



Grand Junction Area
CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

2023 Fall Election Guide

Focused on Business Priorities for Economic Strength





ELECTION GUIDE 2023

A message from the Grand Junction Area Chamber of Commerce

As we approach this Fall's election, it's important to remember that while it may not appear to carry as many high-profile decisions as previous elections, there are still crucial choices on the ballot that directly impact our business community. Elections are more than just selecting candidates; they are your opportunity to have your voice heard on issues that affect your livelihoods, investments, and the overall health of our local economy. These decisions can shape the regulatory environment, influence tax policies, and impact the resources available for business development and growth.

In addition to these important considerations, our organization believes it is absolutely critical to identify Board of Education candidates who understand how their decisions impact our future workforce. The education system plays a pivotal role in shaping the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of the next generation of workers. The decisions made by the Board of Education directly influence the quality of education our students receive, their preparedness for the job market, and their ability to contribute effectively to our local businesses.

The candidates we elect to the Board of Education should be committed to ensuring that our schools are not only providing a strong academic foundation but also equipping students with the skills and experiences necessary to excel in the workforce of tomorrow. This includes promoting STEM education, career and technical training, and a curriculum that aligns with the needs of local businesses.

So, let's not underestimate the significance of this election. It's a chance to make a difference, not just for today, but for the future of our businesses and the prosperity of our community. Make your voice count by casting your vote and encouraging others to do the same. Let's seize this opportunity to shape our future together!

At the service of our business community,
The Grand Junction Area Chamber of Commerce

INTRODUCTION

This Election Guide serves as a reference as you consider candidates in select races for the upcoming election on November 7th. Also included are a few ballot measures we have identified as having direct impact on the business community and economic base.

1. Introduction
2. Candidate Questionnaires and Endorsements
3. Local & Statewide Ballot Measures
4. Election Day Information

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES

Each Candidate was provided an opportunity to submit a questionnaire answering four questions about their candidacy. The answers to these questions are provided in each section. Please note that submitted answers are shown exactly as submitted. The Chamber does not correct grammar, spelling, and general editing errors. Each candidate followed a strict word count requirement to ensure consistency.

CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS

In addition to the written questionnaires, candidates were invited to participate in a panel interview with the Grand Junction Area Chamber of Commerce Endorsement Committee. This committee includes one board representative and five additional representatives from the business community. Chamber staff is present only to facilitate the interviews and record the comments of the committee.

Candidates in each race were all asked the same questions related to business priorities in our community such as the primary role of a School Board member, ensuring transparency within MCVSD51, and how to improve access to work-based learning opportunities for our future workforce within the school district.

All interviews were held to a strict time limit for consistency.

CANDIDATE FORUM

Our endorsement process included invitations to participate in our Candidate Forum as part of the September Quarterly Membership Luncheon. Candidates faced a variety of questions provided by attendees related to business issues, each having an opportunity to answer each question related to their race.

This forum is open to both Chamber members and the community as an opportunity for Candidates to express their perspectives on business-related topics prior to the upcoming election. The Candidate Endorsement Committee is also in attendance as part of the endorsement process.

Mesa County Valley School District Board of Education District A



Jose Luis Chavez



Jessica Hearn



CynDee Skalla

What unique experience/qualifications do you bring to the Mesa County Valley School Board?

Chavez: I was raised in the valley and professionally, I chose to join the ranks of law enforcement by serving as a probation officer and then a juvenile parole officer, where I spent my career collaborating with a varied of systems and individuals who have different views and values. I believe in listening to others and I honor all perspectives in a conversation, I use common sense problems-solving approach with upstream thinking to help others to reach a consensus and positive change, which is in the best interest of the youth or community I am working with.

Hearn: If elected, I would be the only board member with experience teaching STEM courses and the only member working with the nuances of federal government and taxpayer fund sources. In graduate school, I studied Educational Leadership; I already understand staffing models and administrative functions. These experiences uniquely situate me in understanding what student success looks like, the needs of teachers and staff to get them there, and the complexities of government funding sources in allocating these resources. I am fastidious with budgets and will work toward the most prudent use of taxpayer money that directly and positively impacts the classroom.

Skalla: As a retired school teacher with over 35 years of experience, I bring to the board both in-classroom instructional experience as well as institutional educational knowledge specific to School District #51. I have served on multiple educational committees at a district level. I was a Past President of the International Reading Association, where I implemented Reading Conferences, as well as provided ongoing staff development as the Instructor of Record. I have committed my adult life to education and look forward to continuing as a committed board member.

