



EGGS & ISSUES CANDIDATES FORUM

Chamber of Commerce, La Plata Forum, La Plata Energy Council,
Durango Area Realtors • September 1, 2016, at the DoubleTree Hotel



1) Introduction

Good morning – I’m Gwen Lachelt. I’m running for re-election because I love La Plata County and I’m proud of what I’ve been able to accomplish so far with a balanced approach to decision-making and problem-solving. I moved here in 1981. I’m a Fort Lewis graduate, I’ve raised my sons here and I’ve created organizations that have had a positive impact on our county, region and country.

I’m a recognized leader in oil and gas policy. Governor Hickenlooper appointed me to co-chair the Blue Ribbon Task Force and Republican Congressman Lamborn invited me to testify before Congress this spring on the BLM’s Wasted Gas Rule.

Because of my background in policy and managing organizations, I was able to hit the ground running in 2012. We’ve restored long-range planning, we’re writing a new land use code, standing up for public lands, clean air and water, affordable housing and we’re being responsive to citizen concerns.

I welcome the opportunity to serve for another term because we still have so much to do to build a future for us all. Again, because all of these questions deserve more than yes or no answers, copies of my responses are available. Thank you.

2) What is my plan to diversify the economy?

The key parts of my plan are: investing in our infrastructure, expanding broadband internet services county-wide, writing a new land use code and keeping our county a desirable place to live, work and play.

Diversifying our economy makes our county resilient. Natural gas prices have plummeted from a high of \$13 to \$2 since 2010. Low prices have taught us that being too dependent upon one

industry for tax revenues is not a long-term strategy for success.

The main tool counties have to strengthen local economies is investing in our transportation infrastructure – roads and bridges and the airport. It’s a fundamental responsibility to provide safe roads and bridges so passing Measure 1A here in La Plata County this year to ensure safe roads and bridges is a priority.

The county played a key role in opting out of Senate Bill 152 last year, which now allows us to establish public-private partnerships to develop broadband county-wide.

Writing a new land use code that streamlines the planning process for those who want to develop businesses in the county is key. Businesses need to know where they can locate and they need certainty – they need a planning process that is based on predictability.

La Plata County has one of the largest numbers of workers telecommuting from home in the country. People stay here and relocate here because of our public lands and trail systems, sparkling rivers and lakes and our great sense of community. Keeping La Plata County a desirable place to live means continuing to work for clean air and water, affordable housing, and a livable wage – these efforts will pay dividends and be our greatest legacy.

3) Yes or No: The county contributes \$60,000 a year to the La Plata County Economic Development Alliance. Will you continue to support this expenditure?

Yes. This question deserves more than a yes or no answer. La Plata County has supported the Alliance since it was founded. It was founded to do just what we were responding to in the earlier

question – help diversify our economy. While the Alliance has made a great impact and provides a great service to our county, due to declining revenues, La Plata County may not be able to continue to support this organization or other agencies at the level we have been funding them over the past several years.

4) What is your definition of economic development?

This question is really critical to our county and deserves more than a thirty-second response.

Economic development is a long-term community effort to improve the local economy and our quality of life by building the county’s capacity to adapt to economic change.

I believe there is a difference between economic growth and economic development. Economic growth tends to represent more jobs. Economic development first looks to strengthen the lives of those who live here and to maintain and enhance our quality of life. Economic growth in our region historically has been based on the boom and bust nature of extractive industries. While those industries have made enormous contributions to our economy, broader economic development is what is going to help us ride those boom and bust eras and come out the other side stronger, more resilient. Economic development can and should increase the well-being of people of our residents and not only maintain, but also enhance, our quality of life. While economic growth creates more jobs, ultimately, we want jobs that pay enough so people can afford to live here.



5) How are you going to prevent more and more infrastructure costs?

We do a great job promoting Durango and La Plata County. From Outside to Sunset magazines, we are repeatedly ranked one of the best places to live, work and play. Our current population of 56,000 is estimated to grow to 85,000 people in 20 years.

