

**Boost New Mexico's Economy:
Improve State's Public Works Process
By Senator Pete Campos**

Improving the process by which New Mexico selects and pays for public works projects is a key component to improving New Mexico's economy. Doing so in a year like this — when revenue is tighter than ever — is especially important.

I have long advocated for changing our capital outlay process, and while many reforms and improvements have been made, both administratively and procedurally, there is still much work to be done. The state is still appropriating money for public works projects that: 1) are not ready to begin; 2) cannot be completed with the funds appropriated; and 3) are not viable either because the local government doesn't want the project or because funding the project would violate the state's "anti-donation clause", which prohibits the state from providing funding directly to private entities.

Properly vetting and funding infrastructure projects is not a trivial matter. Drinking water and wastewater projects, building code compliance projects, public safety improvements, street and road repair, recreational upgrades and museum projects are all critical to the quality of life that we enjoy in New Mexico. Besides the immediate jobs created by the planning, design and construction of such projects, a thoughtful, well-reasoned infrastructure plan leads to sustainable economic development.

This is a pivotal time for our state. New Mexico's lackluster economic performance over the last decade is forcing policymakers to cut state services at the same time we are trying to make the state an attractive location for new or expanding businesses, millennials, working families and retirees. That's hard to do in the best of times, but it is an especially difficult task when school budgets are being cut, museum hours are being curtailed, crime is out of control and our plan to upgrade our ailing infrastructure is haphazard at best.

We must enact changes now that ensure projects that are proposed for funding are reviewed by technical and professional staff within both the executive and legislative branches of government and that an infrastructure master plan extending at least five years is adopted and followed. Legislators and the governor, as elected policymakers, should still retain the final authority to decide which projects are funded each year and which are not, but they should be strongly guided by an established planning process.

Just like a bad infrastructure planning process can hurt a state, so too can a good infrastructure process be beneficial. When we work together, we can better connect our residents and provide critical services to New Mexicans from Mora to Las Cruces, from Aztec to Clovis and from Lordsburg to Raton. We can work with federal agencies, including the military bases, local governments and private entities, to leverage funds, coordinate services and make the most of our limited resources.

By diversifying our economy and improving our public works process, we will become a strong competitor for new and expanding businesses and the jobs they will bring. New Mexicans and visitors alike will benefit from those improvements we make to our communities.