

CWI held its Meet and Greet the Candidates for District 33 State Senator last week at Carrizozo Town Hall. Carrizozo Works, Inc. hosted several similar events for the community to meet the candidates in contested elections over the years. We've done both face-to-face meetings and on-line surveys. The board felt it important this year to do the former so people in the area have the chance to meet the candidates in person, away from electioneering and campaign events in a casual setting. Each event featured one candidate. They did not appear together.

CWI is a not-for-profit. As such, we cannot endorse or oppose any candidate. The same questions from CWI were asked of both candidates in each race for fairness. They came from the board and AI. We believe they cover a wide range of topics affecting our area. We believe they were worded so as not to favor an incumbent or someone new to the political process. Each candidate had three minutes to answer. The audience had the chance to ask their own questions. Those questions and answers are not included below, since they were unique to a candidate and answers could not be compared. Additional time was made for constituents to talk to the candidate after the question and answer period as well.

As to the questions themselves, they were not provided beforehand, and were not made public before the meet and greet. The questions concerned local issues, and did not address state or national affairs.

Printed copies are available at the Rec Center in Carrizozo during Nourishing Nation business hours and in the lobby of Carrizozo Town Hall.

The Meet and Greet for the two candidates for Probate Judge will be at Carrizozo Town Hall on October 17. The Honorable Rhonda Burrows will appear from 1:00 to 2:30 pm; Pam Beckman will appear from 3:00 to 4:30 pm. The same format and rules will be followed.

Here are the CWI questions:

What experience from your professional, community or personal life do you believe have best prepared you to serve as state senator, and what areas would you expect to learn more about?

Mr. Griffin. And you've given me three minutes to respond! Okay. I can say, logically, my first answer, of course, is being an attorney, representing people. But what I may lack in experience as a politician will have to show, and have to last, when I step forward to represent a large number of people. I understand that there's a distinction between parties, and people like to carry out those distinctions. I don't like that too much myself because we all live together in the same communities. We all have the same concerns. So I would think representation, although I've done it many times as an attorney, may not be the best precursor to a role in the Senate because you can't then represent one singular interest. You have to try to calculate and try to figure out what the broader interest would be. So what I think I actually bring is 17 years of management experience. Before I became an attorney, I was in telecommunications. I climbed the poles. I told a story where I broke my back when I was 19 years old in the

telecommunications business. I stayed with it, became a manager, and for 17 years managed businesses for corporations like Telecommunications Incorporated, Jones Intercable, Cable 1, which was a Washington Post subsidiary, and United International Holdings. I served in Slovak Republic. I served in Spain; two different stints. I worked in Ireland and Belgium developing telecommunications networks for people, but also managing scant budgets because we had to do a startup business that had to make money. So every year I was given a budget, and I could exceed the budget in income almost every year between 105 and 108%. That was difficult in the telecommunications business when we were losing a lot of our traction and losing a lot of our customers. So I can say that the experience that I will bring would be sort of analogous—analytical and calculative. And there's that word calculus. I got my scholarship to the University of California Berkeley in differential calculus. But I don't use that so much anymore. But what I do is I try to use numbers. And I try to use the application of specific numbers to specific problems. I would hope someday to be able to utilize all of that and get more democracy in our government. Maybe polling is not the right word, but receiving information from the constituency to help make those decisions. That's how I think my experience would apply.

Senator Wilson. Well, I think my experience that most prepares me is that I served eight years in the Lincoln County Commission. Part of that was that I spent a lot of time in Santa Fe because, at that time, we didn't hire a lobbyist, and the elected official served as the lobbyist. And back in those days we were dealing with some property tax issues and spent a lot of time out there. And so that's probably the one position. But in addition to that, when I was president of the New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association in leadership, it's the expectation that you serve as the lobbyist for the organization there. So over about 13 years, I spent some time in Santa Fe. I think I've learned so much. I've been a Senator just since January—10 months. And it's been a busy summer, interim session, interim committee sessions. And, you know, in any organization, there's a formal and informal way to do things, and you have to be pretty good at both to be successful. So I'm building relationships with people across the aisle and in the other chamber and what I'm learning about is the relationships and how those people think and how we can do things together. It's hard to do that during the session, but these interim committees are a great opportunity. You break bread, share meals together, have a little different kind of conversation than you do in the Roundhouse.

Senate District 33 includes communities with different economic circumstances, industries, political views and priorities. How would you make sure you represent constituents whose views differ from your own?

