

ReNew Mexico Candidate Questionnaire – 2020

Elected Official/Candidate Name: **Athena Ann Christodoulou**

District: **Senate District 21**

1. Our state has started to make unparalleled progress in the transition to 100% clean, renewable energy these last few years. What role do you think renewable energy should play in our state's economic future?

We have huge natural solar and wind resources. Some even argue, the best in the nation because unlike having only wind, or only solar, we have both in very complementary amounts. As I like to kid the utility companies..."Our wind/solar combination decapitates the duck (curve)." We also have the electricity grid hubs to three electricity markets and have the potential to be, once again, a major exporter of electricity...clean electrons this time! In addition, we have our three national labs and state universities already beginning to move in the "beneficial" electricity direction for the transportation and building sectors. Add to that an invigorated rural workforce and I see NM becoming a renewable energy and energy storage hub.

And while RE may not \$ for \$ replace oil and gas revenues, the boom and bust cycle plays havoc with any sort of planning. So we need to wean our workforce off the short-term-profit mentality and think long-term stability. Also, the oil and gas industry has been in decline for a decade, now. Companies have taken on an unsustainable amount of debt and are selling assets to pay shareholders. In the meantime, renewables in NM have become so price competitive that they now generate the least expensive electricity in history. On the other hand, oil and gas in New Mexico costs taxpayers millions in the hidden charges for environmental remediation, sealing wells and health care, especially to the tens of thousands of children and vulnerable families living close to wells and refineries. In addition, during the second worst drought in 1,200 years, drilling uses up billions of gallons of water. Fortunately, we have a chance to protect our farmers, ranchers and outdoor industries from the ravages of climate change by leading the way towards a renewable economy in multiple sectors.

Producing electricity is only the beginning, though. Let's add agrivoltaics to it.

Here is a recent [project](#) in Colorado. As our lands, people, and outlook becomes clean and energized, New Mexico will truly be the Land of Enchantment.

2. There have been discussions about implementing a tax on wind energy (and renewable energy more broadly). At these critical, early stages of clean energy development, such legislation would be extremely detrimental to New Mexicans living in rural communities and would prevent future renewable energy investment from bringing needed jobs and revenue to New Mexicans. If elected, will you oppose a wind tax that could jeopardize future rural jobs in the wind industry?

Yes, I oppose a tax on wind energy at this juncture. However, I would consider a tax on wind energy if all government subsidies of fossil fuels were removed and there was also a carbon tax that truly took into account all the costs that we pay as a society for using fossil fuels – from the FEMA funds that help states recover from climate exacerbated fires and hurricanes; to expanding Federal Flood Insurance; to local recycling program costs; to Medicare costs of covering increased asthma, allergies, water-borne diseases, and heat stroke....and that's just the beginning.

3. How should Industrial Revenue Bonds (IRB) be utilized as a tool to support new renewable energy projects in your district?

My district is highly suburban with only a little rural activity mostly confined to home ownership and a piece of Sandia Pueblo. However, the people in my district might be interested in industrial revenue bonds as investors. And I would help implement the following: (from [Clean Energy Finance Through the Bond Market:](#))

- **Establish mutually useful partnerships between development finance experts and clean energy officials at the state and local government levels**
- **Expand and scale up bond-financed clean energy projects using credit enhancement and other emerging tools to mitigate risk and through demonstration projects**
- **Improve availability of data and develop standardized documentation so that the risks and rewards of clean energy investments can be better understood**
- **Create a pipeline of rated and private placement deals, in effect a new clean energy asset class, to meet the demand by institutional investors for fixed-income clean energy securities**

4. Updates to our transmission system and energy infrastructure are critical in order to ensure that we have low-cost, reliable energy and to best support our growing population. If elected, what will you do to support upgrades to our transmission infrastructure?

As of this year, thanks to our legislators and others, we are currently assessing our grid modernization needs. And in conjunction with a state-wide EPSCoR research program on the subject, we should be more informed as legislators. As an engineer, I'm informed by data. From California's recent blackout experience, it is very clear that we need a smart grid with active demand/response. We also need the ability to integrate microgrids and community solar into our system. Because transmission line ownership is complex, we will need to build a coalition of stakeholders including conservation and other non-profit, indigenous, youth, co-ops, utilities, government, tech-companies, and university groups to work together to ensure equitable local, state and regional solutions. I have been on the Senate Memorial 63 working group on community solar for the past year and it presents a good model for future work in this area as well.

5. There are two major transmission projects in development with the potential to transmit thousands of megawatts of renewable energy to our grid as well as bring hundreds of clean energy jobs to our communities and millions in revenue and investments. What are some ways we can bring more projects like Western Spirit and SunZia to New Mexico?

PNM has recently announced its acquisition by Avangrid, a renewable energy power company. Working with our utilities, PRC, technical assets, and workforce in a concerted effort will prime us for a decentralized grid. Educating the public will be paramount. As will creating the frameworks of a plan. New Mexico also needs to be more business friendly toward the sectors it wishes to grow.

6. Will you sign our “Save Rural Jobs” pledge to promote more job creation and more renewable energy project revenue for our state?

Yes, with pleasure.

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