

It is important to note that the three separate branches of government all play an important role in the governance, guidance and independence of democracy. While the executive branch authorizes legislation and the judicial branch supports and enforces the laws, it is the legislative branch that actually considers and develops bills to send to the governor for final action.

The 2013 legislature will have the responsibility of sending what it believes are important measures to the governor — measures that will most certainly affect our future health, education and economic well-being.

Of the three branches of government, the legislative is the one most closely associated with the people. Because New Mexico is a citizen legislature, I think that this is particularly true here. While many other states have professional, salaried legislatures, each legislator in New Mexico does something else to pay the bills. We are teachers, lawyers, ranchers and small-business owners. We are parents and grandparents, cousins, and aunts and uncles. Some legislators are retired, but their personal and professional experience helps inform the decisions they make. After the legislative session ends, most of us return to our jobs, and that experience as regular citizens often helps us understand the problems facing New Mexicans.

While our own experiences provide us some perspective as we develop legislation, we depend heavily on input from citizens to make our decisions. One of the main reasons the legislature is so closely associated with the people is because of how crucial citizen input is to the process. Many of the bills we consider begin as ideas from our constituents. It is possible for constituents to find and speak directly with legislators throughout the legislative session about the bills we are considering or to ask them to help demystify what can sometimes be a confusing process. The openness and accessibility of New Mexico's State Capitol, as opposed to some of the other state capitols I have visited, encourages this kind of input.

Of course, the executive and judicial branches provide us with significant input on bills, too. Other elected officials, such as the attorney general, add their voices to the process. However, I want to emphasize that input from everyday citizens to the legislative process is one of the cornerstones of democracy, and it should not go unappreciated. While the process may seem a bit confusing at first, legislators are willing to take time to help citizens understand and participate in the process. As a group, we pride ourselves on being approachable, and we each work with our constituents daily to address their concerns.

During the 2013 legislative session, we will consider bills dealing with education, economic development, water, health care and a host of other topics. Committees will hear these bills, improving them when they can, and many deserving bills will be heard by both the house of representatives and the senate. While some bills will not pass, many consensus-driven pieces of legislation will pass and be sent to the governor for her signature. Those bills that make it to the governor's desk represent the legislature's efforts to improve life for all New Mexicans. As part of a separate branch of government, the governor can choose to sign or veto that effort.

It is true that the legislature is a process, but thinking of it in those terms sometimes makes it easy to lose track of the idea that it is a process driven by people. It is important to remember that bills are really just ideas from people, and while getting those bills passed and signed by the governor can sometimes be confusing, legislators were elected to help you with

that process. As I mentioned before, we are people just like you, and most of us like visiting with people about whatever their concerns are, so please feel free to come see us.

I encourage all New Mexicans to help provide input to the legislature. Sometimes it comes from direct input on a bill or two, and sometimes it's just a matter of voicing your concerns. We consider bills on behalf of the people, and we take their input seriously. The work we do is only as good as the input and feedback we get, and by actively participating, you help improve the quality of our work.