

NEW MEXICO PRC NOMINATING COMMITTEE

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NMPRC 2026 Candidate Questionnaire

Samantha J. Serna

1. Briefly describe your experience with regulatory topics including utility rate setting, promulgating regulations, broadband regulation, and New Mexico's energy transition.

My regulatory experience comes primarily from local government, public administration, and economic development. For more than a decade, I have worked in planning, project management, community development, and county government, where regulatory decisions ultimately become real projects, real costs, and real consequences for communities.

I have extensive experience working with ordinances, public policy, infrastructure planning, procurement, capital projects, budgets, public hearings, and implementation of state and federal requirements. As a county commissioner, I review complex matters, question professional staff and legal counsel, weigh competing interests, and make decisions in public with direct accountability to the people those decisions affect.

I also serve as Vice President of the Southeastern New Mexico Economic Development District and on the New Mexico State Workforce Development Board. Those roles have broadened my perspective beyond Lincoln County and reinforced how closely infrastructure, workforce, and economic development are connected.

When a community lacks adequate electric capacity, reliable broadband, or other essential infrastructure, economic development can stall before a project ever reaches construction. A business may be ready to invest, and a community may have people ready to work, but infrastructure limitations, cost, or delays can determine whether that investment actually happens in New Mexico.

My career has not been centered on litigating utility rate cases. It has been centered on implementing public policy, managing infrastructure and development, and understanding how government decisions affect communities, employers, small businesses, and families.

Broadband is a good example. In rural New Mexico, broadband is not a luxury. It affects economic development, education, health care, emergency response, workforce participation, and whether communities can compete for jobs and investment.

The same practical approach should apply to New Mexico's energy transition. The Commission must faithfully implement state law while keeping reliability and affordability central to its work. The transition cannot be successful if its financial or reliability consequences fall disproportionately on communities least able to absorb them.

My approach would be disciplined and evidence-based: understand the record, question assumptions, examine costs and alternatives, follow the law, and determine whether a proposal serves New Mexico customers and the long-term interests of our state.

2. What is “public interest” in the context of utility regulation?

The public interest means ensuring that all New Mexicans have access to safe, reliable, and affordable utility services that support daily life and create opportunities for the future. It includes families managing household expenses, businesses working to grow, and communities seeking the infrastructure necessary to attract investment and good jobs.

As a fifth-generation Lincoln County resident with experience in local government, economic development, and workforce development, I understand how closely those needs are connected. Employers need dependable power, adequate capacity, and reliable broadband before they can commit to a location or expand. Residents need those same services to pursue education, earn a living, and build a future in their communities.

I would bring that perspective to decisions affecting metropolitan, rural, and tribal communities across New Mexico. Responsible utility planning can help communities compete for development, support existing businesses, and prepare for growth. That requires careful attention to affordability, timely infrastructure investment, and fair allocation of costs so that existing customers are protected.

My contribution would be to connect regulatory decisions with practical opportunities for New Mexicans. I would examine whether a proposal strengthens service, supports lasting economic benefits, and holds utilities and developers accountable for their commitments. Public interest includes meeting today’s needs while creating the conditions for the next generation to succeed here at home.

3. How much transparency should the Commission provide the public into their deliberations and the basis for their decisions?

As much transparency as the law permits while protecting information that is legitimately confidential.

Having served in elected local government, I know public confidence depends not only on what government decides, but whether people can understand how and why the decision was made.

Commission orders should clearly explain the evidence considered, applicable law, competing arguments, and reasoning supporting the decision. New Mexicans should not need to be utility attorneys, engineers, or regulatory economists to understand why a major decision affecting their monthly utility bill was made.

Transparency also creates accountability. When government conducts its work openly, and decision-makers know their reasoning must withstand public scrutiny, the process is stronger.

Public institutions belong to the public. Transparency should reflect that.

4. New Mexico has 23 distinct sovereign Native American tribes within its borders. Please explain your familiarity with the State-Tribal relationship with an emphasis on how this relationship is applicable to utilities including power generation, rights of way and alternative energy.

My familiarity with State-Tribal relationships is grounded in direct experience.

The Village of Ruidoso borders the Mescalero Apache Reservation. Throughout my years working in local government in Lincoln County and Ruidoso, I have worked in a region where cooperation with the Mescalero Apache Tribe is an important part of regional government.

