

# Better disclosure needed in elections

As executive director of the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government, (FOG), I work every day to make sure New Mexicans have access to public information.

As a part of this mission, I am often asked to speak to public officials from emerging democratic countries about transparency issues, as they look to the U.S. as the model for freedoms across the board, from freedom of information to freedom of the press.

Increasingly though, my pride in our political system has wavered, primarily due to the ever increasing role of money in our political system.

When I talk to emerging democracies, I usually have 60 to 90 minutes to explain why openness is good for a democracy and why without it, government officials cannot be held accountable.

"Democracy dies behind closed doors," I always tell them. Sometimes, I leave those meetings

## Guest Column

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feeling smug that I live in a mature democracy where we enjoy the full, free flow of information. In fact, more than two centuries ago, one of our nation's founders, Thomas Jefferson, observed that "information is the currency of a democracy."

As we saw this election season, American elections now are different than they ever have been. I feel overwhelmed with more opinion than facts, more innuendo than information, especially in regard to the real

source of those campaign ads that flood our mailboxes and airwaves.

Who is really funding these ads? Often the "paid for" disclosures refer to political action committees, PACs, who hide behind names that obfuscate rather than inform such as "We love this state," "Freedom for all," "Liberating America."

FOG's mantra long has been, "You have a right to know." That is why FOG has recently become involved in the New Mexico Pledge, a nonpartisan effort of leaders throughout the state working to raise awareness and to create a dialog about the impact of money in politics. In particular, FOG is concerned about the need for better transparency by those who govern.

We need better disclosure in elections, including clear definitions of coordination between campaigns and independent efforts, improved dis-

closure in lobbying activities, and the development of technology that makes election and lobbying disclosure filings in New Mexico easier, more transparent and more affordable. Only then, can all citizens have access to information about who is influencing our lawmakers and us as voters.

Democracy indeed dies behind closed doors. Let us return to the early vision of our founders where information, not money, is the currency of our democracy.

For more information about New Mexico Pledge, visit [www.newmexicopledge.org](http://www.newmexicopledge.org).

Susan Boe is the executive director of the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization which has led the fight for transparency in New Mexico for almost 25 years. For more information about FOG, visit [www.nmfog.org](http://www.nmfog.org).