

## Ben Ray Luján hosting ‘virtual road trip’ meetings

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent  
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As the end of July approaches, election races start to heat up. With numerous state and national seats up for grabs, candidates have to meet with voters to win them over.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes an already difficult race more difficult since many states have placed a ban on large gatherings, given their potential to become “super spreader” events. As such, candidates have jumped over this hurdle by holding virtual meetings through Zoom or other similar means.

Congressman Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., is taking that route on his goal of becoming a senator for New Mexico. Starting July 24, Luján is holding a series of “virtual road trips” in collaboration with multiple Democratic groups across the state to talk about his campaign.

These gatherings are held as webinars where the public is invited to register on Luján’s campaign website and then can call in during the allotted time with questions for Lujan.

In a webinar held July 22 with McKinley County Democrats, Luján addressed one such question about the importance of water and how getting it for the Navajo Nation can be expedited.

“Water is too precious in New Mexico for us to not use it,” Luján said. “Whether it’s for recreation, or agricultural [purposes], or for living.”

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Luján was referring to one of the tenets of water law in New Mexico, which is “beneficial use,” or where water is obtained for irrigation or domestic, commercial and industrial uses.

He mentioned Lea County in the southeastern portion of the state as being an area where beneficial use is particularly important.

“They use water for their recreation areas, maintaining quality of life, and protecting and preserving the local wildlife,” Luján said.

Water usage is one area Luján’s campaign is focusing on, with other issues stemming from the state’s Third District as well.

Luján previously called for action to address inequities facing tribal nations who had been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, including funding Indian Health Service, investing in infrastructure, and providing proper compensation for tribal members who had previously been impacted by radiation exposure on tribal lands.

Then on July 10, Luján met virtually with Veterans Helping Veterans in Gallup to address health care access and the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as resources that were available for N.M. veterans.

“America owes our veterans a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. But we can make sure veterans have the full support of the federal government, especially now that we’re faced with the COVID-19 pandemic,” he said during that meeting.

Some of Luján’s other campaign tenets’ focuses include health care areas such as lowering the cost of prescription drugs and making doctor’s visits more affordable. He called these areas part of “everyone’s best interest.”

Luján said there is so much at stake with the upcoming election cycle.

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“It’s so important we continue to learn from one another,” he said. “We need to be looking at having a leader that’s not going to just tweet about things all day, but to engage with leaders around the world.”

He added this election will be crucial to restoring America’s standing in the world.

“This is why there should be a focal point to bring voters together,” Luján continued. “Instead of where we are now where it’s one divisive decision after another by the president.”

As the pandemic continues, Luján said it is important for people to keep an eye on their friends and neighbors. Not just to maintain their wellbeing, but that they are given the means to vote.

“Make sure they have access to the ballot box. Let them know they can vote by mail as early as October,” he said.

Lujan said he looks forward to hearing from more people at future meetings.

“I hope I have the honor of becoming your senator, and becoming the voice of New Mexico,” he said.

***For more information on the upcoming meetings, as well as to register to call in, visit <https://www.mobilize.us/peopleforben/>***

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