

August 25, 2025

Mr. Tom Acker
P.O. Box 2463
Grand Junction, CO 81502

Dear Tom,

Restore the Balance is a 501(c)4 organization that educates the public about the danger political extremism poses to a healthy democracy. We urge citizens to learn about candidates running for public office and to support those who best put public interest first and work to bring citizens together.

To help citizens learn about candidates, we have created a questionnaire for you and your opponent running for Mesa County Commissioner. We also will send the questionnaire to Mr. J.J. Fletcher who is running unopposed.

We will share your responses, question by question, along with those of your opponent with our 2,900 members and supporters on our website. We will also share them with various media outlets which we believe will help citizens make the best decision about whom to support.

We have provided you with a set of seven political principles we believe should guide political conduct in Western Colorado. Please review them carefully. One of our questions will be about these seven principles.

As previously stated, our endeavor is to provide information to the voters of Mesa County about candidates seeking office. As a candidate seeking to serve the public, we encourage you to submit answers to our questionnaire by September 10, 2024. Your answers should be sent to RestoreTheBalance@Outlook.com by this deadline to ensure they will appear along with your opponent's on our website and other media outlets.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the questionnaire or the process, please send them to me at restorethebalance@outlook.com.

Thank you,

Tim Sarmo
Restore the Balance

Restore the Balance

Seven political principles to guide political conduct

We must do more than simply be against extremism. We must act against it whenever we can. We embrace the following set of principles to govern political conduct by candidates and citizens alike. **WE BELIEVE:**

1. Political parties, citizens and elected officials should vigorously compete over values, principles, and ideas, but must also find common ground to solve problems and pass needed legislation.
2. Facts, supported by objectively examined evidence, are the basis for what to believe and how to act.
3. No one person or political party has a monopoly on the best public policy proposals; communication and good faith negotiations are essential to the legislative process.
4. The public interest must come before party interests, for voters and elected officials alike.
5. Extremists of all kinds attract supporters and money by appealing to fears and resentments, amplifying divisions instead of truly addressing problems.
6. Citizens should be free to run for or hold office without being threatened or harassed.
7. Citizens may certainly exercise their personal freedoms, but they may not ignore their personal responsibilities to the community at large.

Candidate Questionnaire
Mesa County Commissioner

1. What is your motivation for running for Mesa County Commissioner? What are your qualifications to serve?

I am a retired college Spanish professor. I have served in various capacities on community organizations including: Hispanic Affairs Project (Board President for appr. 8 yrs); Grand Valley Peace and Justice (Board member 12+ years); Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (Board member 2 yrs); Founding member Western Slope Against Trafficking, since 2013). After having served in the community and state responding to policies, I desire to enact policy.

2. What do you perceive as the top three issues facing Mesa County that you propose to address, and how would you address those issues if elected?

- 1- Housing crisis: Mesa County currently faces an extreme housing shortage which includes 30% of school district staff being housing stressed; new faculty at CMU cannot afford to purchase a home; the homelessness numbers continue to grow. We need to create a collaborative approach including public and private sector that addresses the concerns of the community members that suffer from the scarcity of affordable housing. Examples already coming to the fore include the collaboration announced recently between BOA Builders and Housing Resources of the Western Slope. Solutions might include mixed use zoning, higher density dwelling units with common public space close in to public transportation.*
- 2- Protection of agricultural lands: The Mesa County website states that our residents value the agricultural character of our county, but many ag producers are nearly retirement age without off spring to take over the land. As a recent Colorado legislator stated "AG producers view their land as the 401 K." With the commodification of water by Wall St. investors, unless we create a means for current farmers and ranchers to guarantee a retirement income, there is a risk that their land become a housing development or simply become fallow and desert while the investor "banks" the water in Lake Powell as an investment. The County must collaborate with folks like the Colorado West Land Trust to guide farmers to navigators that will assist in establishing Conservation Easements that will provide the necessary income for retirement and also guarantee that the land stays in production.*
- 3- Dangerous roadways: Currently, our roadways are often poorly maintained and unsafe for the variety of means of mobility in our community including bikes, pedestrians and public transport. We must look to being more multi-modal in our transportation vision rather than so car-centered. With the introduction by GJ of electric scooters, and the advent of electrified bikes as well as regular bikes we*

are also noting the dangerous state of our roads often lacking bike lanes and barriers to protect pedestrians as well as safe cross walks. A large percentage of our community is lower wage earners and cannot afford the cost of a car, therefore We must encourage GVT usage and enhance the service and frequency of the busses so that users can find transportation when returning from work at 11 PM when restaurants and bars close. These alternatives to the private cars will make us safer, slow the speeds down (as seen on 4th St. in GJ) and, by encouraging walking and bike riding , make us healthier. And finally, lest us consider making our irrigation canals accessible to biking and walking as was done in Denver and other communities, being mindful of the needs of users like AG producers who may need safe access for their farm machinery. Safer roadways will make it possible for our youth to move around the community thus reducing the reliance on motor vehicles and inculcating a spirit of independence and self-reliance in our young people.

