

A Look at the 2018 Legislative Session

By Senator Pete Campos

As the new year commences, we look to the current legislative session with optimistic caution. Despite a modest increase in state revenue, the budget must address growing state and local needs, federal tax changes and the need for gradual tax modernization. We will approach the 2018 legislative session with a delicate balance of spending, investing, saving and vision-building for the future. We will prioritize the state budget to address people's real needs, reinvigorating our residents' confidence and their roles in our future economy. The legislature will focus heavily on mental health, public safety, benefits to our elderly, child protective services and health services for underserved communities. We will seek to stabilize the state's revenue to allow for more strategic and long-term planning. I will work hard during the session to improve the lives of constituents throughout the state of New Mexico.

Our work has already begun, and while legislative sessions typically start slowly, we hit the ground running this year by passing legislation that adds New Mexico to an interstate nursing compact that will allow nurses licensed in other states to continue practicing here. This is especially critical in rural New Mexico, where nurses, particularly ones from out of state, really are the front line of health care delivery and make up a huge part of the staff. The governor has already signed this important bill, and our focus now shifts to other critical areas.

Continuing our commitment to improve the education and well-being of our children, we will work toward quality public education, human services programs and Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) programs that complement each other and better incorporate federally funded Head Start programs. We will provide holistic services for the youth in our communities to better prepare them for entry into tomorrow's workforce. I also intend to work with my colleagues to improve public safety across the state by investing in operations and training centers so that law enforcement, emergency medical technicians, firefighters and other first responders can more effectively communicate, train and operate.

New Mexico benefits greatly when all branches of government work together. Although there appears to be consensus between the legislature and the governor, we recognize the difficulty in allocating available state resources. It is crucial to establish a more reliable revenue stream by expanding the revenue-generating load among more stakeholders and alleviating the

state's dependence on gross receipts tax, personal income tax and oil and gas revenues. Additionally, major goals for the 2018 legislative session will include replenishing numerous specialty fund reserves, raising reserve levels and closing tax loopholes. The potential targeted tax reform package may address tax pyramiding, internet sales, motor vehicle excise tax and gross receipts tax on hospitals, with the ultimate goal of increasing state revenue without increasing taxes.

The proposed 2018 state budget will benefit New Mexicans in many ways — public employee compensation will increase 1.5%, with additional targeted compensation for prison guards, nurses and social workers; state equalization guarantee and teacher compensation will increase for public schools; our colleges and universities will receive increases in funding through our capital outlay process; the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute at Las Vegas (BHI), the CYFD and law enforcement will receive an increase in funding; and Medicaid funding will also be increased.

I will further seek to improve the roads and highways of New Mexico through a highway construction and improvements bill that will be voted on as a general obligation bond in the amount of \$49 million in Senate Bill 94. I will work diligently to improve our information technology systems so that New Mexico students have the best connectivity at school, medical facilities have the best technology systems to deliver real-time and efficient health care to patients and small businesses can operate with efficient accountability systems. I will target funding and provide support to the advocates who are addressing the opioid addiction epidemic that is devastating our communities. I will also support an increase to the tourism and economic development budgets, which will benefit both rural and urban New Mexicans.

In regard to the many projects being developed in New Mexico, whether they are locally owned small businesses or national corporations, it is important to thoughtfully coordinate strategic, master and business plans to ensure that all new projects serve the basic safety and well-being needs of the public, create new or sustain existing jobs and address issues such as liability, utilities, payroll and outcomes of the projects. We will work together, plan well, remain aware of potential funding sources, leverage our resources and maximize the best use of every dollar we invest in the future of New Mexico.

Overall, we will work as a unified legislative body to establish stability and continuity for efficient and effective services that best serve New Mexicans. We will coordinate economic

development ideas, planning, strategies, volunteers and organizations to improve public safety, health, education, jobs and the economy. Through legislative action, we hope that the residents of New Mexico gain more confidence in these areas and that our youth are enticed to remain in the state, build their careers and raise their families. As always, I believe the best path forward is collaboration; the more we learn and share with each other, the better we all become. I invite you to visit my website, petecampos.com, for additional insight into my aspirations for New Mexico and the 2018 legislative session.