Mr. Griffin. I'm already starting that now. Going door to door—an endeavor I was a little scared of when I first started it, because I had no idea really what to expect. You go to a lot of different homes. If you go to 1,579 homes, which I did through Friday of last week, I get 1,579 different views. But that's how I think this is working for me. I'm starting to incorporate that stuff. I'm hearing things. I'm being taught. A 19-year-old girl in Tularosa taught me about third spaces and its importance. Now, I'd heard the phrase before, but I'd never heard it come home to me so passionately as she did. And I think meeting people has got to be the best way, really, to learn who you're representing. But the “how” to represent them, I can't say I have a specific answer,

but I have a vision. I have a vision and I got this vision, again, from going door to door. Met a woman in the White Mountain Meadows community in Ruidoso who said: "I've spent 40 years in education, so don't tell me about education." I said: "No, I'm not going to tell you about education, but I'm going to remember who you are and, hopefully, you'll tell me about education when I face an education issue." That started a trend, and I've got a lot of people deciding to be my liaison. I don't even know if that's the right word, but I say, "Would you be my educational liaison?" And I get good responses from people. I've got a construction guy in the construction business. "Would you be my construction liaison?" So in that sense, I may not be meeting everyone, but I'm meeting a broad cross-section, and I think everyone that I'm meeting is giving me a new sense of where I live. I've got to admit, before I got started with politics, I had sort of a limited view of my community, limited to Lincoln County, and the few friends and people that I visit with. Now, this endeavor of being sent to every home and every style of constituent, I think every politician should go through that.

Senator Wilson. Well, I think that's important, and it kind of goes back to what I just said. I build relationships. I'm not one of the most partisan guys, to be honest with you. And I think, I believe in our system, and I believe there's a reason that we have two parties, two major parties. But once the election's over, it's time to get to work. And so there's a lot of people that will have different opinions with me and me with them. But when you get focused on what the real issues are, especially those that affect people locally, there's all kinds of state issues and there's lots of noise. When you cut through the noise and get down what needs to be done, the partisan things and the differences kind of go away. Other than that, you negotiate and you trade things that are important to you for things that are important to somebody else, and ultimately, you can get some things done. This is a diverse district, representing three different counties and all of the communities in those counties. But I'm thankful. Some of my peers have eight counties to take care of or five counties to take care of. And so I'm thankful for that.

New Mexico faces long-term water challenges. What should the state Legislature be doing now to protect water supplies for communities, agriculture and future generations?

Mr. Griffin. Wow. Again, another tough question. Thank you. I'm not going to pretend that I know how to solve New Mexico's water problems, but I have caucused. And when I say that, they taught me that word—I didn't use it before. But I have caucused with important people in the state, primarily the Senators, because I hope to be one of their peers at some point. I've talked specifically about water. I've sort of brought up the issue, and it may be uncomfortable, that the State Engineer's Office could spend more time with our elected officials explaining how they do their business. And I've met a lot of great people in the State Engineer's Office. And I stand by every one of them as dedicated professionals. But they're engineers. And we're politicians. And engineers and politicians aren't really known for communicating really well with each other. I would try to break that down. I actually have a plan, a personal plan, perhaps on my first day as a Senator, of visiting the State Engineer's Office and trying to get specific data on the conservation of water. I know it's their mission. It's the mission and it's on almost every application for change of water rights, for instance. But the State Engineer's Office perhaps

could use a publicity test or a publicity training. In other words, we want to know what they're doing for conservation of water, but we're not really sure that they're achieving their goal. And maybe we're not hearing enough from them about their efforts. Maybe we're not hearing enough from the State Engineer's Office about where the water is going. And there are some concerns about water. I know that in this community specifically, but also in Tularosa. I was down there during their most recent water crisis. And it's inexplicable that the state people are not communicating with the local people and not communicating with the State Engineer's Office. I think we need that kind of communication. We need a long-term plan and we need to be careful where we send our water. It should benefit New Mexico residents.

Senator Wilson. Well the first thing, we pray for rain, and we've been blessed lately and that was very good. You know, everybody's now a water expert. It's on everybody's mind and water conservation is huge for taking care of the water we have. We recently settled that compact with Texas, so that's 50 years. The fight is over. We didn't necessarily win, but at least it's settled and now we know what we're dealing with. I know farmers, especially up and down the Rio Grande Valley, that have embraced new methods and new technology and ways to conserve water. There's different things that you can plant and grow that are more water-conservative than others. You know, it's interesting. You know those little things in a disposable diaper that swell up, those gel things? You can plant those with your crop and they'll hold moisture and then the plant will tap into that moisture so it doesn't disappear. It holds that moisture in the soil. Carol's done it in her garden, and it's really neat. I think we need to continue to educate people, especially the large water users, about ways to protect water. On the ranch, we put shade balls on all of our drinkers and storage tanks, and they float on top, but they prevent evaporation, and we've been amazed at how much it really saves and how much we were losing to evaporation. So those kinds of things are important. As we're in a position now and things are happening in terms of the brackish water and saline water and produced water down in the southeast part of the state. And they're recycling that water. And putting it to good use. We talk to new industries that are coming that are going to be water consumers. They can use a different kind of water and not necessarily compete with our municipal water or agriculture water. That technology and that science is moving pretty fast. I'm really encouraged.