This growth is and will continue putting a tremendous strain on our roads and bridges, schools and the demand for broadband services county wide.

One way to cut down on costs is to concentrate development around existing infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, public transportation) - to grow in a manner that doesn't outpace our ability to provide essential services like road maintenance and law enforcement.

It is incumbent upon the county to maintain and improve our transportation infrastructure. We will always have infrastructure costs. It's critical that we keep costs down by awarding bids to trusted and competent contractors who will perform high quality projects at the best price.

The most effective way to prevent huge costs in the future is taking care of what you have now. If I never change the oil in my car or replace the tires, I'll have to get another car much sooner rather than much later.

6) The Planning Department has been known to say "That's not our job to tell you that." What will you do to change this culture?

It depends what the question is. If it's a legal question or a question for another permitting agency, it may very well not be a question that planning staff can address. Our current code does not allow staff to tell applicants if their project will be compatible with a neighborhood. If a project needs a permit, it has to go through a process that may require approval by the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners.

It is very frustrating to hear how long it can take some projects to get through the planning process. I personally have heard a lot of these complaints. Due to the nature of our current land use code, this has been an issue with the planning department for decades. In just

four years, we have restored long-range planning to La Plata County and we're writing a brand new Land Use Code. The new code will improve residents experience with the planning department.

7) The land use code is not business friendly, how will you fix this issue?

In addition to writing a new land use code, planning staff have been working to improve and streamline the planning process for large development projects. We have successfully cut in half the amount of time needed to approve Class 11 projects. It's important to point out that planning efficiencies are a two-way street - a significant number of projects are delayed because applicants don't submit a complete package up front.

Again, we are writing a new land use code and long-range planning has been restored to La Plata County. The comprehensive plan will be completed early next year. Several chapters are finalized and available on the county website.

We will have a new land use code in 18 months that will ideally achieve the following goals:

- Reduce the amount of time, effort and money required to successfully navigate the planning process
- Implement tools that allow a more equitable way of allocating infrastructure improvement costs
- Reflect and accomplishes the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan
- Develop processes that are clear, consistent, predictable, and efficient for the development community
- Provide clarity surrounding development requirements

8) What will you cut if the road and bridge initiative does not pass?

If the road and bridge measure fails, we will have to consider redistributing the mill levy for the road and bridge fund, which will mean that all of our funds will face cutbacks. Due to declining revenues from oil and gas, the road and bridge fund will run out of money. In 2017, county revenues are projected to be down 60% over 2010 levels. If the measure fails this November, the county will have to decide which funds will take cuts and at what level.

Those other funds, besides the Road & Bridge Fund are: General Fund (Sheriff's Office, Assessor, Clerk & Recorder, Attorney, Fairgrounds, etc.); Social Services Fund (Human Services Department); and the Capital Improvements Fund (funds set aside in the early 2000's for capital projects - remodeling the County Courthouse to accommodate the federal United States District Court to better serve the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute tribes and other federal court needs; updating (purchasing existing or building new) county buildings and offices to provide better services to residents and office space for the county's 450 employees).

9) What are your priorities if the road and bridge measure passes?

Those road and bridge priorities are established. The Road & Bridge department has a 10-year capital improvements plan that is outlined by road and bridge district.

You can read the 10-year plan on the county's website: <http://co.laplata.co.us/cms/One.aspx?portalId=1323753&pageId=4198488>

"The plan combines 12 reconstruction jobs, 12 asphalt paving projects, 3 intersection realignments, and 8 bridge design and upgrade projects to address public safety, deteriorating road conditions and increased traffic throughout the county's road network." - La Plata County website.

10) You have \$10,000 given to you, what non-profit do you donate to?

I would donate my gift of \$10,000 to the Food Bank for a new home. The Food Bank has long outgrown its current home. A 2014 survey by Feed America shows that 13% of our residents are food insecure and miss at least one meal a day due to a lack of access to a sufficient quantity of food. The food bank is a priority for our whole community. If people have food security, they are better able to focus on being productive employees, attentive students and engaged citizens.

