

**Conservation Voters New Mexico**  
**PRC Candidate Questionnaire**  
*September 2006*

**Responses from David Bacon**

Issue Questions:

1. Do you support requiring utilities to add significant amounts of renewable energy to their generation portfolios, even if it means rates might have to increase (in the short term) to accomplish this?

Y/N

Yes. I would like to see substantial increases in the renewable percentages over what is currently required. I believe that a 2020 goal of 50%, with compatible intermediate goals, is achievable. Wind, solar and biomass technology are rapidly developing, as is energy efficiency technology. Furthermore, with rises in fossil fuel prices, decreases in the cost of renewable technology, and regulatory changes such as a feed-in rate to attract private capital for local renewable energy production (see below), significant rate increases should not be required.

2. Do you support the right of customers to “net-meter” renewable energy systems?

Y/N

Yes. I installed the first net-metered residential solar system in New Mexico on my home in 1998, and it was this experience that got me involved in utility regulation issues in the first place!

I plan to strengthen net-metering rights in two ways: First, I will promote rules that require utilities to interconnect any renewable-energy system that meets safety standards set by a neutral third-party. We cannot hope to have large-scale penetration of customer-owned generation if we leave utility companies in control of interconnection standards. Second, I will seek to implement feed-in tariffs that reward customers for installing renewable energy systems by paying a premium for the energy they generate. Such tariffs have become known worldwide as the single most effective tool for accelerating implementation of renewable energy, based on their success in China, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland and Canada.

These are important steps toward fully decentralized power production with local small- and medium-scale producers, and the terms of the interconnection rules and tariffs can be customized to achieve the desired results. For instance, higher tariffs can be offered for generation that is strategically located to reduce a capacity constraint or eliminate the need for a line upgrade. Real-time tariffs that pay more during peak-use times can reduce peak loading on distribution lines. And penalties can be set such that they deter utilities from trying to block interconnection of beneficial distributed generation.

3. Do you support requiring utilities to implement energy efficiency programs that achieve a mandates target? If so, what percentage level of mandated target would you support?

Y/N

What level?

To achieve our goals with energy efficiency, we must separately address the efficient *generation and distribution* of energy and the efficient *use* of energy.

Utilities are in the business of generating and distributing energy, and I strongly support rules that ensure that they do those things efficiently. Our present system of cost-based regulation rewards utilities for spending money and being inefficient. That's why they always want to build expensive new power lines and generation plants. We need to move toward performance-based regulation, which instead rewards utilities for *reducing* system cost by building more efficient generation plants, and locating them strategically to reduce the need for new power lines.

The efficient *use* of energy is also extremely important, and the PRC can do some things to incentivize it. But demand-side energy efficiency is an unregulated, competitive enterprise, and putting regulated, monopoly companies into this businesses under a full cost-recovery mechanism is anticompetitive and problematic. The biggest problem is that the cost-recovery mechanism guarantees that the utility's revenue stream is maintained as energy use declines. Under such a program, if energy consumption were successfully cut in half, the consumers would enjoy no net financial benefit because they would still be paying the same total amount of money to the utility company!

A better mechanism for promoting efficient use of energy would be to collect a small charge on every customer's bill, and use it to fund efficiency programs that are run by third-parties.

4. Given NM's potential for renewable energy development, what is your position on the building of new conventional, pulverized coal plants in New Mexico? Do you support requiring any new, advanced coal projects to fully "sequester" their CO2 emissions? Do you support mechanisms for "cost recovery" to make advanced coal (IGCC + CCSR) cost-effective?

In general, I do not support additional coal-fired generation at all due to environmental problems that extend well beyond the CO2 issues. According to an August, 2000 study by Clear the Air, coal-fired generation in the U.S. emits more than one billion pounds of toxins annually. A follow-up study by Abt Associates determined that this pollution kills about 30,000 Americans annually. Coal-fired power plants have major negative impacts due to the destructive nature of coal mining, the need for major transmission lines, and from the huge quantities of water they require. (The two coal-fired plants in San Juan County consume nearly 50-million gallons of water per day, not much less than the total water consumption of the City of Albuquerque.)

I need to look further at sequestration, because there are several things that concern me about it. I know that there were some serious safety issues with the early attempts to sequester CO2 in freshwater ponds, and I am unsure of how environmentally sound it is to store it in underground aquifers. I don't believe storing CO2 in depleted mines and other underground formations has yet been proven effective in the long term. I also need to better understand the energy required to sequester CO2. There is a current of opinion that supports advanced coal cycles and sequestration, particularly as an alternative to massive conventional coal development in the developing world. However, for New Mexico I am extremely reluctant to support any coal technology that is still based on coal mining. And until I know more about the current state of sequestration technology, I will not support subsidies to try to make it cost effective.