How would you balance economic development and job creation with the costs to communities for water, infrastructure, housing and public services?

Mr. Griffin. Okay. You guys play hardball. I wish I could tell you. I don't want to be a politician, a typical politician that says: "I have a plan and a scheme, and I'll roll it out within a few days." I don't have a plan and a scheme. But perhaps I have, again, a vision that we all, I think, share, that we would like to see development be related to local projects, be related to local contracting, be related to local labor force. We would like to see investment be related to those same projects, to the same line of thinking that says that we have to maintain New Mexico's—I won't say sovereignty—we will interact with other states and foreign entities, but New Mexico has to protect its own assets. I think we have a lot of assets, and I do know, I've been told, and very reliably, that we have a budget surplus. So if we're going to have it, and if we are ever going to apply it, it should be applied to domestic betterment. And so when we say development, I don't

have a plan on how to balance all those things, but I think the basis of my plan is studying. Something that I also have been well known for, I would hope, is that I would study the issues, study the numbers. And for instance, one of my thoughts is the capital outlay. Every year, Senators are allotted a certain amount of money to spend within their district, and it gets allotted to traditional projects. What I think I would do, and again, this is a thought of mine to address what you're concerned about: To learn the process, I would distill perhaps the last 20 years of capital outlay. I think it's a good benchmark. Last 20 years of capital outlay, see where the money went, and then go and look to see. What about this ditch that you made all this money for? Is it being used? What about this bridge? Or what about that particular road project? Is it being done? Or was it done to serve four homes when we have 400 homes that could benefit better from that road project? I'm going to do a lot of analysis. That's why I can tell you about my plan. Not much more than that. Sorry.

Senator Wilson. Well, I think it's kind of the same thing. If you're going to attract industry that's going to consume water, you've got to make sure they're embracing all of the things that conserve water. It's a hot topic, but I'm comfortable talking about it. When you look at Project Jupiter, that's a perfect example down in Las Cruces. Just since that project has started, they have changed the way they're going to use water in that plant. It used to be they got the water rights and secured the water, and they were going to use an evaporative system, which is like an evaporative system in our homes. Now they're going to do the closed system, which is similar to the radiator in your automobile. There's some maintenance, but the water consumption is very, very limited. And I've sat through several presentations on those kinds of things, and particularly that Jupiter project. It's going to be about the equivalent of probably a small subdivision over a 15-year period in terms of its water consumption. So that's a lot different than it was going to be in the beginning. And so I think of those issues and of local governments. You have to have plans in place to force those developers to listen to the community, and they have to build accountability. I grew up on a cistern. That's how we got our water. And you see people and their homes, practice better. When you shave in the morning, you don't turn the water on, wait for it to get hot and run and run and run and shave. You just shave, turn the water on, rinse off your blade, turn it off. Conserve water.

As rural communities work to attract and train workers, families and businesses, how would you address the need for workforce housing?

Mr. Griffin. Great point. I'm not sure I can again give you specifics, but again, I have certain visions, if you let me share them with you. For instance, and it's probably going to sound like a tired record, but where is the money being made right now? Where is the money going right now that people pay? How much are people paying right now for rent? How much are people paying for the purchase of a new home? And is it on par with other communities in New Mexico with the same demographics? I don't think so. I think maybe we're stretching a little bit in what we think are the appropriate prices. I spoke with the realtors last week. Of course, they would love to see the prices all go up because then their commissions go up. But I think there may be a mistake in that, in that it's only attracting perhaps a specific demographic at a specific price. Workforce people are here. They're always going to be here. They're always going to need

housing. But I think a lot of them are getting priced out of buying and affording a home for the first time. And even rents. As an attorney, my wife and I enjoy a reasonable income. As we prepare to build our house out here in Nogal, we're renting. God bless our land lady. Wonderful lady. But she, like so many others, are seeing that the prices can be raised and that the market will bear it. But what, again, is the market? I think the market forgets about our workforce people. So I need to have a plan for that, but I don't want it to sound like a plan that is going to deprive people of their hard-earned money that they invest in to buy and build homes and perhaps sell at a reasonable profit. So it's not really going to be one of asking people to make sacrifices against their investments. I think what's going to be is we're going to be asking people to make investments in community matters. There may be bonds issued for purposes of public housing, and I would be a proponent of that. But I would also, again, want it to match the needs. I think that one of the most important things is that a lot of legislation is probably being done because it's a good idea, but did anybody study the numbers in advance? What is the need for housing? My wife's actually got a pretty good finger on it. She pays closer attention, I think, than I do to a specific issue of housing costs and workforce housing. And she'll tell you as well that there is an inequity right now in the supply and the demand. I think we need to probably raise, I, may be presuming, that this is a foregone conclusion. But we need to raise the supply because we know the demand is great. And the supply would be a supply of reasonable cost.

