

**From:** Joe Monahan <jmonahan@ix.netcom.com>  
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In this issue:

### **Chaves County Commissioners do the bidding of Democrat State Representative Nominee**

#### **Late breaking: Governor appoints Mary Skeen**

Chaves County Commissioner Harold Hobson was beaming with pride after Friday's commission meeting. So was Democrat state representative nominee Ellen Wedum of Cloudcroft. She had spent the last couple of weeks lobbying the Lincoln and Otero County commissions unsuccessfully only to see her work pay off in Roswell.

At issue was the replacement for the late Avon Wilson who passed away July 10, creating a vacancy in state House of Representatives' District 59. The New Mexico Constitution calls for the affected counties (in this case Chaves, Lincoln and Otero) to send one nominee each to the governor. The governor then must appoint from the list provided by the counties. In most instances a partisan choice is made, with Democrat-controlled commissions nominating Democrats, etc. Each of the three counties is controlled, at least nominally, by Republican commissions.

Two weeks ago Lincoln County commissioners voted to send a letter to Governor Richardson recommending Republican nominee Nora Espinoza to fill out the remainder of Wilson's term. They also wrote the two other county commissions asking them to do the same. Otero County asked for input from Representative Wilson's family, who responded with a strong letter of endorsement for Nora Espinoza, as well as copies of letters written by the late representative on behalf of Espinoza. A few days later, over the protest of Wedum and other Democrats. the Otero County Commission nominated Espinoza.

So when the Chaves County Commission met last Friday no one necessarily expected anything unusual. But observers hadn't reckoned with Commissioners Harold Hobson, Dick Taylor and Dorrie Faubus, all of whom are registered Republicans. Republican commissioner Alice Eppers moved to recommend Nora Espinoza as the new representative, but her motion failed to get a second. Then, after denouncing Espinoza in a rambling speech, Hobson nominated Mary Skeen, widow of former Congressman Joe Skeen. Faubus immediately seconded the motion, and Taylor followed suit, the motion carrying 3-1. The lone Democrat commissioner was not available.

Wedum and fellow Democrats in attendance were ecstatic. Following the meeting Wedum lavished praise on the three registered Republican commissioners, as well as local oilman Mark Murphy who is reputed to have orchestrated the meeting. She then appeared in a triumphant and fairly extended television interview.

Hobson was overheard proudly telling Democrat Wedum, "Now you have your level playing field." What he meant was that appointing Espinoza would have given the Republican an unfair advantage in the upcoming general election contest between Wedum and Espinoza. Everyone knew the goal of the Democrats, as well as the Murphy-Hobson-Faubus-Taylor group was to get one additional name – any name at all – added to the list (of only one name) already sent forth by the other two counties. They knew the governor would appoint anybody but Espinoza. Wedum gushed with appreciation for what Hobson had achieved. Why these Republicans wanted to help the Democrats so badly remained a mystery.

Eppers, who is personal friends with Mrs. Skeen, voted against the motion, she emphasized, "Not because I wasn't for Mary, but because I just knew no one had contacted her about this and I could see her name was just being used. I thought it was wrong, even cruel, to use her like this and I wasn't going to be a part of it. It is just plain mean to use someone, especially a lady like Mrs. Skeen, to be your pawn, to play political games with people."

As things turned out Eppers was 100% correct. The three commissioners had not informed Mrs. Skeen of their idea prior to the meeting. When she found out about it her first words were "You're kidding." She then stated she would tell them she appreciated the gesture, but would decline the offer. Only later did the commissioners and other co-planners call her and tell her all about their idea. According to several accounts reaching **NMPJ** they also proceeded to give Mrs. Skeen a great deal of erroneous information about both the nomination process as well as serving as a legislator.

On Monday afternoon it was announced that Governor Richardson had indeed appointed Mary Skeen to be the new state representative. According to Alice Eppers: "The question remains, would Mary Skeen actually go through with this if she really knew all the ramifications and how cynically she is being used?" Eppers concluded, "The Mary Skeen I know wouldn't do this if she had all the information. One thing is for sure, Joe Skeen would never have permitted her to be used like this. He was loyal to his party and loyal to the people of southeastern New Mexico."

### **The Root Cause of the Actions**

What to make of all this? No one can be sure, but the immediate speculation again centered on the cozy relationship between Governor Richardson and local Democrat kingpin Virgil Beagles, who in turn is extremely close with registered Republicans Harold Hobson and Dorrie Faubus. (We have already read much about Beagles and Hobson engineering Faubus' appointment to the county commission after Beagles was successful in ousting Republican Sue Gutierrez.) Throw Murphy and Taylor into the mix and you have a group of at least four local registered Republicans who are actively working to advance the Democrats' local agenda.

During the meeting Hobson ranted and raved about the recent Republican Primary, but not about the state representative race. Instead he was very upset about the county commission primary between Faubus and challenger Greg Nibert. The Nibert campaign, which Hobson attacked in the strongest terms, used the slogan "the Real Republican," apparently to distinguish Nibert from Faubus who had been appointed by Bill Richardson.

Hobson let fly with all his might:

"Something I cannot understand and never will understand is during the primary this commissioner to my right (Faubus) was appointed by Governor Richardson and she got blasted. She got blasted by being appointed by the governor. It was said she wasn't a real Republican. Now y'all are wanting the governor to appoint Nora Espinoza. So is that gonna make her not a real Republican. In my mind you can't have it both ways."

Then Hobson nominated Mrs. Skeen. No one bothered to point out that, consistent with Hobson's "logic," if the governor appoints Mary Skeen that makes her "not a real Republican" either.

What any of that hollering had to do with the question before the commission was not clear at all. In fact, Nora Espinoza ran in a primary for state representative, not county commissioner. Her opponent was Mike Kakuska. Neither Kakuska nor Espinoza played any role at all in the Faubus – Nibert race. They were far too busy trying to run their respective campaigns.

Mark Murphy, who has told people he is going to be the next state Republican chairman, was heard bragging about the shenanigans in Roswell at various meetings over the weekend. It does seem like a strange way to be a party leader.

In years past Chaves County Republican primary opponents supported each other after the primary was over. This spring Espinoza, when asked at a public forum, pledged her support for Mike Kakuska in the event he won the primary. Kakuska did the same, also pledging his support to Espinoza in his concession call the night of the primary. Apparently though, Kakuska's supporters – Murphy, Hobson and Taylor either didn't get the word, or have decided to sow the seeds of disunity within the party and try their best to elect the Democrat candidate.

Stay tuned.