

Senate's Driver's License Compromise Solves Problems

By Senator Pete Campos

It is not easy to compromise, which is why it took two giants of the New Mexico Senate — Senators John Arthur Smith and Stuart Ingle — to bring forward a solution to one of the state's most divisive questions: whether to allow people who are in this country illegally to drive legally in New Mexico.

This issue has divided the state since 2003, when New Mexico began licensing drivers who are not in the country legally. Opponents of the law have argued that New Mexicans will no longer be able to use their driver's licenses to get on airplanes and that law-abiding citizens will soon have to get expensive passports just to fly within the United States because of looming federal requirements. Supporters of New Mexico's law have argued that licensing all drivers makes us safer and that we can do that and find a way to allow New Mexicans to use their licenses to get on airplanes.

Both are right, and the legislation sponsored by Senators Ingle and Smith recognizes that.

Under the Senate legislation, New Mexicans and other people who are in this country legally will be able to get a driver's license that will meet the federal government's REAL ID requirements so they can board airplanes and get into federal buildings. And people who are not in the country legally, but who we all know will continue to live, work and drive in New Mexico, will be licensed, ensuring that the state can track their driving records. They will not be able to use that license to get on an airplane, however, or for any other federal purpose.

New Mexico citizens will actually have their choice of license. Those of us who do not fly or who use our passports to travel both domestically and internationally can choose to have a driver's license that does not meet the federal REAL ID requirements.

For years, we have all been told that our driver's licenses will no longer be good for boarding airplanes. We've been told that taking away licenses from people in the country illegally is unrealistic and makes our roads unsafe. We've been told that a license or "driving permit" that is only issued to immigrants here illegally would unfairly and unnecessarily label them as "illegal immigrants". This legislation solves all of those problems.

It does not satisfy one group of people. Those who simply do not want people who are in the United States illegally to be able to drive or who are only willing to let them drive with a

short-term "driving permit" that immediately identifies them as an illegal immigrant will not support this legislation.

But the nature of a good compromise is that not everyone will be completely happy. The Senate legislation is a remarkably good compromise that deserves our support.

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