Senator Wilson. The key to what you just said is we have industries that need a workforce. That means you've got an economy that's starting to function or is functioning or growing and I think that's how you address that need. You have a thriving economy attracting industries or growing industries that will pay wages for people to be able to afford a home. That's the American Dream, and that's the most significant way for people to build wealth over a lifetime of multi-generations. I've learned there are so many programs through the Department of Finance and Administration and others, there's lots of non-profits that've been functioning in Santa Fe, primarily, that are now moving to the other parts of the state. And that's what they do. They develop workforce houses. I've worked with a couple of groups in Alamogordo. And it's not just a housing project. And they come with a plan. It's a plan for here and now. How are we going to have a plan for this group of people that are starting out in their starter homes to be able to move to the next home, and then make that home available for somebody else for their starter home? It's a sequence. You build a community. Last year, the session was the health care session. This year's going to be housing. There's lots of proposals for tax and savings for developers. Communities are always asked to give the land to a developer so they will come to develop, and those kind of things.

What policies would you support to help rural communities attract and retain doctors, nurses, behavioral health providers and other health care professionals?

Mr. Griffin. Yeah. You know, it's, again, I'm going to confess to a certain ignorance of how to resolve the issue. I know that it has to be attacked. I know that we have to have access to quality health care. But I think one of the ways that we can do that is probably something that I need to discuss further with my potential Senate peers. It's the idea that we could supersede, and I know you've had me avoid reference to too much the federal government's issues, but if

the federal government were to deprive us of any of our health care ambitions, because we as a state have proven that we care about our people and that we want our people to have health insurance, we want them to have adequate health care. But I think New Mexico is on the cusp of being a revolutionary state in the sense that if the federal government should continue to disappoint us, and deprive the subsidies that had once comprised, including my own health care plan, then the state would be wise to consider making efforts to support a fund that would do the same for its citizens, if it's not available on the federal level. That's number one. I don't really know either how we can increase the call for doctors and medical facilities in New Mexico any more than we have. Some say that professionals are discouraged from coming to New Mexico for various reasons and that their discouragement is what's keeping them from coming here. I think it may just be another factor of New Mexico's position, where we are in terms of our financial health, our fiscal health as far as the state, and our individual incomes. Doctors, like most professionals, want to go where they're going to get the most money. And I think we may need to adjust our thinking and make it so that the businesses that provide and the hospitals that provide for the incomes of the doctors and the nurses and all the support facilities that health care requires, I think we have to make it more profitable for them. But I'm not sure I'm just on board with any kind of a subsidy. It might be a tax break. I'd say some tax breaks are probably wise. But I think we're probably heading in the right direction by considering that New Mexico may have to assume some of the federal responsibility.

Senator Wilson. Well, that's a great question. I spent 18 years of my life doing exactly that. And we had a lot of success in the last session. Just being able to take care of the medical malpractice issue that was literally driving people away. So we took care of that. I've talked to hospitals within the district that, even in the last six months, they've recruited 13,15 providers that were not available at the time. We have a very robust program in the state for loan repayment. So they can get federal loan repayment, they can get state loan repayment. Those are not hard to qualify for. They do come with expectations: if you come to rural communities and you spend a significant amount of time, that's part of their loan repayment that's paying the cash out to their lenders. But the real key to that is, and we've seen it happen, and we've seen its success is that, let's say we needed to fill a vacancy at the clinic here. It needs to be a community effort. You bring somebody, they tour the town, and you have an event and people come and invite them to come to our home and make them feel so welcome and so encouraged to be here. It becomes an emotional decision, and not a financial decision or not necessarily in the details of working for the hospital or the clinic. This will become home to them. If you can get them to come and fulfill their obligation so many times, they'll stay. A perfect example of that is Dale Goad. He's now retired, but that was his first job. He stayed here, and he retired here. So the mechanisms are in place, but the key is the community.

What is your plan to support education at all levels in our district?.

Mr. Griffin. Well, that's my favorite one. Thank you for asking. And again, I've met enough teachers and educators in my door-to-door campaign that I'm getting schooled on school. And what I recognize is that there may be statistics that show New Mexico low on the scale of education success, if you compare us to the other 49 states. New Mexico usually shows up near

the bottom, but I don't think it's a lack of effort on the part of our educators. I don't think it's a lack of effort on the part of our public education department. But I think we could revamp and review the entire system, and I think we need to listen more to the teachers. Frankly, I think we need to pay teachers more. If there is a more noble profession out there, someone please tell me what it is because I've been saying that the noblest profession is the teacher. So I would want to support that in my capital outlay, in the budget that they would afford a Senator to work with, that has anything to do with schools. I hear that the Mescalero schools, though they try very hard and they have some very hardworking people, that those schools could use some help. They should be brought to the standards of the rest of the state. I don't think anybody would disagree. We want to teach all children to the same level of quality of education that we expect for our own. So that's a rough part of it. I didn't hit all the points you wanted me to, but I'd like to examine, as well that process, probably as closely as I proposed to it with water.

