

# Adelante Progressive Caucus: Questionnaire for Candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives from New Mexico CD-3 24 February 2020

**Candidate: Teresa Leger Fernandez**

## Economy

1. Economic dynamism and wealth creation has concentrated in urban areas while rural areas and marginalized communities have largely been left behind. New Mexico CD-3 is one of the least densely populated congressional districts in the nation. Many of its residents do not have access to jobs, health care or the internet. As U.S. congressperson, what will you do to enhance broadly-distributed economic development and wealth creation in rural and marginalized communities?

*I have spent much of my life working on economic development in rural communities. I was born and have lived in rural northern New Mexico and its villages. In Congress I will continue to be a champion for this work. There are a number of key principles that must be part of a comprehensive federal strategy to create economic development in rural communities:*

- *Federal support for building 21st century infrastructure, like broadband, while also fixing our 20th century infrastructure (too many of our communities lack good clean water and other basic needs).*
- *A review and revision of the programs intended to assist rural areas. As an example, too much money is not deployed in our state because the structure of the program can not be accessed by smaller communities. The federal match is too large, the applications cumbersome and the incentives are simply wrong. As an example, we recently attempted to access broadband funding for three communities where not a single household had access to the internet. The application was denied because it was a consortium of three communities applying for the funds (which makes on the ground sense, but USDA was discouraging collective action) and the area had been claimed by a for-profit provider which had no incentive to provide services to these poor communities, but USDA would not fund projects within this corporation's claimed territory.*

- *The 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure is key because without it we can't provide tele-medicine, or allow small businesses, artisans and others who need access to the internet to succeed.*
- *We need to redirect USDA funding to small and medium sized ranches and to support regenerative agriculture. This will allow our ranchers and farmers to stay on the land and help solve our climate crisis.*
- *Federal funding and incentives for clean energy, green jobs, and efforts to diversify New Mexico's economy beyond resource extraction.*
- *Federal support for education, from early childhood to higher education. I will also work to leverage programs at the Department of Agriculture, Department of Education, Small Business Administration, and Community Development Financial Institution that promote economic vitality and capital investment in poorer communities, without the inefficiencies in programs such as the New Markets Tax Credits, to directly benefit our rural communities. I've worked on hundreds of millions in financing/grant funding for a range of projects from health facilities to businesses and infrastructure in underserved communities. Too many of the programs are inefficient - the banks and middle men take too much money out at the top, leaving less to flow to the program. In Congress I plan to lead on finding better ways of structuring them, so that our communities receive a greater positive, efficient impact from these existing programs.*

2. Is the American dream dead? Socioeconomic mobility in the US has ossified relative to most other developed economies. Economic inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, is at its highest value in half a century and sits comparatively high relative to those other developed economies. Many Americans, on both the left and the right, believe the system is rigged against them. What historical mix of policies and economic trends have brought us to our current economic state? And what structural changes will you work for to get our economy working on behalf of all Americans (and not just the corporate elite)?

*Congress has an obligation to address our unjust income inequality, and to promote economic growth and stability. I fully support raising the federal minimum wage. We must reverse the tax cuts that primarily benefit the ultra-wealthy and mega corporations. Our tax system is inequitable and has exacerbated the income inequality. We must protect Social Security and Medicare, support small businesses by creating access to capital and providing tax incentives, and invest in education and job-training programs. I support eliminating tuition at public colleges, universities and vocational training for most students, so that our workers are not left with crippling debt years after they complete their schooling. We must also enact paid family leave and ensure affordable child care for our families.*

*Finally, it is unacceptable that women make less than their male counterparts doing comparable work. In New Mexico women make 85 cents for every dollar paid to men, Latina women make even less, taking in 56 cents for every dollar paid to white men. In Congress, I will be an advocate and a powerful voice standing up for equal pay for equal work.*

## Climate

3. How do you view the existential threat posed by the climate crisis?
- A. Don't worry. The market solves all problems.
  - B. Combating climate change will require significant personal lifestyle changes and great shared sacrifice.
  - C. Promptly taking substantive collective steps to meaningfully address climate change provides us the opportunity to modernize our economy while transforming our society toward greater economic and social justice.

Please choose the option that most closely expresses your views and provide us your thoughts on how you will address climate change if elected to U.S. Congress.

