

## **Every Driver in New Mexico Should Be Properly Licensed By Senator Pete Campos**

One of the most divisive, emotional and visceral issues to come before the New Mexico Legislature in recent years is that of whether the State of New Mexico should give driver's licenses to people who are not in the United States legally.

If we look at the question objectively, the only logical answer can be "yes".

While New Mexico, along with every other state and virtually every country, requires people to pass a test and obtain a license before driving, the act itself of driving a car is about as common an activity as there can be in today's society.

New Mexico currently has about 1.2 million licensed drivers. It is in our best interest to do everything we can to make sure that those drivers know the rules of the road, are properly insured and will lose their licenses if they abuse the privilege by driving while intoxicated or by committing other driving offenses. We've worked hard in New Mexico to combat two problems that have plagued us for years — a high number of uninsured motorists and a high incidence of drunken driving. By linking driver's license databases with motor vehicle insurance databases and with court databases, we've made great strides in reducing the number of uninsured drivers and repeat drunken drivers on our roads.

The estimated percentage of uninsured motorists in New Mexico has dropped significantly in recent years to less than 10 percent at the end of 2008. And the number of alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths that year was the lowest in years. It is undeniable that our streets and highways are safer today than they were before we allowed undocumented immigrants to get licenses in 2003.

Everyone wants to ensure that we keep our streets safe, but opponents of the current state law that grants people licenses to drive regardless of their immigration status say that it poses a threat to our national security. It is too easy, they say, for people who would do harm to our country to get a New Mexico driver's license and then use that as a form of identification to build up a cache of more IDs, to open bank accounts, to rent apartments or buildings and to get on airplanes.

Those are legitimate concerns, and the New Mexico Legislature has made public safety and public health top priorities for years. That is why the New Mexico Senate approved a compromise measure that significantly tightens the requirements that foreign nationals must meet to get a driver's license. People who cannot show that they are in the United States legally must provide a tax identification number; proof of their true identity, such as a passport from their home country; and two proofs that they really live in New Mexico, such as utility bills, bank statements, rental or mortgage receipts or student records; and they must be fingerprinted. In addition, licenses granted to people who cannot prove that they are here legally will be valid for only two years; those people must come into a Motor Vehicle Division office every two years to renew a license.

Finally, every license that was issued since 2003 to a foreign national who did not provide a social security number would be canceled within two years, and any foreign national who fraudulently tries to obtain a new driver's license would be guilty of a fourth degree felony.

This compromise will help ensure that people who have New Mexico driver's licenses are genuine New Mexico residents and have provided their true identity to the state. It will keep both our highways and our nation safer.