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## Martinez wins NM GOP gubernatorial primary

By Barry Massey Associated Press Writer  
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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) - Susana Martinez, a prosecutor from southern New Mexico, won the Republican nomination for governor Tuesday night and will face Democrat Diane Denish in a general election race deciding who becomes New Mexico's first woman governor.

It will be the third woman against woman gubernatorial general election matchup in U.S. history.

Martinez, the Dona Ana County district attorney, won a five-way contest for the GOP nomination with 51 percent of the vote in unofficial returns. Former state GOP chairman Allen Weh had 28 percent of the vote.

With three-fifths of precincts reporting, Doug Turner, who owns an Albuquerque public relations company, had 11 percent of the vote. Pete Domenici Jr., an Albuquerque lawyer and son of former U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, had 7 percent and 3 percent went to state Rep. Janice Arnold-Jones of Albuquerque.

A lively crowd gathered at Hotel Encanto in Las Cruces to hear a late-night victory speech by Martinez.

"It's time for results, not excuses," she said. "New Mexico, bold change is on its way." Martinez thanked supporters and tipped her hat to Weh.

Backer Mike Tellez, a Las Cruces restaurant owner, expressed optimism for Martinez's chances at the seat.

"She'll be the first Hispanic female to be governor in New Mexico," said Tellez, who attended the party.

The primary produced a political first for New Mexico because neither Democrats nor Republicans had ever selected a woman as their gubernatorial nominee.

Martinez and Denish will battle in the fall campaign to become chief executive of a state mired in an economic downturn and struggling with weak revenues, which likely will force the next governor to grapple with a budget shortfall and painful decisions about cutting education and governmental services.

The Republicans hope to win the governorship after eight years of Democratic control under Gov. Bill Richardson, who is term-limited and cannot seek re-election. Denish was Richardson's running mate in 2002 and 2006.

Democrats hold a 1.6-to-1 advantage in voter registration in New Mexico. But Republicans are upbeat about their chances in the November general election because of a restive mood among voters, who in contests across the nation have favored political outsiders over insiders.

Martinez, 50, switched parties to run for district attorney in 1996 and defeated a Democratic incumbent. She's been re-elected since then in the state's second-largest county, where Democrats hold a nearly 2-to-1 advantage in voter registration.

In the primary, she emphasized her experience in prosecuting crimes in a county that hugs the international border with Mexico. She advocated the repeal of state laws that allow illegal immigrants to get driver's licenses and for their children to qualify for state lottery-financed college scholarships.

Martinez also promised to fight corruption in state government.

Pay-to-play allegations have dogged the Richardson administration, and there's a pending federal investigation of state investments and the use of politically connected marketing agents.

Without a Democratic primary opponent, Denish accumulated a hefty campaign war chest and aired television advertisements to polish her image in an effort to immunize her from likely GOP attacks in the general election. One ad outlined Denish's work to overhaul a scandal-ridden regional housing authority.

Denish, 61, is the first woman to serve as lieutenant governor in New Mexico. In that role, she advocated for programs for children, including pre-kindergarten, and played a role in legislation to overhaul the state's regional housing system and tighter regulation of payday lenders. Before her election, she ran a company that did market research and fundraising for nonprofit organizations.

Hawaii in 2002 and Nebraska in 1986 had gubernatorial races in which the Republican and Democratic nominees were women, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University and the University of Virginia Center for Politics. Republicans won both of those elections.

Sun-News reporter Diana M. Alba contributed to this report



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