*C. Here in New Mexico, we know how important the land is to who we are as a people. We know that climate change is an existential crisis. We must act to protect our land, our water, and our air for future generations by reducing carbon pollution, rejoining the Paris Agreement, and investing in renewable energy resources like wind and solar, as well as clean energy tax incentives. We must transition away from fossil fuels and provide economic assistance to those parts of the country, those communities that have borne the brunt of our fossil fuel consumption. In Congress, I will promote the Green New Deal and work to help bring clean energy jobs and investment dollars to Northern New Mexico so that we can put our abundant wind and solar resources to work. I would support USDA funding for regenerative agriculture so our ranchers and farmers could stay on their land, provide us with locally grown food and capture carbon.*

*I would apply a lens to all of our funding and subsidies granted through our federal agencies and tax code – does this subsidy, tax break or program help solve our climate crisis and create opportunities, or does it contribute to global climate disruption?*

*I have a history of working on renewable energy projects and of fighting environmental degradation. From fighting the proposed Fence Lake Coal Mine, lobbying in support of community solar, and protecting community water access as an Acequia commissioner. My decades of environmental and cultural preservation work brought me to the attention of the Obama White House, and President Obama appointed me to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation – later elevating me to Vice Chair of the Council. In this role, I led the effort to make our preservation and historical work more*

*inclusive and our programs and policies more reflective of our racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity.*

*The Sierra Club recognized my lifelong commitment to environmental justice and endorsed me as the environmental champion in this race.*

4. The Four Corners region and the southeastern part of the state rely heavily on fossil fuel extraction and processing to employ thousands of New Mexicans. What concrete steps would you take in Congress to address the climate emergency while considering the positive financial benefits of the New Mexico oil and gas industry, to both our communities and our state budget?

*We have an incredible opportunity to continue bringing sustainable, clean energy jobs to our state.*

*I've been championing renewable energy for the last 14 years, from suggesting mark-ups in then-Senator Bingaman's renewable energy tax credit legislation to advocating for renewable energy at the Roundhouse. I will continue this advocacy and be a powerful voice in Congress in pushing for solutions that can simultaneously address the critical needs to employ people with living wage jobs and to build sustainability and resiliency in our state.*

*In Congress, I will work to bring additional investment dollars to New Mexico to create these clean energy jobs -- in wind and solar energy, in sustainable agriculture, and in green infrastructure. At the same time, I will work to ensure that those transitioning out of traditional energy jobs are honored and supported. And I will work with the rest of the New Mexico delegation and members from surrounding states on transmission projects to ensure that we are able to export all of the new clean energy that we generate, which will create even more jobs for New Mexicans.*

### Progressive Values

5. What have you done in the past that demonstrates your progressive values? Please elaborate on your past efforts on issues such as advancing human rights, addressing climate change, diminishing the disparity of wealth in this country, ending structural racism, or advocating for peace and diplomacy instead of militarism.

*I have spent the past 30 years working with and on behalf of our communities in Northern New Mexico -- listening, bringing people together, and getting things done. I've worked across this district to promote tribal sovereignty, raise renewable energy issues, secure hundreds of millions in federal funding and financing to help build*

*schools, rural health clinics, businesses and critical infrastructure. I've fought for and won voting rights cases for our communities. I've pushed for our progressive values – and know what it takes to actually make real progress here. I've championed – and won – the Voting Rights Act in the decennial redistricting cases here in New Mexico and across the country with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF.) I've pushed for access to the ballot in rural areas that were underserved.*

*In this campaign, I have been endorsed by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Courage to Change PAC and the New Mexico Working Families Party because both recognize that I am the progressive candidate in this race who truly represents our communities, and has the ability to take our voices and values to Washington.*

### Health Care

6. We are the only developed country in the world that has not yet managed to institute universal health care. Health care should be a right for every American. As a U.S. congressperson, how do you propose we provide quality health care for every American?

*I have helped build multiple rural health clinics here in Northern New Mexico, and understand what it takes to create access to good quality and community based health care.*

*In Congress, I will fight for Medicare for All and work to ensure that all Americans have access to quality, affordable health care, especially in our rural areas. We all know someone who we care about who hasn't gone to the doctor to get something treated because they couldn't afford the deductible or copay, even though they had insurance. Health care for all means access for all. It means a health care system that isn't crippled by bankrupting deductibles and copays. It means negotiating for lower drug prices, addressing the patent system, and ensuring that Americans cannot be discriminated against because of pre-existing conditions. We must also address the racial and ethnic disparities and injustices in health treatment and outcomes. Our families deserve care regardless of medical history, let alone race, gender, sexual orientation, or immigration status.*

### Immigration

7. Ever since Trump took office, Democrats have been playing whack-a-mole in Congress and in the courts, attempting to forestall the administration's egregiously cruel immigration policies. Please step back from this reactionary stance and tell us what you would do in the U.S. Congress to achieve a just and equitable immigration policy.