That relationship became particularly important during major disasters affecting our region. I have worked on joint disaster recovery issues involving the Mescalero Apache Tribe, where jurisdictional boundaries do not change the reality that neighboring communities share watersheds, infrastructure, transportation systems, emergency needs, and long-term recovery challenges.

Those experiences reinforced something important for me: tribal governments are sovereign governments and should be engaged accordingly.

That same principle applies to utility regulation. Power generation, transmission, rights-of-way, broadband, and alternative energy projects can cross jurisdictional boundaries and directly affect tribal lands and communities. The Commission must respect tribal sovereignty, understand the limits of state jurisdiction, and engage tribal governments early and meaningfully when decisions may affect them.

New Mexico's tribal nations are not simply another stakeholder group. Each is a sovereign government with its own priorities, resources, communities, and economic interests.

My experience working alongside the Mescalero Apache Tribe has taught me that effective government-to-government relationships begin with respect, communication, and a willingness to work through difficult issues together.

5. What is your definition of "just and reasonable" rates? Has this definition evolved through the years as the PRC and other commissions expanded the scope of their decisions to embrace more special interests?

A just and reasonable rate should allow a utility to recover prudent costs and earn an appropriate return necessary to provide safe and reliable service without requiring customers to pay costs that are unnecessary, unsupported, or unfairly allocated.

The standard should remain grounded in evidence.

The regulatory environment has become more complex. Utilities are being asked to address reliability, resilience, wildfire risk, environmental requirements, economic development, new technologies, and changing demand. Those issues can legitimately affect costs.

But complexity should never become an excuse for losing sight of the customer.

For every significant investment placed into rates, commissioners should understand what is being purchased, why it is necessary, whether the cost is prudent, whether reasonable alternatives were considered, who benefits, and who ultimately pays.

Special interests may participate in the process and provide valuable information. They should not determine the outcome. The Commission's obligation is to the law, the evidentiary record, and the public interest.

6. If a utility could justify a 20% increase in its rates, based on projections of future costs and sales, but it would impose hardship on a certain segment of its customers, how would you reconcile this dilemma? What regulatory options would you consider?

A technically supportable revenue requirement does not end the Commission's inquiry.

A 20 percent increase is not simply a percentage on a spreadsheet. For a family already balancing housing, groceries, medicine, and utilities, it can have a substantial impact. The same is true for a small business operating on narrow margins.

I would closely examine the assumptions underlying the projections, whether expenditures are prudent, whether costs can reasonably be phased, whether the allocation among customer classes is justified, and whether alternatives could reduce the immediate impact.

I would also consider lawful regulatory tools such as phased implementation, appropriate rate design, protections for qualifying low-income customers, and other mechanisms that address severe customer impacts without simply transferring unreasonable costs to other customers or undermining the utility's ability to provide reliable service.

Affordability and reliability should not be treated as competing slogans. The Commission has to deal responsibly with both.

7. What is the role of intervenors in Commission adjudications, and do they add value to Commission decisions? If so, how?

Yes. Intervenors can provide perspectives, expertise, evidence, and cross-examination that strengthen the Commission's record.

Utilities possess substantial institutional and technical resources. Participation by consumer representatives, large customers, local governments, tribal governments, environmental organizations, and other affected interests can identify assumptions and consequences that deserve additional scrutiny.

As an elected official, I value hearing from people who disagree with one another. Good decision-making does not require agreement. It requires decision-makers willing to listen, ask questions, and distinguish advocacy from evidence.

Intervenors contribute to that process, but the Commission remains responsible for independently evaluating the record and applying the law. No intervenor should substitute its policy preferences for the Commission's independent judgment.

8. How will you balance implementation of legislative direction with independent regulatory judgment, and what steps will you take to avoid regulatory capture, manage stakeholder influence, and ensure decisions are grounded in evidence and the long-term interests of New Mexico customers?

The Legislature establishes policy through law. The Commission's responsibility is to implement that law faithfully while exercising the independent regulatory judgment entrusted to it.

Independence does not mean disregarding legislative direction. It means refusing to predetermine the outcome of a case because of political pressure, industry influence, or advocacy from any particular interest.

My standard would be consistent regardless of who appears before the Commission: follow applicable ethics and ex parte requirements, maintain appropriate boundaries, examine the complete evidentiary record, question assumptions, and explain decisions publicly.

Regulatory capture can come from more than industry. Any organization or interest with repeated access to decision-makers can exert influence.