- For more information about hunger in La Plata County, visit:
- <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/colorado/county/la-plata>



11) What will you do if you don't win the election? (30 seconds)

I welcome the opportunity to serve La Plata County for one more term. I've always had to work and will always have to work so I will find a job that hopefully keeps me in Durango.

12) Yes or no: Are you in favor of allowing fracking in La Plata County?

Yes. Fracking is allowed in La Plata County. This question is not a yes or no question. Fracking of oil and gas wells has been occurring in our community and region for decades. I've worked not only for best practices for oil and gas development and for landowners to have a say in where oil and gas development occurs on their own land (which didn't occur before landowners had rights) but I've also worked for best practices during drilling and fracking operations. Tens of thousands of gallons of chemicals are used during oil and gas drilling and fracking operations. Landowners, neighbors, and emergency responders need to know when those chemicals are being trucked through neighborhoods and on our county roads and state and federal highways in case a spill or a blowout occurs.

In 2007, when a local oil and gas worker had fracking chemicals spilled on his clothing, he ended up in the emergency room at Mercy Medical Center. The nurse who handled his clothing ended up in the emergency room herself due to exposure to the fumes from the chemicals on the workers clothing. She nearly died and the fracking chemical company refused to disclose the chemicals she was exposed to, putting her life in peril.

I worked for years with many others across Colorado and the nation to require companies to disclose the chemicals used in these operations. Colorado now has what is considered one of the nation's strongest regulations governing fracking chemical disclosure. It is certainly not a perfect standard but it is a start.

The fracking process can also contribute significant methane emissions. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and contributes to global warming and climate change. Methane capture technologies or "green fracking" operations can help reduce emissions during fracking oper-

ations. These kinds of best practices can help us address climate change in our own backyard.

Companies have long held that fracking is necessary to produce oil and gas from many underground oil and gas formations. Because of widespread public outcry over fracking, companies are pioneering ways to frack with green fracking fluids. Companies are also researching how to frack without water. Companies understand that they must have a social license to operate. Without this social license, companies will always be in conflict with the communities in which they operate.

13) Do you think that communities that ban oil and gas drilling should receive energy impact money and severance tax?

I believe that communities that bear the impact of energy development should receive the lion's share of energy impact funds and severance tax.

Severance tax funds were first conceived of because oil and gas is considered a finite resource. Once it's gone, it's gone – it's "severed" from the earth. Those severed resources are not only for current citizens but for our future citizens, those not yet born, who won't benefit from resources severed today unless there is a fund set aside for those future generations to benefit from – whether it's for education, community facilities, state wildlife parks and open space.

14) Yes or no? Are you in favor of Amendment 69?

Undecided. I'm in support of a single-payer health care system. Again, this question deserves more than a yes or no answer. As a citizen of this country, I believe health care should be a right, not a privilege. President Obama accomplished something no other president in the history of our country has been able to accomplish by passing the Affordable Care Act. This first attempt has made a tremendous difference for millions of Americans who now have health care but it hasn't been a perfect fix. I don't believe there is an absolute perfect fix but Amendment 69 tries to get there with a single payer health care system. I am still researching Amendment 69 and will try to attend the public forum tonight in order to make an informed decision. Re-

ardless of whether this measure is the answer, I am proud that Colorado was the first state to tackle this issue and I hope our state legislators take this effort as a clarion call to develop a meaningful health care system for our state.

A public forum on Colorado Care/ Amendment 69 will be held Thursday, September 1, 6:00-8:00 pm at the Durango Public Library.

A letter supporting the ballot measure was published in the August 30th edition of Durango Herald: <http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20160829/OPINION03/160829527/-1/opinion03>

15) How would you make home ownership attainable or affordable in LPC?

Just like it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to make home ownership attainable and affordable.