With a requirement for "efficiency and conservation first", all possible efficiency upgrades and conservation improvements can be required prior to approval of any new fossil fuel generation facilities. Since efficiency and conservation could potentially result in up to 70% reduction in demand, such a requirement could effectively eliminate the need for any new coal- or gas-fired power plants in New Mexico.

5. Do you support the building of new transmission in NM to specifically support renewable energy transmission? If yes, what percentage of renewable energy should new transmission facilities be required to include?

Y/N

What level?

I am extremely skeptical of the proposed Renewable Energy Transmission Authority. This is not because of any opposition to wind energy; on the contrary, I strongly support development of wind energy for the many areas of New Mexico where it is particularly suitable. But not only is the Authority almost entirely unaccountable to voters, but there is nothing in the current legislation that prevents this new, massive transmission line infrastructure from being used to transport energy from increased fossil fuel or nuclear power developments!

My focus is on local generation for local use – a very different model than the traditional one of centralized generation at huge power plants and transmission over intrusive (and inefficient) lines to distant markets. The PRC has a major role in determining the renewable portfolio for electric utilities. In addition to wind and solar, an additional local energy source is biomass for local thermal energy production, as an efficient alternate local energy source, reducing the need for long transmission lines and as a way to have forest thinning occur in a sustainable way that can have significant benefits to local economies. Local Energy, a group which I co-founded, is currently working with Santa Clara and Taos pueblos on projects like this. However, the PRC must oppose any proposals to produce electricity from biomass. Not only is the efficiency very low (the biomass generation plant in Eagar, Arizona has 17-percent wood-to-wire efficiency!), but such projects would quickly devastate our forests.

If local utilities develop local renewable sources, then existing transmission lines will have increased capacity for transmission of renewable energy to other locales as necessary.

All said, if new transmission facilities were required to transmit some very high percentage of renewable energy, say 80%, and if interconnection rules and a feed-in rate allowed and encouraged access to these facilities for small- and medium-size local producers, I would be willing to support such projects as a way to encourage renewable energy development.

6. Would you approve nuclear power generation in NM? Why or why not?

Y/N

No! Nuclear energy is the antithesis of the kind of ecologically sensitive, renewable and decentralized energy system I am working towards. It is inevitably massively centralized, requiring long transmission lines with their own environmental problems; it will never be economically self sufficient without massive government subsidy and indemnification against damages; the plants have potential for enormous environmental damage in the event of an accident; and there is no prospect of a way to deal with radioactive and highly toxic waste that lasts for tens of thousands of years. Facilities like WIPP and now Louisiana Energy and its planned uranium enrichment facility in Eunice, NM are the inevitable consequences of nuclear technology. Furthermore, the uranium mining that fueled nuclear development has taken a huge health and environmental toll on the Navajo in this district; the Navajo have taken a strong stand against uranium mining and it is time they are joined in their courageous stand by other elected officials in New Mexico.

7. In your view, in what order and degree is the obligation of the PRC to represent:

- a) all New Mexicans
- b) Rate payers
- c) Utilities

Explain your views.

I believe the correct order is as shown: All New Mexicans, then ratepayers, then utilities. In regulating the corporations that provide insurance and utilities to New Mexicans, I must represent all New Mexicans to ensure that our long-term energy strategy is both economically and environmentally sustainable over the long term. In the past, it seems to me, the order has been inverted, with utilities determining policies and the PRC just going along with little public input or accountability. As a Commissioner, one of my principles will be to be independent of the utilities, as well as of the political power structure that has led to these poor decisions in the past. I would like to see increased representation of ratepayers, native nations and pueblos, unions, and community groups in front of the PRC. The PRC should fund a legal structure to represent ratepayers in PRC proceedings. This would go hand in hand with the kind of improvements to PRC public accountability and public access to information I am proposing.

Background and Campaign-related questions:

1. Describe your current occupation and other employment experience relevant to the position for which you are running. What other elected positions have you held, if any?

I am a carpenter and woodworker, and have spent much of my working life as a green builder (including on my own home). I am also an energy consultant and activist. While I have not held elected public office, I was the Green Party's candidate for Governor in 2002 and ran on a strong pro-environment platform.

2. What experience do you have with conservation issues? What, if any, specific environmental accomplishments are you most proud of?

