

Health Initiatives Give Us Hope, Support the Economy

By Senator Pete Campos

The health care industry is the bright spot in New Mexico's economy, adding jobs at a time when other sectors are shedding them, but it does even more by supporting the culture of our communities and providing hope to generations of New Mexicans.

As New Mexico's population grows older, it is more important than ever that our hospitals and clinics remain financially strong and that our doctors, nurses and other health care providers remain able to give us the kind of first-rate and compassionate care that we all need and have come to expect. Potential changes at the federal level to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, more commonly known as Obamacare, threaten to disrupt the financial ability of many New Mexicans to pay for health care, which will affect how well the industry is able to provide services to the rest of us.

Providing a measure of stability at the state level will go a long way toward ensuring that New Mexicans can get the health care they need from a successful industry.

Fully funding Medicaid, the joint state and federal program that helps more than one out of every three New Mexicans pay for health care, is an important step. While it is expensive — costing more than 17 percent of the state's General Fund budget — Medicaid spending provides a great return on investment, attracting \$4.00 in federal money for each \$1.00 that the state spends, providing thousands of jobs throughout New Mexico and, of course, helping ensure that New Mexicans stay healthy.

Hospitals and other health care providers are willing to help the state fully fund Medicaid. Unlike many other industries, hospitals have actually suggested closing the tax loopholes that they benefit from in order to fully fund Medicaid. You read that correctly. Hospital administrators and executives know that quality health care costs money and that they can improve the care they provide their patients, properly compensate their doctors, nurses and other providers for the care they provide and continue to contribute mightily to New Mexico's economy if the state has more tax revenue with which to fully fund Medicaid.

Of course, ensuring good health takes more than money.

Nutrition and education programs, including our "farm-to-classroom" efforts to get New

Mexico-grown produce into schools; home-health visits; the dozens and dozens of clinics scattered throughout rural New Mexico; the numerous emergency medical services located across the state; and our nursing incentive programs all contribute to a "healthy" New Mexico, both clinically and economically.

New Mexicans benefit from a wonderfully diverse health care environment, ranging from first-class cancer research and treatment at the University of New Mexico to traditional healing methods that are still successfully practiced throughout the state.

We should remember what our wise grandparents and great-grandparents often told us: we'll be fine as long as we have our health. Let's follow their example and make the best of what we have.