The strongest protection against regulatory capture is a commissioner who remembers the obligation of the office. I would serve the people of New Mexico by following the law, maintaining independence, evaluating the complete evidentiary record, and making decisions that can withstand public scrutiny, even when powerful interests would prefer a different result.

9. What can the Commission do to promote universal access to broadband?

New Mexico should treat broadband as essential infrastructure.

The Commission should use the authority granted to it by law while coordinating with federal, state, tribal, and local entities so that programs complement rather than duplicate one another.

The greatest challenge is often the economics of serving sparsely populated areas. Rural communities cannot always be evaluated under the same business model as densely populated metropolitan areas.

I have spent my career in rural local government and economic development, and I have seen the consequences when infrastructure does not reach smaller communities. Broadband affects education, health care, emergency response, entrepreneurship, workforce participation, government services, and economic development.

For rural New Mexico, access to broadband can determine whether a person can work from their community, whether a business can operate there, and whether a student has access to the same opportunities available elsewhere.

The measure of success should not simply be dollars allocated or miles of infrastructure announced. It should be whether New Mexicans can actually obtain reliable and affordable service.

10. How should the PRC approach resource adequacy and reliability planning, including the role of firm resources, demand-side resources, and regional coordination to ensure reliable and affordable service?

Reliability must remain a core obligation.

In New Mexico, reliability has significance beyond residential and commercial service. Our state is home to national laboratories, military installations, research facilities, and testing operations that perform missions important to national security. A resilient and dependable electric system is therefore an economic, public safety, and, in parts of our state, national security concern.

The Commission should evaluate resource adequacy using realistic assumptions about peak demand, extreme weather, generation availability, transmission constraints, and how different resources actually perform during periods of system stress.

A diverse portfolio can include firm resources, renewable generation, storage, demand response, energy efficiency, and regional coordination. Each should be evaluated based on demonstrated capabilities, costs, and risks rather than labels.

Regional coordination can provide substantial benefits, but New Mexico should not become so dependent on external resources that customers or critical facilities are exposed to unacceptable reliability or price risks during regional emergencies.

Resilience also deserves greater attention. Resource planning should consider not only whether sufficient electricity exists during normal conditions, but how the system performs during wildfire, extreme weather, transmission disruptions, and other emergencies.

Having worked through major disasters and disaster recovery in Lincoln County, I know there is an important difference between infrastructure that works under normal circumstances and infrastructure capable of functioning when a community needs it most.

The objective should be clear: sufficient dependable resources to serve New Mexicans when needed, a resilient grid capable of supporting critical infrastructure and rates customers can reasonably bear.

11. What is the role of the Commission in protecting existing customers from the high demands placed by data centers on the electric grid?

New Mexico should welcome responsible economic development, but existing customers should not unknowingly subsidize infrastructure built primarily to serve exceptionally large new loads.

For major data-center proposals, I would want clear information regarding required generation, transmission, and distribution investments, projected load, cost allocation, contractual commitments, stranded-cost risk, and what happens if projected demand does not materialize.

My economic and workforce development experience also informs my view of this issue. New Mexico should compete for investment and high-quality employment, but economic development should create durable benefits for our communities. Infrastructure capacity is finite, and decisions involving very large loads should consider their effects on existing customers, other prospective employers, and critical facilities.

That is particularly important in New Mexico because our electric system supports communities and businesses as well as national laboratories, military installations, and other facilities performing important state and federal missions.

Large-load customers can create economic opportunities and potentially improve utilization of the electric system. They can also create substantial financial exposure.

Economic development and customer protection are not mutually exclusive. Growth should pay an appropriate share of the costs it creates, and existing residential and small-business customers should not become the financial backstop for speculative demand.

12. What would be the major issues surrounding natural gas utilities in the future? Should gas utilities invest today in new infrastructure that can become stranded before its expected end date when many energy consumers are projected to switch from natural gas to electricity?

Natural gas utilities face a difficult planning environment involving aging infrastructure, safety requirements, changing customer demand, electrification, and the possibility that long-lived investments could become underutilized before the end of their expected useful lives.

The Commission should not assume either that natural gas demand will disappear quickly or that historical demand patterns will continue indefinitely.

Major new investments should therefore be evaluated carefully for necessity, useful life, alternatives, demand assumptions, and stranded-cost risk.

