

Building a Solid Foundation Takes Teamwork

By Senator Pete Campos

On March 16, 2019, the New Mexico Legislature reached the end of one of the busiest sessions in recent memory, giving us all, legislators and citizens, a lot to reflect on and to anticipate for the upcoming interim. Expectations were sky high leading into this session, with an additional \$1.2 billion in new money as a result of increased oil and gas activity; a significant increase in the number of seats held by Democrats in the House of Representatives; a new Democratic governor; overwhelming approval by voters for the legislature to create a state ethics commission; and a landmark district court ruling that found that the state is violating the constitutional rights of students to a sufficient education.

From the very start, the session was punctuated by a sense of urgency as eager new faces joined longer-serving members ready to transition state government from the past few years of stagnancy, divisive politics and a legislature and executive that were largely at odds with one another to a more cooperative, progressive tone and body. Many bills were introduced as part of our "moonshot" mission to make improvements in education, energy, health care, public safety and corrections; many bills were endorsed by various interim committees; hundreds of bills were specifically requested by constituents; and much legislation still required more work before it could make its way through the legislative process. I look forward to the ongoing discussions and further development of legislation that will be studied during the interim.

The energy of the session was immediately infectious as we hit the ground running, or flying, with the so-called "rocket docket", a package of 42 bills passed by the legislature over the past two years, unanimously or with few dissenting votes, but vetoed or pocket vetoed by the previous governor. This legislative package included increasing reporting requirements for lobbyists; providing financing for wastewater systems across the state; expanding the authority of university police officers; and funding advanced mapping of underground water resources. All of these bills were signed into law early in this year's session.

During the session, we considered numerous high-profile pieces of legislation, many of which addressed public education. Partly in response to last year's lawsuit, which found that the state failed to provide a sufficient education for low-income students, English as a second language students, Native American students and students with disabilities, legislation was

passed that expands the K-3 Plus extended school year program to include grades four and five in low-performing or low-income schools; increases minimum salaries six percent for educators and other school staff; establishes bullying prevention policies; and requires a needs assessment for historically defined Indian impacted school districts to assist students in graduating and becoming college- or career-ready.

Some other high-priority bills that were passed address tax reform and changes to the film production tax credit. The big tax package, House Bill 6, creates a new top personal income tax bracket; subjects third-party sellers that use internet marketplace platforms, such as Amazon, to the gross receipts tax; increases the cigarette tax and imposes a tobacco products tax on e-cigarettes; and increases the working families tax credit. A bill was also passed and signed by the governor to change the film production tax credit to foster the growth of the film industry in New Mexico, which has become a significant economic driver for the state. The legislature was able to both pay off a significant portion of the backlog of film tax credits and increase the annual aggregate cap on film tax credit payments.

Other important legislation included raising New Mexico's minimum wage; enacting same-day voter registration; committing New Mexico to the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact; creating a data-sharing network for criminal justice data; requiring a federal instant background check for the sale of a firearm; enacting the Energy Transition Act, which establishes a pathway for a low-carbon energy transition, provides workforce training and assistance to affected communities and raises renewable energy portfolio standards, making New Mexico a leader in the development of renewable energy and zero carbon policies; and enacting the State Ethics Commission Act, which creates a seven-member commission to hear complaints about violations by state executive and legislative employees and officials, candidates, lobbyists and government contractors.

Of particular note are the budget and capital outlay bills passed by the legislature. The budget made appropriations of approximately \$7 billion, an 11 percent increase from last year's budget, and included an additional \$448 million for public education. Other funding bills included additional funding to state agencies for various needs throughout the state, totaling approximately \$60.7 million. The capital outlay package authorized \$933 million in expenditures for projects across the state, including an additional \$69 million for public education infrastructure projects.

So much was achieved over the course of 60 days, and while not every goal was accomplished or every member completely satisfied with every outcome, overall, I think this session was a remarkable stepping stone to a period of growth for the state toward the kind of government that is willing to listen, debate, compromise and work hard for the benefit of ALL New Mexicans.

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