



**NEW MEXICO FIRST**  
*People. Ideas. Progress.*

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**CONTACT:**

Sharon Berman

505-553-2876

sharon.berman@protonmail.com

## **After 38 years of service to New Mexico, the state's leading public deliberation organization closes**

***New Mexico First's board of directors announce that a portion of mission will continue through a final grant to NMPBS***

**Albuquerque, NM** – Following a 38-year legacy of service to the people and policymakers of New Mexico, the board of directors of the nonpartisan, nonprofit **New Mexico First** today announced that the public policy organization has closed its doors. Remaining reserve funds were granted to NMPBS, which will use the resources to support programming that features public deliberation.

New Mexico First was established in 1986 by then U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Pete Domenici (R-NM). Its mission was to *be a catalyst for positive change by conducting independent research, engaging New Mexicans in policy, and enabling action*. The organization was well known for its unique, multi-day deliberative town halls that brought people together across party lines to find consensus on the state's most pronounced challenges. The town halls and forums, sometimes conducted on behalf of state agencies or other organizations, often included more than 200 people from throughout New Mexico.

Policy outcomes influenced by New Mexico First – all in collaboration with other organizations, policymakers of both major parties, and committed voters – are featured on the organization's [archival website](#). Highlights include:

### **Good government**

- Passage of the [NM Redistricting Act](#), expanding public input into the decennial process of drawing legislative and congressional boundaries
- Establishment of the [State Ethics Commission](#), which promotes the integrity of state government through enforcement of ethics laws

- Major [campaign finance reform](#), limiting amounts of political donations and reducing dark money in state elections

### **Education**

- Supporting New Mexico's **youngest children** through the creation of a [cabinet level agency](#) focused on early childhood education, establishment of licensure standards for [birth to age 5 childcare programs](#), launch of [New Mexico PreK](#), and expansion of the state's [home-visiting programs](#) (since "babies don't come with instructions")
- Strengthening **K-12 education** via passage of the [Hispanic Education Act](#), advancement of experiential and multilingual learning in New Mexico classrooms, the establishment of the [Math and Science Bureau](#), and legislative defense of minimum college math requirements for teachers
- Bolstering **college education** in New Mexico by supporting the establishment of the cabinet level [Higher Education Department](#), alignment of high school graduation requirements with college entrance exams, as well as expanded workforce development programs in health, education, energy, technology, and agriculture

### **Economy**

- Management of the [Resilience in New Mexico Agriculture Task Force](#), which informed the appropriation of hundreds of thousands of state dollars for hunger prevention, protection of New Mexico's signature green and red chile industry, as well as expansion of small-scale and industrial food production
- Launch of the [NM Tax Research Institute](#), a stand-alone policy think tank that has informed dozens of tax-related laws
- Establishment of the cabinet-level [Department of Tourism](#) as well as enactment of small business regulatory relief legislation

### **Natural resources**

- Helping to ensure New Mexico's future through the development of its first [State Water Plan](#) as well as multiple subsequent updates
- Management of the [NM Energy Roadmap](#), which contributed to the substantial reduction of methane emissions and other reforms
- Passage of the [NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Act](#), which aims to reduce catastrophic wildfires through forest management

### **Healthcare**

- Passage of laws and appropriations to strengthen New Mexico's healthcare and behavioral health workforce including waivers of licensure fees, funding for medical student loan repayments, and comprehensive training programs for students
- Acceptance of the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) [Medicaid expansion](#), which enabled most adults with incomes up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level to qualify for coverage
- Expansion of prenatal coverage through Medicaid
- Passage and creation of the [Health Care Affordability Fund Act](#), which reduced insurance premiums for individuals and small businesses and provided resources to design and implement state healthcare coverage initiatives for uninsured New Mexico residents.

Over the course of the organization's existence, these and other [outcomes](#) were informed by over 200 in-depth policy reports, input from tens of thousands of New Mexicans, and direct advocacy in over 30 legislative sessions. Members of the board of directors gathered yesterday to celebrate the organization's legacy of civic engagement and policy change. Board chair Heather Balas, who was also the organization's longest serving executive director (2007-2019), commented on the values of New Mexico First.

"This organization was predicated on the idea that sound nonpartisan research, coupled with thoughtful discussion among people from all walks of life, would surface consensus about how to make our state stronger. That simple formula worked, again and again," said Balas. "While we are deeply saddened by New Mexico First's closure, we believe our state must continue to meaningfully engage voters in our policy future."

Board member Barbara Brazil chaired the committee that handled the organization's closure and previously served as its executive director (2006-2008). "I believe the political division facing our state and nation is deeply damaging. New Mexico First stood against that type of dissension, ensuring that people worked across party lines," said Brazil. "Even without New Mexico First, we must be reminded that – as community members and New Mexicans – there is more that unites us than divides us."

The board previously voted to grant its remaining financial resources to the public television station KNME-TV, more commonly known as NMPBS. The station aims to continue part of New Mexico First's mission by holding on-air community discussions.

"NMPBS is honored to accept this gift of support to continue engaging New Mexicans in policy that results in positive and collaborative change," said General Manager Franz Joachim. "The missions of New Mexico First and NMPBS have long been mutually supportive. Some of NMPBS' best local efforts have been in collaboration with New Mexico First."

**Donations to the New Mexico First Legacy Fund, which will support public engagement and town hall programming at NMPBS, can be made at [nmfirst.org](http://nmfirst.org). Each donation to the Legacy Fund, up to \$125,000, will be matched by the Greg Nelson and the Warren Nelson Family.**

Concluded Balas: "New Mexico First's greatest legacy may be that we asked people to respectfully listen to, and consider, perspectives different from their own. Our charity didn't ask them to change their minds, but to connect – just connect – despite their differences. It is our board's deepest hope that the people and policymakers of New Mexico pursue avenues to lift up our beautiful state in unified ways."



The final board meeting was attended by the New Mexico First board and board emeritus members, retired member and NMPBS general manager, and New Mexico First staff. L to R: Marcus Mims, Judy Zanotti, Franz Joachim, Barbara Brazil, Nichole Rogers, Sharon Berman, Martha Romero, Don Lopez and Heather Balas.