Senator Wilson. With all levels and all mechanisms. I believe, and so I'll start by saying this. I'm not an educator. I married one. My grandmother was a school teacher. She's why my grandfather settled in this country—because he fell in love with a school teacher. And I'm a product of the public school system and proud of it, proud to be a product of Carrizozo High School, Carrizozo's school system. Very successful. We had a great class, a lot of great people came through that system. But as things evolve, I support options and choices. You know, that could be homeschooling, that could be private schools, parochial schools. You know, in Carrizozo, there's not a lot of options. But in Carrizozo, our school system could fit any of those models, because it's about parental support, parental participation, and accountability. When I was growing up, if I messed up, and I did, my mom knew about it quickly. The problem could have been solved, you know, but that's just the way it is, and that's the way it should be. And it's a matter of community. But, you know, you get into how you pay for it, and the funding mechanisms, and all of that. Whether it's a voucher system or a trading system, there are a lot of mechanisms. I embrace the concept of choice. I embrace the concept of competition. That's what Liam and I are doing now. We're competing. That's our system. And I told him the other day, I'm a better candidate because he is in the race. And so I've seen it happen in the education realm academically with Capitan and Corona. That kind of competition makes us all better.

Many rural communities face challenges involving roads, water systems, wastewater, broadband and other infrastructure. How would you determine which projects deserve state investment?

Mr. Griffin. I alluded to that a little bit earlier. The idea, to me, is to look to see what's been done in the past. And I enjoy the fact that never having been a politician before, never having been a Senator before, I don't really know what's been done in the past or why, but I would look at the tracks that we've laid in the sand behind us and say, what was the money spent on and did it do any good? If we can prove that those kinds of things, those kinds of projects that have been done in the past have traction, that they've been appreciated, that the people wanted those things, then I would consider making them a priority. But as a math guy, I've been known to do this before, and I don't see any problem with it: We add the numbers up. What would the

numbers want? What I want the numbers to show is that they're, for instance, if I want to call on Jeremy Bentham and his utilitarian theory, will do the greatest good for the greatest number. That seems to be a simple and logical outcome, but I would still want to have a number of factors that would compose that figure. Typically, for instance, you talk about the roads and infrastructure, broadband, things like that. It might make sense, and I saw the vision that broadband would make it to every rural community. But if broadband makes it into every rural community, and it goes for 20 miles to reach one home, is that as beneficial as an expenditure that would go 20 miles to reach 20 homes? So that's probably how I would prioritize. But I would still like to maintain that we should be able to give everybody in New Mexico the quality of life and share it, as we all do. But I just don't know how realistic that is. I've got an ideal vision for everyone having access equally to everything. One of my favorites is access to justice, because I see it so closely. And rural communities suffer, whereas our urban communities seem to deal well with the access to justice indices. I would just say again, if we see a particular community, and we have it in the legal profession, that suffers from a lack of access to the legal structure, then I would say that was almost a gimme. You just know that that community is probably suffering because it's been repeatedly ignored based on the pattern of the last, say, 20 years. I'm going to look at trends, I'm going to look at our past, and I'm going to look at needs, and I'm going to put some numbers together, hopefully, that will demonstrate very clearly where the priorities need to be.

Senator Wilson. All of the above. But you do have to prioritize. There's a lot of federal funding coming for broadband. It's a matter of getting the processes and things in place that they can come to the communities. I'm encouraged by what progress has been made as technology advances. I can't remember how many millions of dollars was at the request for capital outlay that we have to choose and prioritize. And to me, I wish it could be all of the above. I wish it could be some of all of the above. But it's always water, even before roads. I think that's what we did last year was to help finish one of [Carrizozo's] water projects. And then the roads. Now, roads are a priority to me. It's frustrating. There's more bureaucracy in the highway department and the transportation system than I ever imagined. It is to the point where I learned the other day, you go to the pump and you pay gas tax or diesel fuel tax. I've always presumed that tax goes to pay for roads but when the state's general fund was in trouble, they started sweeping those gas taxes to the general fund. We have almost a billion dollar surplus over what we had last year. I think it's time to put that money and more back into the roads. There's plenty of money in the general fund. I advocate to pull more money out of the general fund and put it in the roads and get them fixed. Last year we passed the \$70 billion debt program to fix roads. The reality of the way that was structured is the roads will be worn out before we pay the debt off. That didn't make sense. I'd rather just pay for it, get it fixed, and then move on to the next one. But, you know, programs like the road on 7th Street (in Carrizozo), it's a co-op program with the state. And so there's some good mechanisms out there. And I'm proud of Carrizozo, because you're getting it done. So many communities, we allocate that money, and they don't get it done. And then there's \$7 billion sitting in the fund that's been appropriated, and it's not being put to good use. That's not the case in Carrizozo. And we use that as an example to others that we can't give you more money until you use what you have.