*Our immigration system is broken. In Congress, I will champion humane, comprehensive immigration reform that keeps families together and treats everyone with dignity. I strongly support a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. and a DREAM act, which must also extend to dreamers' families.*

*I speak on these issues from a place of experience: I helped start an immigration clinic, handled asylum and defense of deportation cases and developed a unique legal program to assist undocumented families gain their legal status.*

*I will fight tirelessly against Trump's racist, inefficient and expensive wall and will work to restore dignity and humanity to our immigration process. And I will push for reform that takes into account the realities of the immigrant experience, including the exploitation of immigrant labor and the role of the U.S. in destabilizing governments in Latin America.*

*Something that the Republicans intentionally ignore is the talent, energy, and value that immigrants bring to this nation. Immigrants are an economic benefit to our country, studies estimate that comprehensive immigration reform would result in \$1.5 trillion in additional GDP over ten years. I have seen this firsthand through my service on the board of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), and by being an active member in our diverse New Mexican community that fosters and celebrates multiculturalism, in a way that I think can be a model for other parts of the nation.*

### Fair Elections

8. The growing power of money and corporations in our elections, combined with the adverse effects of voter suppression, gerrymandering, and geographically disproportionate representation poses a substantive threat to our democracy. As U.S. congressperson, what would you do to ensure free and fair elections?

*At its heart, fair elections and campaign finance reform is about making sure every voter has access to the voting box and that every vote has the same impact.*

*I have spent much of my career working to strengthen and protect our democracy by making it more inclusive. When I was Vice Chair of MALDEF, we litigated multiple redistricting cases to fight gerrymandering, including in Texas and California. Here in New Mexico, I litigated and won the Voting Rights Act Claims in the 2001 and 2012 redistricting cases. Instead of suing the state of New Mexico when county clerks failed to place early voting machines in rural Native American communities, I drafted a bill, sponsored by Speaker Ben Lujan, to require it. I successfully litigated Santa Fe's ranked choice voting lawsuit before our Supreme Court, which was supported by a coalition of grassroots organizations. I am part of a coalition working to get everyone counted in the 2020 census - pushing for state funding since we are aware that this administration is not eager to count our colonias, tribal lands, and minority communities. New Mexico has some of the highest undercounts in the country, and these marginalized communities lose out on political access and federal funding if they are not counted.*

*I see my campaign for Congress as an extension of this work to ensure that our democracy is accessible to all of our communities. Once elected I will be a fierce advocate for voting rights, against gerrymandering, and will work to overturn Citizens United and stem the flow of unlimited and undisclosed money in politics.*

### Foreign Policy

9. On December 10, 2019, more than 180 House Democrats joined a nearly united Republican caucus to pass a sweeping \$738 billion military spending bill that gave President Trump his long-sought "Space Force," free rein to wage endless wars, and a green light to continue fueling the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen. Just 48 members of the House, including 41 Democrats, voted against the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, which increases the Pentagon budget by \$22 billion. How would you have voted on this bill, and how will you vote on the next Defense Authorization Act if it authorizes \$700 billion or more for the defense budget? Does it make a difference to you if the bill would come from a Democratic president?

*I support curbing Pentagon spending, doing so in a responsible way that protects Americans but does not enable wasteful, unnecessary defense spending and allows us to redirect federal funds to addressing our most pressing social and environmental issues. In terms of future legislation, I would consider each bill individually and independently -- taking into account the specifics of the legislation and the national security landscape at that time.*

10. The Washington Post recently released the Afghan Papers, which reveal that senior U.S. officials failed to tell the truth about the war in Afghanistan throughout the 18-year campaign, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable. Do you have a plan to end the longest war in United States history, withdraw our troops, and bring our service members home?

*Given President Trump's very recent U.S.-Taliban agreement and the shifting dynamics of US engagement in Afghanistan and relationships with the relevant actors, it would be irresponsible to outline a specific plan at this time. I do fully support bringing our troops home, and doing so through thoughtful diplomacy that does not isolate our allies or compromise our counterterrorism objectives.*

*More broadly, following the destabilizing actions of the current administration, we must work to rebuild our international relationships and credibility. We must re-prioritize diplomacy, recruit and improve the morale at the State Department, and recommit to being a global leader on securing international stability, protecting and promoting human rights, and tackling issues like climate change that impact our global community.*

### Trade Policy

11. Free trade plays an integral part of American foreign and economic policy. As a border state, New Mexico directly benefits from foreign trade. At the same time, many manufacturing workers, farmers, and small-business owners, have been negatively affected by U.S. trade policy. As a U.S. congressperson, how would you propose altering our trade policy to protect those adversely affected?

*I would advocate for trade policy that protects workers and working class families and prioritizes their well-being over that of corporations and special interests. And protects our environment at the same time. Specifically, I would support trade policy that adheres to the Congressional Progressive Caucus's fair trade principles:*

- *Protect Congress' authority to set trade policy*
- *Restore balanced trade*
- *Put workers first*
- *Stop currency manipulation*
- *Expand buy America procurement practices*
- *Protect the environment above profits*
- *Protect the environment for future generations*
- *Prioritize consumers above profits*
- *Protect nationhood rights*
- *Secure affordable access to essential medicines and services*
- *Respect human rights*
- *Provide a safety net for vulnerable workers*