I have been a very active environmentalist over the years. Much of my working life has been in green building, and I installed the first net-metered residential solar system in New Mexico on my home in 1998. I've been an active participant in many environmental groups and movements over the years, including opposing WIPP, the Rural Conservation Alliance against gravel mining in Cerrillos, and the opposition to the Olé Line. Some of these we won, though unfortunately not all.

I've been a volunteer with Project Lighthawk, which has helped a number of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, document adverse environmental impacts and oppose inappropriate projects. I've been part of the Sustainable Energy Coalition in New Mexico, have been a board member of the Los Alamos Study Group, and am a Life Member of the New Mexico Solar Energy Association. I was a founding member of the Permaculture Credit union, a growing institution dedicated to the care and benefit of the earth and its inhabitants. I have also worked hard on issues of local and organic agriculture and on issues of forest restoration. Since 2003 I have been a member of the State Land Office Advisory Board, appointed to represent conservation interests.

3. What are your campaign's main voter outreach strategies?

Voter contact is the primary voter outreach strategy. The emphasis is on direct contact, including door to door visits with voters by the candidate and campaign volunteers and phone calls by candidate and volunteers (much of the district is rural and not walkable);

also public appearances by candidate, radio talk shows, seeking endorsements of newspapers, activist organizations and individuals, radio and print ads and yard signs on private property (serving as personal endorsements) and direct mail in targeted rural areas. Since there is no Republican in this race, R's are included in our targeted frequent voter lists. We are using personal endorsements around the district and will have an intensive Get Out the Vote campaign.

4. Have you opted into the new public finance system for PRC candidates? Why or why not? If not, how much money have you currently raised to date? What is your projected overall campaign budget?

Yes. Public financing or "clean elections" is one of the ways we can recover our democracy. It is critical to any prospects for future expansion to other offices that it be shown to work by actually electing people using it. We raised and spent the full \$5,000 allowed under the seed money provision; the public financing has provided another \$10,900; and the Green Party is contributing the maximum \$1090 permitted. This requires a bare-bones budget of \$12,000 for the election period. However, since our opponent chose not to participate in public financing, if she spends more than \$10,900 we will be matched up to a maximum total of \$32,700. We will not know this until the Oct. 9, Oct. 30, and Nov. 2 campaign finance filings.

5. Please list the core staff, supporters, and/or fundraisers working on behalf of your campaign, and describe their areas of expertise.

Key campaign workers include David Thompson (campaign manager), worker, organizer and manager in many winning political campaigns in Canada and New Mexico; Rick Lass (media), former candidate, long-time activist on environmental and election reform issues; Melissa McDonald (Santa Fe office coordinator), former candidate, permaculture business owner, activist on water issues; Rosamund Evans, (Bernalillo county coordinator), Green Party and Grey Panthers activist; Sarah Teofanov, (San Juan county coordinator), artist, teacher and peace activist; Norm and Tracy Tucker, Bloomfield community leaders; Corrine Sanchez (Treasurer), Tewa activist on women's, native, and peace issues; Mitch Buszek, (campaign assistant), long-time political activist and campaign manager; Joe Lacayo, (McKinley county coordinator), social worker, activist.

6. Have you been endorsed by other groups in this election cycle? If so, who? Please include contact information.

I have been endorsed by the Sierra Club (the Rio Grande Chapter, covering New Mexico and West Texas – Tom Robey, Political Chair, 955-9578, [trobey@cybermesa.com](mailto:trobey@cybermesa.com)), by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (Carter Bundy, Regional Political Director, 266-2177, [carterbundy@yahoo.com](mailto:carterbundy@yahoo.com), or Josh Anderson, State Political Director, 266-2416, [j\\_anderson123@hotmail.com](mailto:j_anderson123@hotmail.com)), and by Independent Voters of New Mexico (Abe Guttman, founder, 286-2900, [indvotenm@aol.com](mailto:indvotenm@aol.com)). We are also in regular contact with several other unions and other political action committees in New Mexico regarding endorsement.

7. What do you see as the main challenges confronting your campaign?

Based on the strengths of the campaign: the most knowledgeable and articulate candidate, strong volunteer base, experienced campaign management team, high probability of major newspaper endorsements (Albuquerque Journal, New Mexican, Santa Fe Reporter) and endorsements (and potential endorsements) from Labor and

other activist groups) .. the major challenges are two 1) the reluctance of some Democratic Party voters to vote a split ticket and support a Green candidate, and 2) limited financial resources under public financing to do the mailing necessary to reach rural voters.