What are your plans for communicating with constituents on a year-round basis?

Mr. Griffin. Okay, you got me with that one, because this is the thing I've, this is probably the reason why I decided to enter college. I studied history. I told you I got my scholarship to the University of California Berkeley in differential calculus. But what I didn't tell you is that two years into that, I switched to liberal arts and sciences. I switched to history. I studied the Federalist Papers. I studied the Constitution. I studied a number of important aspects of our political history, about our political goals and destinies. And I got this picture in my head of the Quaker on horseback. You know the guy from the Quaker Oats box, since it's just a picture I drew. On horseback, riding off to the statehouse, being waved at by the slave and the woman and the child on the side of the road because they don't have voting rights, they've got nothing. Our country began with the idea that one person would go off for four years and come back, and you might be happy with half of their decisions. And I thought, where are we? And why is it 250 years later we're still sending the Quaker on horseback and watching him ride off for four years? I don't think we need to be that way. So I started to think about, actually, it's a controversial topic. Because I know right now there is some thought that we need to regress to ancient methods of voting and so on. And my thought is, no, we need to progress to future methods of voting, and polling, and calculating, and litmus testing. We need more frequent input from people, and it should probably be something as simple as...my phone. I know that I can do complex and high-value financial transactions on my phone with certain security. I think we can poll using AI. And I'm not a big fan of AI. In fact, I don't use it in my practice at all. A lot of lawyers do, but I do not. But I still think we could use artificial intelligence to distill the thoughts and feelings of our constituency on a much more frequent basis. And I'm not saying that we rely on an instantaneous thing. I've often thought there should be maybe a backup system, whereas, if it's an instantaneous vote, it posts somewhere, and then you can verify that, yes, that is the opinion that I gave. Or maybe you have to verify with several different levels of security. But somehow, some way, utilize our modern technology to get a tap into what people are thinking about a particular issue and not wait four years to find out if you got it right.

Senator Wilson. Well, I'm surprised at how busy it is out of session. It's almost like I'm looking forward to session, so I can rest. I'm thankful for today because I didn't have to drive two hours to have this discussion. I got to come home. We're working cows. I took a break, came here, and I'm going to go back and finish this afternoon. That's a relief. I make myself available. You know, I think it's my responsibility to be available. I have not hidden my cell phone number. Just as soon you call me. Or email. We are blessed to have a legislative aid for every legislator. My aid's name is Vince Miller. He does a great job. He does lots of research, lots of homework. So email really is the best mode, but you know, I love these kinds of discussions. I get invited to industry groups. I get invited to commission meetings and city hall meetings and prayer breakfasts. and there's lots of opportunity, and I want to make myself available.

If elected, what is one measurable result you would hope to accomplish during your term, and how would constituents be able to tell whether you had made progress?

Mr. Griffin. I like that question. You guys did good. One of the things that comes to mind is right now we are dealing with high gas prices. We don't know if they're going to go down as a result of national action or inaction. And it seems as though we have no control over it. What I like, again with my discussions with Senators, some of them like this idea right away. There's a warming to it. But if we have control over a certain aspect of our budget, and, like the Mayor of Carrizozo, would have control over certain aspects of the budget but, when money comes in from one source, it must be spent at another source. Well, if we're saying that we have a budget surplus that comes largely from our oil and gas revenue, because it's our largest revenue producer in the state, and we're in control of our own tax on people and on the gas itself. Why don't we consider cutting or perhaps even repealing for a period of time our gas tax? We can see a tangible result to people. In our constituency, in our districts, we can see people actually enjoy the action that the state can take to reduce the cost of transportation. In these rural communities, almost every farmer, rancher, and basically property owner, is spending a lot of money to get to the spaces that they occupy, the places that they work, or the businesses that they frequent. And to do this small thing that we do is within our power, I think that's one of the best ideas that I've had so far. Because I've got to tell you, too, and Rex Wilson is my opponent, but I know he faces the same thing. It's only a two-year term, only, from our perspective, okay? Only a two-year term. How much can we hope to accomplish? At the very, very minimum, a Senator's got the right to vote on something, and he's got the right to propose legislation, and he's got the right to allocate budgetary discretionary items. At the very minimum, every Senator, whether a good performer or not, has that. One of the things that we should do then is consider voting for those things that lower prices as fast as we can. If we do that in January, it probably will have a greater effect, a cumulative effect over time until the economy is restored to its ordinary circuit. I think that those are some of the things that I could do right away, and I think that would be a measurable result.

