

GABI Center for Accountability LLC
Guide for Constitutional Amendments
2024

There will be four constitutional amendments on the November 5, 2024, general election ballot. Below is a summary of each amendment, along with arguments for and against. This guide is provided as an educational resource to inform voters and does not endorse any position.

This voter guide is provided by GABI Center for Accountability LLC as an educational resource. It is intended to inform voters about the proposed constitutional amendments and does not advocate for or against any amendment.

Amendment 1: Veterans' Property Tax Exemption

This amendment proposes extending property tax exemptions to veterans who are less than 100% disabled and to their widows or widowers. The amount of the exemption would be based on the veteran's disability rating, allowing more veterans to receive property tax relief proportionate to their disability percentage.

Cons:

- Could increase property taxes for other residents to compensate for lost revenue.
- May provide benefits to financially stable veterans who do not need tax relief.
- Critics argue that property taxes should be based on the value of property, not the personal circumstances of the owner.

Pros:

- Extends tax relief to more veterans, including those with partial disabilities.
- Helps veterans on fixed incomes by reducing their property tax burden.
- Demonstrates state support for veterans' sacrifices, potentially attracting more veterans to move to New Mexico.

Amendment 2: Increased Property Tax Exemption for Veterans

This amendment seeks to increase the property tax exemption for honorably discharged veterans and their widows or widowers from \$4,000 to \$10,000, with the amount adjusted for inflation. It aims to provide greater tax relief for veterans and their families.

Cons:

- Other property taxpayers may face higher taxes to offset the exemption increase.
- Some argue that veterans' benefits should be the responsibility of the federal government, not the state.
- The exemption could benefit veterans regardless of financial need, which critics see as inequitable.

Pros:

- Increases the tax exemption, providing more financial relief for veterans and their families.
- Includes an inflation adjustment, preventing the need for future amendments.
- Supports homeownership for veterans, especially those on fixed incomes.

Amendment 3: Judicial Nominating Commission Designee

This amendment would allow the dean of the University of New Mexico School of Law to appoint a designee, such as an associate dean or faculty member, to the Judicial Nominating Commission. This change would give the dean more flexibility in managing responsibilities.

Cons:

- **Risk of Entrenching Political Bias:** With the judiciary already perceived as biased due to connections with groups like Emerge, allowing the dean to delegate their role could worsen this bias. If the designee shares similar political ideologies, it may further politicize judicial appointments.
- Some fear the loss of neutrality in tie-breaking votes if a designee replaces the dean.
- Critics argue that the dean's legal expertise is vital for vetting judicial candidates, and losing their direct involvement could weaken the process.

Pros:

- Allows the dean to focus on academic duties by delegating responsibilities.
- Ensures that an equally qualified legal scholar could serve as chair of the nominating commission.
- Provides flexibility in administration without sacrificing the commission's effectiveness.

Amendment 4: County Officers' Salaries

This amendment would give local boards of county commissioners the authority to set the salaries of county officials, removing this responsibility from the state legislature. It also ensures that any fees collected by county officials are paid into the county treasury.

Cons:

- **Potential for Corruption and Self-Interest:** Allowing county commissioners to set their own salaries and those of other officials without state oversight introduces a high risk of corruption or self-serving decisions. Smaller, less scrutinized counties may see significant disparities and inequitable compensation practices.
- **Erosion of Uniform Standards:** The current system ensures uniformity across New Mexico, with salaries tied to county size and classification. Giving commissioners full discretion could create inconsistencies, eroding public trust and leading to inefficiencies in local government.
- Critics are concerned about potential conflicts of interest, as county commissioners would set their own salaries.
- Removing legislative oversight could reduce accountability in the use of county funds.

Pros:

- Provides local control over county officials' salaries, allowing decisions to be made by those familiar with local conditions.
- Could help attract better-qualified candidates for county offices by offering competitive salaries.
- Promotes more efficient government by removing the legislature from local salary decisions.

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