3. Do you believe Colorado's current election laws and procedures administered by Mesa County provide for secure elections? Please explain the reasons for your answer?

Yes, as a member of the Mesa County League of Women Voters and a political candidate, Brand Bantz and Bobbie Gross have provided numerous opportunities to me and other community members to visit the Mesa County Elections Office and observe the election system in person.

4. If elected, what actions would you take to help ensure more effective intergovernmental communication and collaboration to facilitate better outcomes for Mesa County constituents?

I will actively seek out stake holders in the various sectors of our economy and leaders in our community. As a bilingual person, I am concerned that the Spanish-dominant members of our community do not feel welcome as participants in the activities of our elected officials because they are not provided a means to interact with elected officials. GJ City is in the process of implementing interpretation and translation to better interact with that demographic. I will propose that the county also have a line item in the budget for translation and interpretation to better engage that demographic. I will also suggest that Commissioner meetings be held in various venues around the county and at different hours so that all community members are able to attend.

5. In your view, which County programs or services are neglected or underfunded in the current budget? If so, how do you intended to address those areas, if elected?

Given the fact that areas related to human services, economic development and transportation are areas that are suffering in Mesa County as seen through the numbers that the U.S. Census provides, it would benefit the large numbers of families living in poverty if the county budget reflected their increase, but instead of increasing , the county has reduced the line item for human services by \$72, 577 between 2023 and 2024. The vulnerable populations impacted are the children, the elderly and the special needs members of the community. I would increase the human services budget.

Mesa county's Economic Development budget has been reduced by 33%.this is a result of the end of the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act). Many services provided by non-governmental agencies will be ending and we need to find a means of replacing them. This is unfortunate because with our low-income profile and the comments of community members when interviewed, an improvement in the economic picture with the relocation of higher paying employers here would certainly be appreciated and increase our tax base. Finally, we need to propose putting a county ballot issue of "De- Brucing" Mesa County given the restrictions that the amendment places on the county's ability to provide the necessary services, especially in light of the end of the funds from the IRA.

6. What, if anything, can the county do to address affordable housing for families making less than \$80,000 per year?

The Proposition 123 provisions that the state has implemented include grants. Local jurisdictions are provided the ability to request guidance for applying for funding from CHFA. One CHFA initiative is the MIHTC (Middle Income Home Tax Credit) which can be used by households that meet 80-120% of AMI to 140% AMI, which would include this demographic. 60% of Prop. 123 funds . . .

Another exciting aspect of the OEDIT funds is the funding of "Innovative Off-site Factories" to design and build factories that do 3-D printing, kit designs, panelized units, etc. The county should be working to attract these businesses in order to create more high-paying jobs for our community.

7. What, if anything, should the county do to help address homelessness?

The service providers and first responders are already identifying the “frequent flyers.” These are individuals that consume large amounts of county resources due to their over-utilization of our emergency rooms, EMT and law enforcement’s attention. These individuals have substance abuse and behavioral health issues. They require behavioral health interventions to address those needs. Then we must identify folks who perhaps through a family separation, medical bills or another life catastrophe have lost the ability to pay for housing. These individuals may qualify for eviction prevention funding from Housing Resources of the Western Slope of CHFA or other semi-governmental housing services. The services provided by Housing resources include first-time home buyer counseling and education. Down payment assistance is something that will enable first time home buyers to access affordable housing units.

8. What, if anything, should the county do to advance community solar projects?

The energy wasted to heat and cool buildings also contributes to the GHG contamination in the county. So solar energy would a great benefit to air quality as well as cost reductions in our county.

The county should first pick low hanging fruit. Many of the County’s buildings are prime candidates for solar panels. It has been estimated that the old Mesa County Court house has a monthly energy bill in the 10’s of thousands of dollars. Just like the old Federal Building, that building should have been converted to solar years ago. The recently built Clifton Library and the Clifton Community Center are two other missed opportunities since both could have easily been made green with solar roof panels as well as parking solar panels that would have provided electric for both campuses..

9. Mesa County’s population has grown by over 100,000 since 1970, yet we still have a three-person board of commissioners. Would you support expansion of the board to five members, electing either 3 or 5 commissioners by district? If yes, what would you do to make that happen?

First, we need to promote the idea of a 5 member BoCC. The lack of representation by the current 3 member board should be a concern for the residents of Mesa. Over 60 k residents are poorly represented by one commissioner and each district has different concerns that one commissioner will need to address. Then, there should be an issue on the ballot where three commissioners are elected to represent one of

the three districts in the county; they are elected by the residents of their district and the other two are at-large commissioners elected by all the voters in the county.

10. Do you endorse each of the seven principles Restore the Balance proposes to guide political conduct in Western Colorado? If there are one or more principles you do not endorse, please identify them, and explain why.

I find the pledge for RTB to be perfectly logical and I endorse the seven principles.