

2020 PRIMARY POST MORTEM

How Progressive Dark Money Groups
Continue to Win in New Mexico

**Hispanos
Unidos** 

www.nmhispanos.org

background

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The last few elections have seen a decimation of conservative representation in the Roundhouse. After flipping the House of Representatives in 2015 for the first time in over seventy years, the Republicans have been relegated to a “super minority,” with a conservative coalition of Democrats and Republicans in the New Mexico Senate as the last line of defense between a radical progressive agenda hungry to impose greater government control.

In the 2020 Legislative Session, the conservative Democrats in that coalition held firm against the progressive push in control of the governor’s office and the House of Representatives in their attempt to enact gun control legislation, abortion laws, and raiding of the Permanent Fund. Progressive groups and their allies vowed to take out the five Democrat members of the conservative coalition: Senate President Pro Tem Mary Kay Papen of Las Cruces, John Arthur Smith of Deming (chairman of the body’s Finance Committee), Clemente Sanchez of Grants, Gabriel Ramos of Silver City, and George Muñoz of Gallup.

In early April, a campaign called “No Corporate Democrats” was launched in order to support primary challengers running against the five senators. Only Sen. George Muñoz managed to beat his progressive challenger - the other four, John Arthur Smith and Mary Kay Papen, would fall. This coalition has acted as the last check of power in Santa Fe, preventing a complete takeover of the Roundhouse by progressive special interests.

analysis

WHAT HAPPENED?

Media reports following the loss of the four Democratic senators are quick to point out that a PAC called New Mexico Strong spent \$700k in support of the conservative Dem senators. Largely unnoticed but

worth mentioning was another group that was just formed in April called “Council for a Competitive New Mexico” which reported Independent Expenditure expenses in support of the same senators totaling \$134,325.09 (roughly a third of which was spent attacking the progressive challengers). So in all, roughly \$835,000 was spent according to publicly available information (including a few thousand of Hispanos Unidos’ own paid direct voter contact efforts).

This stands in stark contrast to the disclosed money spent by progressive organizations, which totaled a little over a quarter of a million dollars – with 60% of that going towards attacking the moderate Democrats. Looking at the publicly available figures would lead one to believe that the progressive side was vastly outspent by almost four to one. Actually it is very likely that the opposite happened.

This analysis reveals the two major political strategy differences between progressive groups and their opponents:

- **The use by progressives of well-funded dark money groups with zero disclosure requirements.**
- **Progressive groups focus much more on direct voter contact efforts that are shown to be more effective in voter mobilization than traditional paid media.**

≈\$835,000

spent in support of the moderate Dem senators

??????

spent by progressive dark money organizations

analysis

DARK MONEY PROGRESSIVE GROUPS

It is notable how media reports were eager to point out the resources spent by corporations such as Chevron but there was very little mention of either the disclosed spending of progressive groups or the political activity engaged by progressive groups leading the efforts in New Mexico, efforts likely in the high six figure range and approaching the \$1M mark or higher.

These progressive groups with the largest influence and resources operate almost completely in the dark by using 501(c)(4) so-called educational non-profits. They like to claim the mantle of “no corporate donors” but are backed by wealthy out of state individuals and friendly left-leaning organizations.

In fact, the “No Corporate Democrats” campaign was modeled after a similar successful effort in New York that in 2018 defeated Democrats who were allied with Republicans.

While the growing influence of largely untraceable political spending is a problem, it is to the detriment of conservatives not to be playing by the same rules.

Conservative efforts in New Mexico will continue to lose if they keep playing checkers while well-funded, out of state progressive organizations play chess.

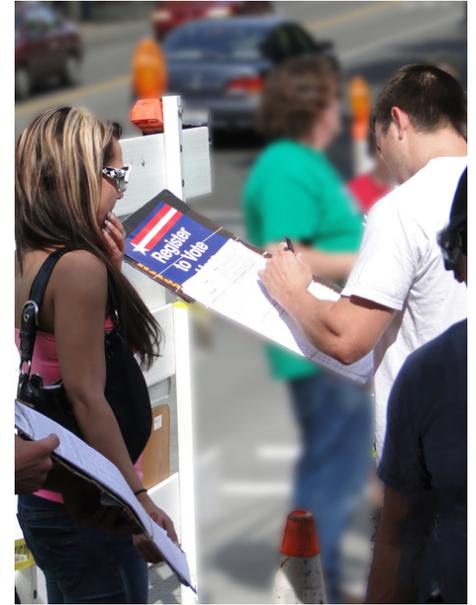


analysis

LOCAL & DIRECT VOTER CONTACT IS HOW TO WIN

100% of the money spent by New Mexico Strong was spend on paid media: direct mail, digital ads, etc. with zero spending on direct voter contact.

Although the new group “Council for a Competitive New Mexico” did spend a small portion of their much smaller budget on what they call “advocacy calls,” it is likely they used an out of state call center to make calls into New Mexico.



While it is unknown exactly how much of the progressive expenditures went towards direct voter contact due to the extensive use of dark money groups, media reports mention the Working Family Party focused on making “thousands of calls...and texting.” Not only is it very likely an overwhelming majority of their political spending was on direct voter contact efforts, but the overall effectiveness of those efforts was boosted even further due to the use of local in-state callers. More specifically, not only are direct voter contact efforts more effective than paid media, it is easy to see that when a neighbor calls you to vote it is a lot more persuasive and effective than an out of state caller.

In order to both mobilize voters successfully and be well positioned to counter the effect of progressive messaging, it is critical for conservatives to use the most effective voter mobilization strategies and techniques available.

This means voter engagement efforts should use direct voter contact methods (door to door, calling, texting, etc.) as the foundation of a successful political effort, and supplemented by paid media – not the other way around.

conclusion

TO WIN WE MUST ADAPT

The sprawling network of out of state progressive organizations – most notably the dark money groups with no spending or fundraising limits and almost no disclosure requirements – continue to dominate New Mexico politics, most recently with their defeat of key moderate Democrat senators this past primary election.

Overall, conservative efforts in New Mexico have not shown an ability to put up any kind of formidable opposition as seen in the election results since 2016. While the work of Hispanos Unidos has focused on voter mobilization and education, including thousands of phone calls this last primary election, our resources are dwarfed by external efforts, including those with views aligned with our own. In order to win, it is imperative for those resources to be better utilized in countering the flood of out of state progressive money. This means that conservative efforts must employ the best practices well understood and utilized by those progressive groups:

- **Play by the same rules and tactically use applicable organizations where appropriate.**
- **Use a bottom up approach: resources need to be focused on direct voter engagement efforts and supplemented by paid media advertising – not the other way around.**



Hispanos Unidos

Hispanos Unidos is a non-partisan grassroots organization committed to making New Mexico a better place to raise a family, earn a living, and pursue the American dream.

Our mission is to connect the public with community leaders, policies, and other organizations that share our vision of a greater New Mexico for all. We will continue to fight for a New Mexico that:

- Fosters economic growth by passing legislation to entice and encourage job creators*
- Promotes a transparent government that holds public officials accountable to the people and not special interests*
- Protects voter integrity by enacting common-sense reforms such as photo voter I.D.*