

**Working Together Sparks Community Vitality**  
**By Senator Pete Campos**

It doesn't take long in northern New Mexico to see the signs of a sluggish economy. Local businesses are closing, and empty storefronts dot our main streets all too often. I have always devoted my efforts to improving the economy of northeastern New Mexico. I'm always happy, then, to see new construction, and I'm very happy to report that Las Vegas and San Miguel County can look forward to over \$45 million in new construction from capital outlay projects over the next couple of years. These projects include:

- \$ 4.5 million to improve the administration building at New Mexico Highlands University;
- \$ 2 million for construction of an education media center, including an auditorium, classrooms and a performing arts education space, at Luna Community College;
- \$ 22 million for completion of the Behavioral Health Institute's (BHI's) Meadows Home long-term care facility;
- \$ over \$8 million from the state Department of Transportation for the city of Las Vegas to improve South Grand Avenue;
- \$ over \$9 million for water delivery improvements in the city of Las Vegas; and
- \$ over \$9 million in additional construction and renovations in the West Las Vegas School District.

Each of these projects is funded by nonrecurring dollars. In the short term, they will create construction jobs, stimulate the local economy and increase the purchasing power of local contractors. Longer term, these projects should pay dividends for years to come.

The public school and college construction will help our young people pursue quality education in improved facilities. That education should translate into a workforce better prepared to enter the job markets of today and tomorrow.

The Meadows Home long-term care facility means both more and better long-term care for our aging population, but also at least a few jobs staffing the facility. Given the downturn in our economy, we have been strategic about providing public- and private-sector mental and physical health care at locations like the BHI, Alta Vista Regional Hospital and El Centro Family Health Clinics. These facilities serve both northeastern New Mexico and residents from all over

the state. The big winners in our continued support of health care are the statewide residents of the BHI, the regional population who use the state-of-the-art Alta Vista health care facility and those who have direct access to rural health care clinics.

Improvements to South Grand Avenue mean better transportation for locals and visitors alike, as well as perhaps making the area more attractive to potential new businesses. Las Vegas is a very special community because it is the hub for the people of the surrounding area who travel to Las Vegas for goods and services such as furniture and medical care. Improving and maintaining our streets is important for those of us who live here, but also for those who visit to enjoy our community's many offerings.

Lastly, I've spoken before at length of the vital importance of water, not just to New Mexico, but particularly to northeastern New Mexico. Improvements in domestic water delivery mean that we will be able to make more efficient use of our most precious resource. If you couple these water improvements with the work already under way to repair reservoir dams in the area (also funded, in part, by nonrecurring capital outlay money), it becomes clear that we are positioning ourselves to use water more efficiently than we ever have.

Efficient use of water, an educated workforce and good transportation are some of the most critical components of future economic growth for Las Vegas and San Miguel County. Without these three, existing businesses will find it difficult to grow or even survive, and new businesses will have an extremely tough time just getting off the ground.

The potential for economic growth in our community is huge! We have tens of millions of recurring dollars coming into our community to fund our public entities, which can spin off to motivate private-sector entrepreneurs to set up small businesses that promote the kind of artisanal, cultural and food products that locals and visitors alike enjoy. When we work together, more start-up businesses will open for business.

Our efforts over the years at Luna Community College have been aimed at developing our trades and mass communications center to serve as the northeastern centerpiece to attract the making of films and to teach those interested in working on both sides of the camera an exciting and lifelong trade that will lead to a great profession.

Las Vegas also has the opportunity to develop and promote Storrie Lake to attract summer enthusiasts, who during their weekend visits often spend significant amounts of money on everything from fishing supplies, food and lodging to local products such as clothing, jewelry and artwork. They will almost certainly buy a meal or two at one of the best restaurants in the Southwest.

From this standpoint, the construction projects you will see around town over the next couple of years are both a win today and a win tomorrow. That win also creates hope, and optimism is a valuable asset in securing the resources that will sustain and create jobs, build the economy and give our youth hope for their future.

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