

New Mexico's economy is catching fire and the entire economic development ecosystem deserves credit for that. This year, though, it's time to recognize the hard work that the New Mexico Small Business Development Centers are doing to create thousands of jobs annually, create new businesses, and help businesses grow.

I understand how hard that is; my family owned several restaurants in the Santa Rosa. Running a business is hard and we often needed help and guidance.

SBDCs have helped business owners like Glenna Ortega, an entrepreneur who owns Jefita's restaurant in Las Vegas. In just two years she's been able to grow a business that now has seven employees and sells out of burritos almost daily because of the support of the local SBDC. The SBDCs have similar success stories across the state, such as helping NM Solar Group in Albuquerque become employee-owned, finding new markets for the 3D imaging software produced by SciVista in Santa Fe and helping Carlsbad Heating and Cooling find new local clients.

And that's why we need to continue to support the New Mexico Small Business Development Center network, the Procurement Technical Assistance Center and the International Business Accelerator. Across the state the network helps small businesses with everything from simple paperwork to advanced international trade and government contracting.

This year, I'm calling for the restoration of funding for the network. The SBDC network, like many state departments, has seen its funding reduced since the recession. It's time that we recognized that the network has the best per-job return on investment in the state. In FY18, the network directly created 4,193 jobs. But more importantly, created 270 businesses in New Mexico and was responsible for \$51 million in commerce.

If the network's funding isn't restored, we could see the centers close, or shrink, across New Mexico, limiting a valuable free resource to the state's on-the-ground job creators. These centers, which are located at community colleges like Luna Community College in Las Vegas, Western New Mexico University in Silver City, CNM in Albuquerque, and Mesalands Community College in Tucumcari, truly do work across the state and are the boots-on-the-ground teams that make economic development work.

When an entrepreneur starts a business, whether that's a consulting firm, a software company, or a small restaurant, they are taking a chance. When, inevitably, entrepreneurs have questions and need help, we need to make sure experienced professionals are there.