

## **Groundwork Ready for Interim Work**

**By Senator Pete Campos**

The 2009 legislative session that is rapidly drawing to a close set the stage for a productive year ahead in New Mexico. We face significant challenges as a state and nation, but I am hopeful that we are well positioned to address these challenges and make the most of the opportunities presented.

To accomplish our mission and continue to move New Mexico forward, we need accurate, up-to-date information, especially of the tax dollars flowing into and out of the state treasury. These wildly changing revenue forecasts — which less than one year ago projected a \$400 million revenue surplus that quickly evaporated and turned into a multimillion dollar deficit — are likely to continue to be volatile as the economy sorts itself out and as consumer confidence remains shaky. It seems increasingly likely that a special legislative session will be necessary later this year to address our changing fiscal situation, whether it improves or declines, and we must be prepared mentally and fiscally to make further cuts if necessary.

At the same time we consider spending cuts, we must also review our tax policies to ensure that taxpayers are treated fairly and that our taxes actually raise enough money to pay for critical state services. Each of New Mexico's tax incentives must be reviewed to ensure that they are still relevant and actually provide more benefit than they cost the state in lost tax revenue. Through this entire process, we must work to streamline government to save as much money as possible so that we can assure taxpayers that they are getting the most "bang" for their tax dollars. New Mexico's educational, health care, public safety and economic development programs must be adjusted and fine-tuned to optimize the role each plays in our state's future.

One of state government's most important roles during this economic crisis will be to protect the most needy among us from hardships, both economic and social, so that when the New Mexico economy recovers, everyone has an opportunity to share in and benefit from the recovery. This is the time to adjust government's direction to meet the needs of the state's population and improve the services that will stabilize and sustain a good future for New Mexico families. Programs that keep children out of gangs and in

schools, where they can be prepared for the world of work, that make the best use of after-school time and that promote good health and nutrition should be strengthened.

We made significant progress in several important areas of governance beyond the current budget and fiscal crisis that we are facing. Legislation to repeal the death penalty was sent to the governor, and legislation to create an ethics commission and establish campaign contribution limits was seriously considered. Also considered was legislation that makes it easier for homeowners to pay the initial costs of renewable energy systems — such as solar panels — and legislation that revamps how the state prioritizes, funds and oversees public construction projects.

One way we can truly improve the quality of life in New Mexico and ensure that our state's fiscal health remains as strong as it can be is to properly identify, prioritize, fund and monitor infrastructure projects. A haphazard process results in wasted money, time and effort. We should continue to look for economic development opportunities through the use of tax increment development districts and for public construction project opportunities through the use of public improvement districts that will help draw industry and capital projects to all areas of the state.

New Mexico is well prepared to make the most of this challenging time. Visionary thinking, trend analysis, proper planning, transparency and accountability will help us make the most of this opportunity.