



New Mexico Ethics Watch essay contest winners share their thoughts

In a ZOOM event Sept. 17 hosted by New Mexico Ethics Watch, N. M. Secy. Of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, OLÉ NM Executive Director Andrea Serrano, and the Campaign Legal Center’s Trevor Potter weighed in on everything from ensuring the validity of the upcoming election, to making sure mail-in votes are counted, to when results will be finalized, and voter suppression in our state.

Oliver talked about the election process and mail-in ballots.

“From the very highest level of the postal service – Postmaster General DeJoy and his senior staff, down to the local and regional officials here in New Mexico, we have been assured and reassured that the election is the highest priority of the U.S. Postal Service until the election is concluded. We are in ‘trust yet verify’ mode with them, making sure we have really good communication and accountability mechanisms in place to make sure that does happen.”

Serrano addressed concerns about voter suppression.

“Our experience is that we’ve had people who were formerly incarcerated who are eligible to register to vote, but they’re told by someone in their county clerk’s office, ‘You went to prison,

you don't get to vote ever again.' That isn't true. People have been told they have to show ID – voter ID is not required anywhere anymore. We work with a lot of naturalized citizens voting for the first time who are older and often don't know what their rights are ... People of color in New Mexico and around the U.S. are voting at lower rates... For us it's about how to make sure that our folks know their rights, so if they do encounter a problem they can say, 'No, you're wrong and here's why.' People need to know you can show up and register and vote in the same moment. That is our mission – to get the word out about that.”

Potter took on the questions about a peaceful transition.

“Under the Constitution, on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20 at noon, the incumbent president and vice president turn into pumpkins. Their term ends... they're either re-elected or somebody else has been elected. What if the electoral college votes from the states are not clear by the Dec. 8 deadline? There is a provision ... If it's a state whose votes are not going to determine the outcome because one or the other candidate has won based on every other state, then it doesn't matter. If it's THE swing state, and it hasn't [been] figured out by Dec. 8 who won there, then it goes to Congress. I assure you there is a procedure for this ... on Jan. 20 somebody will be sworn in as president. Worst case scenario, someone will be sworn in as acting president until the issue has been resolved and the official president is duly elected.”

The first place winner of the essay contest addressed himself to the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second place winner addressed the question of whether the ends justify the means. Both students have agreed to be published in the *Gallup Sun*.

Intro by Beth Blakeman
Associate Editor