

1. Your name and district number:

Janice E. Arnold-Jones, NM CD-1

2. The overall goals of welfare reform are to move people from welfare to work, reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy and encourage healthy marriages and family formation. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, allows funds to be spent for marriage and couple relationship education, responsible fatherhood programs, financial education, and parenting programs. What benefits do you see for allocating 1-2% of the TANF budget in New Mexico for services to strengthen families?

The TANF block grant gives states great flexibility in this regard and New Mexico's program has been successful in getting families off welfare, keeping them off welfare and helping them achieve a higher standard of living than they had while they were on welfare. New Mexico has been successful, in part because we looked at what was working in other states and adapted those best practices to our own communities. Since the children of two-parent families have better chances at success, it just makes common sense to allocate a portion of the block grant to programs that measurably help form and maintain healthy two-parent families.

I would also suggest the state consider shifting to greater administrative adjudication of child support cases. Child Support Enforcement needs to be both robust but fair for those families who either dissolve or were never fully formed in the first place. Too often, the absent parent's fear of the formal court system produces default judgments that don't

accurately reflect the ability to pay. Data supports that non-custodial parents who are current with their child support are also more apt to stay involved in their child's upbringing. And administrative adjudication would be much easier for non-custodial parents to access, quicker to establish the same order, and less fraught with delays and no-shows in court. It can be 'adjudicated' very simply by phone even using a hearing officer, and any party not satisfied with the result can still appeal to a court thereafter.

3. Research has consistently shown that the social, educational, health and economic outcomes of children in healthy, two-parent families are better than those living in single-parent households. New Mexico has among the highest rates in the nation for teen pregnancies, school dropouts, juvenile crimes and women and children living in poverty. New Mexico spends \$225 million every year dealing with the outcomes of families in crisis. If you are elected, what would you do to strengthen families?

Congress can directly impact healthier two-parent family rates in New Mexico by providing greater economic opportunities for everyone. As it stands, New Mexico saddles job creators with surplus regulations, high taxes and other factors that create a poor business climate. Encouraging healthy families will require a partnership effort between our leaders in Congress and our leaders at the state level. From the Congressional side, we can ensure that federal investments in jobs in New Mexico are maintained and enhanced. We can also revise the tax code to further protect two-parent families from higher tax rates and look at further adjustments to the Low Income Comprehensive Tax Rebate,

so two-parent families in which both parents earn modest wages can take advantage of this assistance.

4. The percentage of children in poverty in New Mexico is 26% higher than the national average. There are many factors contributing to this phenomenon including the fact that 45% of infants in New Mexico are born to teen parents. If you are elected, how would you reduce the number of teen pregnancies in New Mexico?

The children at greatest risk are too often trapped in failing schools. Federal Leaders from George Bush to the late Ted Kennedy tried to fix this at the federal level with No Child Left Behind, but the bulk of progress must come actions at the state and local level. However, I would look at modifications to federal involvement to empower states and communities to finally give every kid an honest chance to succeed.

5. Studies show that couple relationship education (e.g., conflict resolution, communication skills, understanding of gender differences, etc.) results in happier and healthier marriages. What programs and services are available to couples and families in your district?

There are many resources for families in New Mexico. Some include New Mexico KIDS, New Mexico Dept. of Health and NM Resources.org, a nongovernmental website that connects people to transportation, food, and other assistance.

6. How can the NM Coalition for Healthy Families help you strengthen families in New Mexico?

The coalition has already taken the first step by bringing together diverse organizations toward a common purpose. I only ask that all involved keep an open mind for solutions that actually work, be willing to abandon those that don't, and be willing to further expand the collaboration with the congressional delegation, the business sector and other service focused institutions.

7. Do you have any additional ideas or comments regarding New Mexico's families?

We need to explore and strengthen enforcement options for those who choose to sire children and then utterly abandon their parental responsibilities. In the absence of real and consistent consequences, portions of our culture have grown tolerant or even celebratory about the status of the absent parent. With enhanced civil pursuit of those who behave recklessly, this attitude would begin to change.