What do you hope to achieve as a School Board Member over the next four years?

Chavez: I hope to have the all of the board members work as a team, we see that teachers are part of the team and we create and maintain a support environment for our teachers. I hope to assist the current board members in working on strategies to develop positive pathways in finding solutions for our budget reductions, declining enrollment and making our school district more competitive and effective. I also will achieve an understanding of all of the duties of the school board.

Hearn: The list of hopes I have are for the District, not me. I hope the new Board can work very quickly as a team and give guidance and direction to better help move the Strategic Plan forward. I hope more students are able to find a sense of belonging in our schools and the bullying and meanness we've seen are drastically reduced. I hope parental involvement increases in our schools, PTOs, after-school programs, and their child's schoolwork. I hope the new Board is able to find better ways to communicate with the community on their decisions and reasonings.

Skalla: Improving student achievement within our district is critical. While our students have shown progress, I am keenly interested in what is holding our students back from being more successful. I will focus on how we can provide optimal learning opportunities for our students. I will engage with the community, especially parents, to include their voices in the direction of our schools. I am concerned about the safety in our schools and will be committed to making sure our students and staff are safe. Improving student readiness post-graduation is also very important, and I look forward to engaging with the community (*maximum word count met*)

In your opinion, what is currently missing from the educational opportunities available to District 51 Students?

Chavez: I feel D51 needs to provide more support and promote the educational opportunities of applied and technical arts.

Hearns: The District does a great job at offering a breadth of courses, school programs, and choices in schools. From the vocational R-5 program to Dual Immersion and tech studies to STEAM, the District has an impressive collection of options. So, what's missing? More teachers, more instructor coaches, and more paraprofessionals. When staff are spread thin, their ability to be their absolute best declines and it impacts the educational opportunities and outcomes of students. The District is working hard to improve salaries and recruit, but Colorado's tax legislation restricts the ability to increase the overall budget and better solve these issues.

Skalla: We need to commit and provide more focus on graduating skilled workers and more prepared graduates. The practical application of what the students are learning and how it applies to career choices is missing from our current curriculum. I will look for ways to engage our business owners in identifying programs such as apprenticeships and sharing cutting-edge technical and semi-technical educational offerings within our schools. College readiness is also missing as only 4 in 10 graduates report a strong readiness for their college education.

How would you describe the impact you would have as a School Board Member on the cultivation of skilled talent for our future workforce?

Chavez: I want to retain and attract teachers who will provide our students with the understanding and awareness of the issues in our community and the world. I also want to promote and raise awareness how important the skilled technical work is to our community.

Hearns: To be the most impactful in any of the work, the Board needs to be working as a team to get there. The District has a vision to equip future graduates to leave school prepared for any challenge, including our future workforce. As a School Board Member, I would continually remember this vision and the strategic plan and use them to drive inquiries, decisions, and inform policy. The strategic plan also outlines an excellent goal for 90% of students to graduate with a post-secondary plan; the pathway to creating the personalized plan would include skilled talents to enter the workforce.


Skalla: Our district has a great opportunity to provide more technological learning opportunities, both within our middle and high schools as well as in partnership with Colorado Mesa University. More emphasis needs to be given to school-business mentorships, apprenticeships, partnerships, and cooperative programs while raising awareness about opportunities in technical and semi-technical trades. These programs should link schools to the workforce where the direct connection can be made between the competencies and greater job opportunities.

What change(s) could you reasonably make during your time on the board to ensure graduates are well equipped for success post-graduation as our future workforce?

Chavez: I would like to see seniors have the opportunity to have internships with our community business, so they can understand and see if this is the career they want to go into. I also want to build a strong partnership with business and industry to grow our skill technical workforce. In this way we may be able to tailor to the needs of our community.

Hearns: The Strategic Plan calls for crafting Individual Career and Academic Plans. This objective gives students robust and aligned options for learning experiences so they are equipped to pursue college, trade school, the military, or a career—all of which ultimately lead them to become our future workforce. I am wildly excited for Year 2 (where students can access the menu of options). As Board Member, I would work as a team with the Board and the Superintendent to make any necessary changes to direction or guidance so D51 staff have what they need to hit the goals on this objective

Skalla: I will focus on student preparedness for post graduate careers by being more focused on task oriented graduates. I would work to enlarge and encourage an awareness of post-graduate opportunities which include concurrent enrollment and cooperative education programs with CMU. I will work towards better prepared graduates to ensure time is not wasted taking remedial classes upon college entry. I will work hard to involve business leaders to create technology-rich schools and create school-business partnerships.