Senator Wilson. Well, I think there are several on a statewide basis. I think there needs to be tax reform. I think it needs to be streamlined. We have such an extremely complicated tax system. There are a lot of people who will throw out, especially on the campaign trail, the idea to just do away with gross receipts tax. Let's just do away with it. Use that excess money from oil and gas revenues. Well, cities live off of gross receipts tax. And so if you're going to do that, you're going to have a problem there. Some states don't have property tax. They say, well, let's do away with property tax. Well, New Mexico county governments live off of property tax. So I think it's a worthy consideration to look at income tax. If we can reduce or eliminate income tax, that's going to hit the state coffers, but we're so blessed with the revenues from the oil and gas industry and other new industries that are coming. There's lots of revenue coming with these new industries. New Mexico is not a poor state. We need to manage things better. There is another thing talked about in statewide races, and it just breaks my heart. The CYFD department is in just such shambles. So many sad stories about some of our families and some of our kids. There's going to be some good legislation coming forward, and no matter who is the successful candidate in the governor's race, there's going to be a change. I don't think we need to completely revamp it or restructure it. I just think we need new leadership and new accountability. There are so many people that work in the field that do a fantastic job, but they don't have the support at the state level. One of the hardest things is recruiting foster parents. I

had a chance to talk to Heather Wilson. You all remember when Heather Wilson was secretary of the CYFD. They recruited. They didn't just recruit families. They recruited foster families in churches. So if there's a member in that church that was participating in them, they got the support of the whole church and the support of the community. It wasn't just a man and a woman or a family. It was a community support system. So those are some of those kinds of things.

Ranchers in District 33 rely on a mix of private, State Trust and federal grazing lands. How should the Legislature balance livestock grazing interests with state conservation goals and public access on state trust lands?

Mr. Griffin. Well, I'm not sure I have the best answer to that because, what I recognize is that you can't take away a grazing right, because a lot of people have built their businesses on the basis of those rights, both state and federal. I'm not sure there's a balance that we could control or have any effect on in terms of federal government, but I think, at least in state government, it might make sense again in our rural communities to grant greater access to grazing rights, to have greater expansion of the ability of our ranchers to utilize state land, especially if the state land isn't being used for anything else.

Senator Wilson. Well, the State Trust Land is very specific in the Enabling Act. In other words, that's how it was set up in the very beginning with an Enabling Act of the State Constitution. And, you know, the ranchers that lease state land are obligated to manage trespass on that land. That's part of their lease. If there's public access to it, the public has access to it. The state game department pays for hunters to be able to access State Trust Lands, if there's a public access. If there's not public access, that's not the case. But access to State Trust Land is managed through the Commissioner of Public Lands. Very specifically, it's not a legislative issue. It's under the Enabling Act of the State Trust Land.

New Mexico relies heavily on oil and gas production for state revenue while solar and wind energy projects are steadily expanding across rural districts. What is your strategy for ensuring District 33 maintains energy sector jobs and tax revenue while supporting reliable, low-cost power for local residents?

Mr. Griffin. Well, the first thing you do is you recognize where most of New Mexico's revenue comes from. A lot of people may not realize that, but the vast majority of what we are able to do as a state comes from oil and gas revenue. So the first thing you do is you don't attempt to reduce it unless you have its adequate and productive replacement. And, particularly if we have an adequate and productive replacement, it may serve as competition, and competition theoretically would drive down prices. I think that's a logical supply and demand response.

Senator Wilson. Well, that's a good question, and thank you. To my knowledge, there's not any oil and gas production industry here, but we benefit from it because what goes from southeast New Mexico and northwest New Mexico to the state coffers that then gets shared through the general fund. But to address wind energy and solar energy, and I'm all energy. Energy demand

is growing so fast. I think we need to embrace all possible new technologies and new ways to generate energy. You know, the wind farm up at Corona, the biggest mistake in that whole deal was that in the beginning, and this just tells you how much demand was not in place there, that energy should be staying in New Mexico. It's going to California. That was a mistake. And I think going forward there will be more of that. But, you know, all of our wells on our ranch are solar. And I believe in solar. I've got all the pieces. I just didn't have time to put them together to put my house on solar. Sometimes it's difficult to look at those big solar farms. But what I'm encouraged by is how they evolved. They've learned that if they put them up off the ground, that livestock can still graze under them. In farm country, you're not eliminating farming. You may grow raspberries instead of corn, but you can still grow stuff under there. The sheep industry is revived in Texas because they use sheep to keep those things clean underneath and don't have to use chemicals to control the vegetation that hinders the production. The cheapest energy that the co-op buys are from those small solar farms that you see around. Solar energy is the cheapest energy that we can have for our grid, and we can do that in New Mexico. So I believe in it, I support it, but I think it's going to take everything. We're not going to eliminate the need for petroleum products, but we can be smart about it, but we don't have to depend 100% on them. I look forward to the day I drive an electric truck, but it's not here yet. They're not efficient for what I use. You can drive them around town, but they're not going to be a work truck.

