

New Mexico Is on the Doorstep of a Bright Future

By Senator Pete Campos

As the combination of record state revenues, a new administration and momentum from the 2019 legislative session continues, I believe that New Mexico is on the doorstep of prosperity undreamt of only a short time ago. As we better understand the magnitude of oil reserves in the Permian Basin and work with private industry and our research institutions to expand the limits of those reserves, we can propel ourselves into this bright future by strategically investing in three critical areas: education, energy and behavioral health care.

Education:

Beginning this year, the legislature has significantly increased our investment in education. We also created a cabinet-level Early Childhood Education and Care Department, in part to maximize the growth and care of our youngest learners. As the system begins to absorb new funding and the new department gets up and running, emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) training, vocational training and teacher recruitment will be key to seizing opportunity for the most critical component of New Mexico's bright future — our children and the vast potential they represent. Development of the technical and analytical skills necessary to compete in the global economy begins with prenatal care, and that development must be carefully fostered from early childhood through graduate school and, eventually, into professional development. Without these skills, businesses will continue to look elsewhere to invest, and our youth will follow them. Producing a highly skilled workforce prepared for tomorrow's jobs will help to attract new businesses to our state and will help homegrown businesses grow, which will encourage our youth to remain in New Mexico. STEM, early childhood education and overall academic rigor are the means by which we will achieve that goal, and we must focus those efforts equally between rural and urban New Mexico.

Energy:

By passing the Energy Transition Act, New Mexico has committed itself to increased, and ultimately total, reliance on renewable energy, including wind, solar, hydroelectric, biomass and geothermal sources. Our state is well positioned for this future, as we possess tremendous wind and solar energy potential. In looking at how we move ourselves toward using 100 percent

renewable energy, it is important that we continue with research and public input to determine where wind and solar farms will be located. Just as critical as renewable energy generation, transmission of that energy is an equally important part of the puzzle. Partnering with our research institutions to help locate and develop generation and transmission infrastructure is a must in this endeavor.

Behavioral Healthcare:

Of the three complex policy areas I am outlining here, behavioral health care is the most complex. Recent tragedies only highlight the critical importance of addressing behavioral and mental health issues before people get hurt, and while there is already some framework in place for delivery of mental health services, it needs vast improvement. The critical points of focus for behavioral health care in New Mexico are: opioid and other substance abuse counseling, child psychiatry, veteran posttraumatic stress disorder treatment, Alzheimer's treatment and the lack of counseling available in New Mexico for each of these needs.

Availability of services in rural parts of the state are currently not commensurate with availability in Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Las Cruces, and more services are desperately needed in those cities, too. The New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute at Las Vegas can serve as a pivotal location within the state to deliver services to New Mexicans. Of course, all residents of New Mexico can help us move forward in addressing this issue by helping to remove the stigma still associated with receiving mental and behavioral health care.

The above issues are complex. Addressing them may be daunting, but I believe that we are on the very cusp of breaking through on each of them. Funding is a big part of that picture, as are commitment and long-term planning. None of us can afford not to commit to addressing these concerns, not when we are closer than we have ever been to such a bright future.