Safety-critical investments cannot simply be deferred. At the same time, customers should not be committed to decades of unnecessary costs when less expensive or more flexible alternatives can reasonably meet the need.

The Commission's responsibility is not to predict the future perfectly. It is to make prudent decisions using the best evidence available and protect customers from avoidable long-term risk.

13. How should the PRC evaluate and oversee utility proposals related to distributed resources, non-wires alternatives, and performance-based mechanisms so that customers receive the benefits of innovation and competition rather than bearing unnecessary cost or risk?

Innovation should solve a problem, not become a reason by itself to spend customer money.

For distributed resources and non-wires alternatives, the Commission should compare them against conventional infrastructure using transparent assumptions about cost, reliability, useful life, scalability, and customer benefits.

Performance-based mechanisms should have clearly defined objectives and measurable outcomes. Utilities should not receive additional compensation merely for activities they are already obligated to perform.

I support innovation where the evidence demonstrates that it can reduce costs, improve reliability, expand customer options, or avoid unnecessary capital investment.

New Mexico should be willing to innovate, but innovation should not mean transferring unreasonable financial risk to ratepayers while anticipated benefits remain speculative.

Every major proposal should ultimately come back to basic questions: What problem are we solving? What will it cost? Who assumes the risk? Who receives the benefit? Is there a better alternative?

14. Per NMSA 1978 Section 62-19-5, please provide the following:

a. Do you hold a baccalaureate degree from an institution of higher education that has been accredited by a regional or national accrediting body? (If you hold a professional license or a post-graduate degree, skip to subsection b.)

Yes. I hold a Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing from New Mexico State University.

i. Do you have at least ten years of professional experience in an area regulated by the commission or in the energy sector and involving a scope of work that includes accounting, public or business administration, economics, finance, statistics, policy,

engineering or law? Please detail how your work experience meets this requirement, including noting the specific number of years in each relevant role.

b. Do you hold a professional license or a post-graduate degree from an institution of higher education that has been accredited by a regional or national accrediting body in an area regulated by the Commission, including accounting, public or business administration, economics, finance, statistics, policy, engineering or law?

Yes. I hold a Master of Business Administration from Louisiana State University Shreveport.

(i). Do you have at least ten years of experience within the field in which you hold your post-graduate degree?

Yes. I have more than ten years of professional experience in public and business administration.

From July 2012 through August 2019, I served Lincoln County in planning and project management. My work included public administration, infrastructure planning, capital projects, project management, and implementation of governmental requirements.

From August 2019 through January 2024, I served as Community Development Director for the Village of Ruidoso. My responsibilities included public administration, development, regulatory implementation, planning, budgeting, infrastructure, project management, and departmental management.

Since January 2023, I have served as a Lincoln County Commissioner. In that capacity, I participate in governmental budgeting, procurement, infrastructure and capital-project decisions, public policy, ordinances, contracts, and oversight of county operations.

My MBA complements more than a decade of practical experience in public-sector management and administration and provides formal graduate-level education in business administration, finance, management, and organizational decision-making.

My education taught me how organizations, finance, and management work. My career has taught me what those decisions mean when government has to implement them and answer directly to the public.

c. Do you have a financial interest in a public utility in New Mexico or elsewhere?

No.

d. Have you been employed by a Commission-regulated entity at any time during the last two years?

No.

e. Do you agree that you will give your entire time to the business of the Commission and will not pursue any other business or vocation or hold any other office for profit?

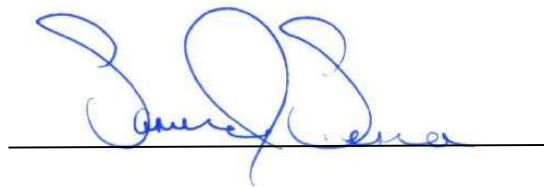
Yes. If appointed, I will comply fully with this requirement and devote my entire professional time to the business of the Public Regulation Commission, including relinquishing any position incompatible with service on the Commission.

15. The two sitting PRC Commissioners are registered to vote with the Democratic Party and Republican Party. The New Mexico Constitution requires that no more than two PRC Commissioners can be registered to vote with the same political party. Please state your registered party affiliation.

Republican.

Affirmation

I affirm that the above information is true and correct, and I have met the statutory and constitutional requirements described in Questions 14 and 15 above.



Samantha J. Serna

Candidate Signature