of health professionals from around the state, provided the public with an opportunity to evaluate 2026 gubernatorial candidates' commitment to support communities vulnerable to these effects at our Dec. 4 town hall.

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Four candidates participated in person and two sent surrogates.

Unfortunately, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* published a misleading story about the logistics around the event, rather than focusing on the many substantive policy proposals being discussed (“Gov. candidates lukewarm on climate town hall,” Dec. 4). That focus was a disservice to readers, denying New Mexicans the chance to hear candidates’ views on critical issues.

All New Mexico governor and lieutenant governor candidates were invited to participate. Three Republican candidates for governor and lieutenant governor (Gregg Hull, Duke Rodriguez and Manuel Lardizabal) responded and were unable to attend. One Republican erroneously reported not being invited. Every Democratic candidate attended in person or via a surrogate.

The health impacts of climate change are not a partisan issue. New Mexicans deserve leaders willing to engage with factual evidence and propose real solutions to the climate related challenges facing our state.

Candidates hoping to lead our state owe voters their thoughts on how to guide New Mexico towards a better future — showing up for our communities is part of the job description. Two weeks prior to the forum, the campaigns were provided with the substantive, solution-focused questions:

- Do you support efforts to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions in New Mexico? What are your recommendations for doing so? If you don’t, what are your reasons?
- Do you support accelerating solar, wind and geothermal technologies? Prioritize them for state investment fund decisions? Increase tax credits? Other ideas?
- Will you fund a climate and public health program within the Department of Health to track scientific and medical data on the health impacts of climate change, evaluate progress and provide technical assistance?
- How do you propose to support communities dependent on the oil and gas industry to transition to more sustainable long-term jobs?

- What actions or policies do you recommend to halt the negative effects of climate change and protect the health of our families?
- What steps will you take to help New Mexicans protect ourselves from more extreme heat? Support stronger state-level worker protections against extreme heat exposure? Support the creation of an Extreme Weather Resilience Fund?

New Mexicans deserve to hear candidates' views on the climate crisis threatening our state. Voters can watch the full forum recording on Healthy Climate NM's YouTube channel and website (www.healthyclimatenm.org).

Learn which gubernatorial and lieutenant governor candidates are prepared to protect our communities with real climate and health policies. The choices we make will determine whether New Mexico becomes a leader in climate resilience and clean energy prosperity, or whether we allow the climate and health crises to deepen.

Our future — and our children's future — depends on electing leaders who will confront reality and act decisively.

Dr. Paul Charlton is an emergency medicine physician in Gallup and board chair of Healthy Climate New Mexico.