 **After careful consideration of the questionnaire, candidate interview, and participation in the candidate forum, the GJACC endorses CynDee Skalla.**

Our Endorsement Committee was impressed with the knowledge and drive each of these candidates brought to the discussions. While we applaud each for stepping up to serve our community, Skalla's experience as an educator and desire to improve the "career-readiness" of our future talent stood out.

Mesa County Valley School District Board of Education

District B



Cindy Enos Martinez



Barbara Evanson

What unique experience/qualifications do you bring to the Mesa County Valley School Board?

Enos Martinez:

- Native of Mesa County
- Vested interest in education since late 70's starting with the HeadStart Program
- Former school board member
- 30+ years of government experience
- Students and teachers are priority
- NO SPECIAL AGENDA

Evanson: I bring a background of law enforcement and safety and security to the board. While serving the district, I saw a real need, not only for physical (building) security, but for security in the well-being of each student. I have the experience and skills to keep our students and staff safe and foster an environment for academic excellence.

What do you hope to achieve as a School Board Member over the next four years?

Enos Martinez:

- Bring transparency and common sense
- Involve students and teachers in more discussions
- Figure out how to hire and retain quality staff
- Make ALL students feel they belong and are equal

Evanson: As a School Board Member, I want to improve our partnership and communication with students, parents, staff, and the community. If everyone feels their input is valued and heard, and the board is transparent, everyone will have a sense of ownership and be invested to build a safe and efficient educational environment for our students. I hope to reinforce the importance of high-quality instruction by staff, in the classes that our students need to have a strong foundation in; such as reading, writing, math, science, and history

In your opinion, what is currently missing from the educational opportunities available to District 51 Students?

Enos Martinez:

- Other alternative pathway programs for graduation; like the KPP Program and R-5

Evanson: D51 has a range of educational opportunities available to our students. The district offers information to most middle school students, at their schools in the middle of their 8th grade year. Let's face it, students are not always the best avenue for communicating future opportunities to their parents. We need to work on ensuring parents are involved and aware of the educational opportunities available to our students across the district, so they can be involved with the process and help their children determine the best route to their future.

How would you describe the impact you would have as a School Board Member on the cultivation of skilled talent for our future workforce?

Enos Martinez:

- Implement a method to identify students who are doing well in area such as math or science and then focus efforts to help develop the student in an area such as electrical or mechanical
- Bring in more community leaders to talk with students considering technical or vocational schools
- Strengthen partnership with CMU Tech


Evanson: There's a notion today that there's more value obtaining a college degree than being educated in a skilled trade. However, not everyone is well-served borrowing 80K to obtain a degree they may never use. Success isn't always dressed in a suit and tie. We must engage with our students as early as possible to ascertain their aspirations. With their input, we could help them identify their best educational track. Furthermore, we could determine what resources may be missing and work toward developing a variety of classes to support the career fields that interest the youth of the Grand Valley.

What change(s) could you reasonably make during your time on the board to ensure graduates are well equipped for success post-graduation as our future workforce?

Enos Martinez:

- Expand Career Center
- Increase vocational and specialized industry classes/programs to high school students
- Offer a class on preparation of resume, filling out job application, interviewing skills and appropriate dress.

Evanson: It is not necessarily a change, but more of fostering a mindset, environment, and relationships where students and families are supported, listened to, and understood. I believe the most well-equipped graduates for our future workforce are ones that have a strong backing and receive honest guidance from their support system. Let's provide each student with the guidance they need to get on the best educational route to be successful after graduation.

 ***After careful consideration of the questionnaire, candidate interview, and participation in the candidate forum, the GJACC endorses Cindy Enos Martinez.***

The passion for our youth displayed by these candidates was undeniable. While it was a tough decision for our committee, Enos Martinez's understanding of both our community and the School District will be valuable as we continue to address challenges facing our schools.

A note about our Board of Education endorsements:

Our local Board of Education plays an indispensable role in setting the foundation for the workforce of the future. It is on their shoulders that the responsibility of imparting knowledge, skills, and values to our young minds rests. A strong education system is the bedrock upon which our future workforce is built, and it is instrumental in shaping the trajectory of our community's economic prosperity. Quality education isn't just about academic excellence; it encompasses character development, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving – skills that are essential in today's ever-evolving job market.

