

# How does Albuquerque Interfaith Engage in Political Life?

Mayoral Runoff Candidates Accountability Session

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Let me begin with a description by Sheldon Wolin, it is quoted in the agenda for today's meeting. Wolin was a political theorist and his definition of "politicalness" is found in the book **The Presense of the Past in an Essay "Called Contract and Birthright."**

"By politicalness I mean our capacity for developing into beings who know and value what it means to participate in and be responsible for the care and improvement of our common and collective life. To be political is not identical with being a part of government or being associated with a political party. These are structured roles, and typically they are highly bureaucratized. Politicalness is something to which we are entitled, but we have to make it consciously our own."

This is the kind of politicalness that Albuquerque Interfaith practices. We come together from different religious and democratic traditions - congregations, schools, unions, and non-profits - and we address issues that face the people living in our institutions. It is not partisan, but is decidedly non-partisan. It not defined by party platforms, but grows of the lived experiences of people...where people share with each other stories of what matters to them, what problems effect their lives, and their aspirations of improving our common life. It does not stop with simply defining huge problems, which tends to be disempowering, but instead breaks down a problem into issues which we can then address by bringing relational power to bear in political arenas.

For example a huge problem facing our community is the brokenness of our behavioral health system...many families in our institutions have known the challenge of getting appropriate help for loved one...also we see mental health issue and addictions be at the root of much crime and many tragic fatal police encounters. We have broken the problem into issues we can effect...like working for the passage of the 1/8 county tax for behavioral health. But we did not stop there, we advocated to make sure that the funds were dealt with appropriate transparency, accountability, and public input. We insisted that citizens be a part of the decision-making apparatus for the use of those funds. We did our research, built relationships, and many of our leaders sit at those decision making tables. And when something happens in one of our institutions, like at La Mesa Presbyterian Church where a counseling center that meets the needs of people with modest means and limited access to social services is facing closure because the parent organization Samaritan Counseling is closing, we were able to turn to a responsive process and have relationships with key decision-makers so that it looks very likely with we can merge the center into another behavioral; health center, Centro Savila, that is also an Ally of AI and get some transitional funding for the newly named Hopkins Center for Children and Families. This is true politicalness...the capacity to shape a better future.

When we say non-partisan, we mean we do not endorse candidates, fund campaigns, or do turn out for any particular candidates. Our accountability sessions are different than most candidate forums, in that we do not hear candidates' platform promises, we can read those, but we want tell stories of real people's lives and challenges and define issues and want to know where the candidate stand on that issues. We let the membership of Albuquerque Interfaith know of those commitments and we we follow up on those commitments with whoever wins an election.

We want to find common ground for working together we candidates of both parties and believe bi-partisan responses to real issues are possible and worth trying to hammer out. We operate with a dictum...no permanent allies and no permanent adversaries...we can work together on one issue and disagree on another, but not be disagreeable about it.

This is our politicalness and we are practicing it here today.