What approach would you take regarding transparency and public disclosure for lobbying and procurement activities involving state agencies and public authorities?

Mr. Griffin. Okay, I like that one. I'm proud to say that I have no corporate money supporting me. Which means that I am at a disadvantage, probably, in most races. But the beauty of it, too, for my race, is I've been able to generate sort of a grassroots movement, a lot of small donations, small private contributors. And that might be slight, because when I entered this race and was asked to solicit corporate sponsors so that I could survive, I looked at the list of the sponsors. I responded to their questions as candidly as I could. And some of them decided, well, I wasn't dogged enough in support of their corporate goals. But as a result, too, what I think I've learned is a slight sense of contempt for the lobbying activity that's done behind closed doors, that is cloak and dagger, that is a gray area. I think we need to have our lobbyists explain what they're doing, who they're doing it for, why they're doing it, how much they're getting to do it, where the money goes, where the money comes from. And I know that there was a proposal last year, Senator Jeff Steinborn told me this a few weeks ago, there was a Lobby Accountability Act. Lobbyist Accountability Act, something like that. I'm misphrasing it. But what it was about was asking them to do just what I said, disclose more about their business. Why would we not, frankly? I mean, if they're up to something, shouldn't they be proud enough to tell us what it is that they're doing? So I would vote for it. If that bill comes back up, I would vote for it. That's what I would do. I would vote for the bill that requires the lobbyists to explain their business. And maybe it sounds like I had a chip on my shoulder because I didn't get any corporate money. No, that's not it. I would probably accept some corporate support or donations if their views were in line with mine, but I'm more proud to say, at this late stage in the campaign, we're probably not going to do that. So I'm able to say with some confidence that I owe no loyalty to any lobbying group, and I will actually ask them to owe loyalty to my constituents.

Senator Wilson. I think transparency is very important in terms of the lobbyists. That's all managed through the Secretary of State's office. Contributions are monitored. I have to fill out a form showing all of the contributions that were made to my campaign. It's monitored, it's transparent. You can go on the Secretary of State's website, see who gave money and how much they gave. So we have a good system. There are some cracks in the Secretary of State's office that are going to need to be fixed. I believe in transparency and I think the mechanisms are there to be transparent.

What role, if any, should term limits play in Legislative leadership positions, and how would you approach balancing leadership continuity against preventing concentrated power?

Mr. Griffin. I'm not a big fan, and haven't been a big fan of politicians in general. I, like most of you, have felt most of my life that politicians are a little bit cruel. But most politicians that I've known are pleased with the fact that they think and, maybe I'm overgeneralizing, they think that we're satisfied with the way they've been handling things. And I would say term limits are one of the ways in which we're able to fight back against the grab and constant grip upon power. But there's also a problem. And like in so many things that I encounter in the law, it's not as cut and dry as it might seem. If you have a real quality candidate, someone who's really accomplishing things and really getting things done, knows how to get things done, knows how to work across the aisle with both sides, and can achieve great results, then I think we'd all be tempted to say, oh, that term limits thing shouldn't apply to this candidate. So in order to be consistent, we should say what that is. And maybe we should say why it is. Some say term limits because people getting to a certain age are not as capable as they used to be. My wife reminds me of that every day. But instead of saying that it's a matter of age, I think term limits has been more convenient. We just say a certain term limit should be applied. But I'm still not convinced that that's the answer to the corruption, is to just say don't let people stay in long, because if they stay in long, they are inevitably corrupt. I don't know if I can say that, even with my doubt and disdain for general political life. I still think that there's value to finding a quality representative. And if you find one, you should be able to keep them for at least a few terms, right? No, I'm not a big fan of term limits from just the point of if you have somebody quality, you might get rid of them. And if you're using it to get rid of people that you believe are corrupt, are you making a one-to-one exponential relation between corruption and longevity? I can't do that, that's not fair.

Senator Wilson. I believe in term limits. I, you know, I just think two terms are enough, and then it's time to bring in fresh blood and new blood. I would advocate for that. I'd rather have a Constitutional Amendment for term limits than I would for salary for legislators. And some of those legislators have been there for 30 years. I just don't think that's healthy for them. I believe in a volunteer legislative system. And I think more people ought to participate in it, and I think more people ought to have the opportunity to participate in the process. County commissioners have term limits. And so from my perspective, I don't know how many times I'll run, but because I'm filling a vacancy. I won't be able to fill a full term until I run again, not this time, but the next time. I'll finally be in sequence with the rest of the Senate for a four-year term, but by the time I

finish that, I will have been there for seven years, and I think short of one year, that would be two terms, and I think that's enough.