

Good morning, Democrats! Edgar and Chris, thank you for the introductions and the nominations this morning.

My name is Linda Vanzi and I am here to ask for your vote to keep me on the Court of Appeals.

I am going to talk to you about three things this morning: why this judicial race matters to all New Mexicans, how you can be assured of my qualifications, and who I am.

This race matters to you because we don't live in a perfect world. Things happen. Our neighborhoods endure crime, contract disputes undermine business, workers get hurt on the job. Fortunately, our judicial system provides a place to resolve conflicts, to repair harm and to punish those who break the rules.

Part of my job as a judge is to ensure that everyone has equal access to the courts and that the playing field between the strong and the weak is leveled. It doesn't matter whether you are David or Goliath, Enron or a small family business, a criminal defendant or the state. For me, everyone plays by the same rules and everyone is held accountable.

The Court of Appeals is the first right of appeal for nearly every case in the state. The issues we confront have far reaching implications for all of us. We hear matters involving your property and your civil rights. We hear disputes about the contracts you entered into and about injuries you have suffered. We decide divorce matters and what should happen to the abused and neglected children in our communities. And, of course, we decide criminal cases.

These are important issues. And, here is what is most important to know. Most of these cases will be resolved at the court of appeals - 85% will go no further in the judicial process and our decisions will become the law in this state.

This election matters because the rule of law matters, because the decisions of the Court

of Appeals touches every facet of our lives, and because those decisions are usually the final word.

So, how can New Mexicans make sure that their judges are the most qualified, capable and well-suited for the position?

Lawyers and legislators recognized the importance of this question and created a judicial selection system to assure the public that only the most qualified lawyers are considered for judgeships. It is a system where a bi-partisan commission made up of people like you along with lawyers, judges, and justices rigorously review the qualifications of applicants in a public proceeding. It is a proceeding where unqualified applicants are eliminated from consideration.

I went through that process along with 40 other applicants for the Court of Appeals position and was proud to be one of the few - along with Judge Robles and Judge Garcia - to be selected for consideration. When someone is not willing to go through the process, you, the voter, have less information by which to evaluate his or her qualifications.

So, I have been through the commission review process, I was appointed to the court, and I have been thrilled to be serving you for the past 15 months. Now, I am running to keep my position.

As I have traveled the state I have had the chance to share with many of you some of my background and tell you who I am.

- I am a former district court judge who served Bernalillo county with distinction. I received judge of the year and trial judge of the year awards, as well as consistently high marks from the lawyers, jurors, and citizens that came before me.
- Before becoming a judge I was a civil rights, and labor and employment lawyer.

My ties to labor were strong and I served as the Chair of the TVI labor board, the City of Albuquerque Labor Board, and as the Vice Chair of the State Labor Board. I am proud of my work with labor and in the past month have been honored to receive the endorsements of many unions including:

The Teamsters, UFCW, the Communications Workers of America, the Building and Trades Council, the New Mexico Professional Firefighters Association, and the Operating Engineers.

But, there was life before being a judge and lawyer, and it is the richness of all my history that brings me here before you today.

My story is one that could only happen in America. I spent the formative years of my life in countries that do not enjoy the liberties and constitutional protections that we have in the United States. I was an eyewitness to the biased, unpredictable application of “justice” and to the constraint of individual and collective freedoms by oppressive states.

I have worked in large corporations like Nestlé Enterprises and small ones like Border Steel in El Paso. I have owned my own business in Taos and have always contributed to my community through volunteer work.

From this background, I have embraced our legal system which values and promotes established principles of justice for all people. The value of a judge is well measured by her capacity to deal fairly with citizens who appear in court, by her ability to honor all people’s right to be heard prior to judgment, and by her absolute commitment to impartial decision-making.

If those are the qualities that you want in a judge, my name is Linda Vanzi and I ask for your vote today and on June 1st. Thank you.