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Don't punish lawyers for upholding Constitution

Everyone wants to know that if he or she or a loved one needed a lawyer, they would be able to get one, regardless of the accusation or who they are. Recent political attacks on lawyer candidates based on whom they have represented is a blow to this right.

Vigorous debate is the hallmark of a vital democracy. However, those involved should honestly discuss the facts and issues. Smearing political opponents who are lawyers based on their clients is merely a tool to distract voters from the real issues.

Recent political rhetoric in New Mexico has fallen to this new low. A mailing by People for Pearce asserts "Women cannot trust Roxanne Lara" because she is a lawyer who "represents in court men who abuse women." In short, Lara should be opposed simply because she is willing to represent both men and women in domestic cases.

The lie is that lawyers are the same as their clients. The truth is that lawyers have a professional duty to ensure due process is not rationed. Our Constitution guarantees everyone a right to be represented by an attorney in criminal court proceedings and in civil proceedings, such as a divorce or other litigation. A campaign against the core American values of justice and the right to counsel undermines political discourse.

Such attacks may also deter young lawyers from representing certain types of clients, whether criminal defendants or men involved in divorces. The implication is plain: pick and choose who you will represent carefully, or you may be ineligible for public office. Such messages are a disservice to both lawyers and to the people of New Mexico.

Lawyers should feel comfortable offering their professional advice to anyone who needs it, and we are entitled to have political campaigns based on real issues and qualifications.

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