

Legislative Process Is Important to Our Democracy

By Senator Pete Campos

Fundamental to our way of life in the United States is the principle that not only will the laws we live under be fair and just, but also the method by which we enact our laws will be fair and just. Skirting the rules and processes is simply not part of the American way of life.

Nowhere is this principle more important than within the very institutions that enact our laws, such as our state legislature. What example do we set as state *lawmakers* if we circumvent the very rules we have put into place for processes to enact laws? Thousands of pieces of legislation are introduced every year in Santa Fe, and New Mexico's volunteer legislators must consider each of them within remarkably short 30-day or 60-day sessions. The only way this work can be done — and done thoughtfully — is to rely on a long-established and efficient committee process.

In the New Mexico Senate, eight committees, each ranging in size from seven to 10 members, divide the work of reviewing legislation, considering committee amendments and recommending that some legislation be approved and others be rejected. The committees are bipartisan and consist of members who have expertise or an interest in the subject matter. Most proposed legislation is reviewed by two or three committees, and most members serve on two committees.

The committee process has been described as the backbone of the legislative process. Without it, unvetted legislation would be voted upon by all 42 members of the senate, and New Mexicans could pay the price by having to live under unworkable laws.

Because one of the functions of a committee is to defeat legislation that a majority of the committee members do not favor, proponents of certain legislation periodically try to circumvent the committee process in an effort to advance their causes. This is understandable and a legitimate part of the legislative process. But opposition to such maneuvers is also a legitimate part of the process. In fact, my support is strong for maintaining the integrity of the committee process and ensuring that legislation be considered first by committees before consideration by the full senate. Such support for the process should never be interpreted as opposition to any specific piece of legislation.

Such was the case a few days ago when I supported the majority of the members of the senate in ensuring that two abortion-related bills be heard by committees. As you may know, an attempt was made to move both bills — a parental notification bill and a ban on late-term abortions — directly to the full senate through a Committee of the Whole. The senators supporting that effort believe passionately, as do I, in the merits of both of these pieces of legislation and will vote, as will I, in favor of them when they come before the full senate.

But I also support the legislative process and recognize the inefficiencies and, frankly, the chaos that would likely ensue if legislation came directly to the full senate without the benefit of careful review in the committees. The hazards of abandoning the committee process far outweigh any perceived benefits of circumventing it.

- 2 -