It means governmental, non-governmental and private entities need to be at the table to figure this out. If there were a silver bullet we wouldn't be having this conversation.

We need land that is in proximity to available water and we need to think small. We all know smaller homes are more affordable and there is a trend worldwide is toward smaller, energy efficient homes.

The entire discussion today about economic development plays a critical role in making home ownership attainable and affordable in La Plata County.

The county works with non-profit partners like the Regional Housing Alliance and Housing Solutions to provide affordable housing, distribute short term rental assistance, housing and financial counseling services with a goal of preventing foreclosures. Again, exploring density in urbanizing areas to promote the concept of small, energy efficient, affordable homes is a real interest of mine.



16) Yes or no. Are you in favor of a new airport terminal in La Plata County?

Yes. I am in favor of a new airport terminal in La Plata County. Our current terminal is operating at double the capacity it was built for. Our current terminal was remodeled 29 years ago in 1987. A lot has changed in the airline industry in 30 years. Airlines are flying larger planes into Durango and they expect to be flying even larger planes here in the future. The space in front of our terminal where the planes are parked, called the "apron," was designed for smaller planes and the FAA has been giving our airport failing grades for safety for lack of parking space for planes, baggage handling areas and passenger space.

17) What is your economic case for or against a new terminal? (1 minute)

Our airport provides a critical service to our region. A representative from the Farmington Economic Development Council came to one of our public meetings on the airport last year and said that our airport is the new Four Corners Regional Airport. Farmington tried to build a new airport to allow a larger runway several years ago and the voters voted it down. We have more people flying out of Durango every month now than Farmington has in a year. A CDOT study shows that the airport is directly or indirectly responsible for generating \$160 million in economic activity in La Plata County alone and almost 1,900 jobs. That includes local companies that depend upon the airport, residents, tourists and hunters.

18) Yes or no. Are you for or against Amendment 70, raising the minimum wage?

Yes. I favor Amendment 70. It proposes to increase the minimum wage to \$12 an hour by 2020 through incremental increases each year. When our local workers are making more money that benefits our economy in many ways. People have more money to spend, businesses increase profits through more dollars circulating through the economy.

19) Closing remarks

This race is about demonstrated concern for and commitment to our community. I have a proven track record - I believe in public service, and have worked for nearly 30 years to protect property values, landowners' rights, water and air quality. My work as a county commissioner continues that tradition.

When I joined the Commission four years ago, the county was experiencing a collapse of logic and a crisis in public confidence.

Our \$750,000 long range-planning effort had been derailed by fears of a United Nations plot to take over the county. We had become a laughing stock making news in national publications. In just four years, we have restored long-range planning and we are writing a new land use code. It is critical that we continue to move forward and not go back to those dark days.

In just four years, we have also restored La Plata County's rank as a leading county standing for oil and gas policies that benefit landowners, the environment, and increase companies bottom lines by setting standards that eliminate liabilities and waste.

I say I'm committed to public lands in public hands, to clean air and water, and to economic development. Let me give you some concrete examples -

- Hermosa Watershed Protection Act - I worked alongside other community leaders meeting with our Congressional delegation in Washington, DC to pass this landmark legislation;
- Restoring the Animas River and cleaning up abandoned mines - we worked hand in hand with neighboring counties and Tribes to address the Gold King Mine Spill and better understand what Superfund designation is all about;
- BLM Wasted Gas Rule - I was called upon to testify in Congress this April by Congressman Lamborn because of my oil and gas policy background;
- And we have restored long range planning to the county and we are writing a new Land Use Code - to ensure predictability and economic development, not just growth.

When I ran in 2012, I brought 3 decades of public policy experience to the table. I now bring those lessons along with four years of serving as a County Commissioner. While government often operates at a glacial pace, because I understand how government works and because I'm persistent, I'm successful at moving big projects forward, both here in La Plata County as well as at the state and federal level.

*I ask for your vote in
November — Thank you!*

Gwen Lachelt

