

Ben Ray Luján, New Mexico leaders host virtual town hall

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
Friday, 14 August 2020 04:51



Two members of Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham's cabinet and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives wanted to hear the concerns of New Mexicans earlier this week amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

District 3 New Mexico Representative Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M. hosted a phone-in town hall with citizens from across New Mexico Aug. 3 with New Mexico Department of Health Secretary Kathy Kunkel and New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions Secretary Bill McCamley.

Over 7,000 New Mexicans tuned in to the hour-long phone call.

"It's been over four months since the president declared a national emergency due to the coronavirus, and many of the relief measures put in place by Congress are expiring," Luján said to the attendees.

Nationwide, the United States has seen over 4.7 million confirmed COVID-19 cases as of Aug. 3, according to the Johns Hopkins University of Medicine.

The state has seen over 21,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases as of Aug. 3 with 655 reported deaths.

Ben Ray Luján, New Mexico leaders host virtual town hall

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
Friday, 14 August 2020 04:51

“We have come a long way since March 11, which is when we had our first case in New Mexico. Back then, we could only test about 300 people a day, and now we’ve tested as many as 8,000 people a day. We have an average of over 5,000 a day of testing, and [testing] in every county in New Mexico,” Kunkel said.

Kunkel added that about half the testing comes from the Department of Health and the other half is taken care of by private sector labs.

In New Mexico, Kunkel said about 10 percent of confirmed COVID-19 cases are found among individuals aged 19 and younger.

“People don’t think children can get COVID, and while children generally get a mild case, they can contract it and they can bring it home,” she said.

Over 130,000 New Mexicans were receiving some sort of unemployment benefits, as of Aug. 3.

McCamley stressed how the health of the community goes hand-in-hand with the impact of the economy.

“Some people argue over and over again that we should open everything again. The problem is this: Arizona did that, and if you look at May, when they reopened a lot faster and a lot bigger than New Mexico did — did some jobs come back initially? Yes they did,” McCamley said.

“But the *Washington Post* did a very thorough study of the economic impacts of their decision, and what happened? They got jobs back initially, but COVID spiked. More people got the virus, more people ended up in the hospital, and three times the number of people died in Arizona than New Mexico.”

Ben Ray Luján, New Mexico leaders host virtual town hall

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
Friday, 14 August 2020 04:51

Luján said for anyone wanting to get in touch with his office to reach out at lujan.state.gov.

Luján, who has served in the U.S. House of Representatives since 2009, will face off against TV meteorologist-turned-political hopeful Republican Mark Ronchetti in the November election for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Tom Udall, D-N.M.

By Dominic Aragon
Sun Correspondent