As the Chamber of Commerce, we recognize the critical importance of nurturing talent and ensuring that our local workforce is equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century. We understand that businesses require a skilled workforce to remain competitive and innovative. By actively engaging with our local Board of Education, we can help bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace. It is critical that candidates understand the importance of career readiness programs, internships, and apprenticeships that provide students with real-world experiences and a better understanding of the career pathways available to them.

Furthermore, the Chamber of Commerce continues to play a pivotal role in advocating for policies that promote educational excellence and workforce development. By working in tandem with the Board of Education, we can ensure that our schools have the necessary resources, curricula, and extracurricular activities that foster holistic development.

The connection between our local Board of Education and the cultivation of our future workforce is symbiotic and of paramount importance. As a Chamber of Commerce, we are committed to identifying candidates who not only grasp the significance of education but also actively champion efforts to shape our youth into the talent of tomorrow. By collaborating with our Board of Education, we can bridge the gap between education and the business world, ultimately benefiting our community's economic growth and prosperity.

Local & Statewide Ballot Measures

Proposition HH - Reduce Property Taxes and Voter-Approved Revenue Change (State of Colorado)

Ballot Language: SHALL THE STATE REDUCE PROPERTY TAXES FOR HOMES AND BUSINESSES, INCLUDING EXPANDING PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FOR SENIORS, AND BACKFILL COUNTIES, WATER DISTRICTS, FIRE DISTRICTS, AMBULANCE AND HOSPITAL DISTRICTS, AND OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND FUND SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY USING A PORTION OF THE STATE SURPLUS UP TO THE PROPOSITION HH CAP AS DEFINED IN THIS MEASURE?

Chamber Position: Oppose

While this measure is intended to reduce certain residential and commercial assessment rates used in the calculation of property taxes in the hopes of a slight decrease in the amount of property taxes many will pay. It will also raise the annual growth rate in the state spending limit to allow the state to collect and spend an additional \$9 billion over the next ten years.

Ultimately, we believe many taxpayers would end up losing more by giving up TABOR refunds than they would gain as a decrease on their property tax bill, especially renters who do not currently pay property taxes, many of whom make up our workforce and already face cost of living challenges. This measure is overly complex and while the title suggests a benefit for Coloradoans, once you dive into the details of this proposed measure, we see little benefit to our businesses and workforce that would outweigh the consequences.

Question 2B- 99 Year Lease Allowance (City of Grand Junction)

Ballot Language: Shall there be an amendment to Article XIV, Section 124 of the City Charter, as amended, to increase the authorized lease term for City property, now owned or after acquired, from 25 years to a term not to exceed 99 years when the property is to be used for affordable housing and/or workforce housing project(s)?

Chamber Position: Support

We recognize the need for creative solutions as we tackle affordable workforce housing as a community. Allowing 99-year leases for affordable and workforce housing projects is a step in the right direction and clearly defining what “affordable and workforce housing” for this purpose will be critical to ensuring the intention of this measure matches the outcomes down the road.

It is also vital that the City of Grand Junction be cautious to avoid becoming overly invested as “property managers”. This is an opportunity to leverage City resources while collaborating with vital partners such as Housing Resources and other non-profits who specialize in this type of housing. We look forward to seeing this new tool be used to continue to relieve the pressure on workforce housing across the community knowing it is a topic on our employers’ minds.

ELECTION DAY IS TUESDAY, November 7th, 2023

To update your voter registration please visit

www.govotecolorado.com

Or visit the Mesa County Elections Office at:

200 S. Spruce Street

Grand Junction, CO 81501

(970)-244-1662

Mail Ballot Drop Off Locations:

Mesa County Central Services - 200 S Spruce Street, Grand Junction

Fruita Civic Center - 325 E Aspen Ave, Fruita

Clifton DMV - 3225 I-70 Business Loop, # A2, Clifton

GVT West Transfer Facility - 612 24 1/2 Road, Grand Junction

Department of Human Services - 510 29 1/2 Road, Grand Junction

Colorado Mesa University - 1299 N 12th St, Grand Junction (Robinson Theatre)

Mesa County Fairgrounds - 2785 US Highway 50, Grand Junction

Palisade Community Center - 120 W 8th Street, Palisade

BALLOTS MUST BE RETURNED BEFORE 7:00 P.M. ON ELECTION DAY

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