

**Senate Prepared to Put Internal Politics Aside,
Work Cooperatively on Important Issues
By Senator Pete Campos**

All of us who are involved in or who follow the inner workings of state government and politics are understandably intrigued by the behind-the-scenes maneuvering surrounding the selection of New Mexico's next lieutenant governor, the president pro tempore of the state Senate and the shifting political currents in the Legislature. But we also know that, especially in these challenging times, none of that really matters to the people we represent.

New Mexicans are concerned about their jobs, about the quality of their children's schools, about higher education opportunities in New Mexico, about economic development and about a whole host of other "pocketbook" issues. They're worried about their retirement accounts, about the price of groceries and about their ability, or inability, to see a doctor when they're sick.

New Mexicans can rest assured that despite the political or partisan differences among policymakers, the members of the Legislature are committed to acting on the issues that matter most in a way that is best for New Mexico and its residents. The Legislature convenes on January 20 amid the most severe financial challenge that has faced state government in decades: it must immediately close this year's budget gap, which amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars, and then approve a bare-bones budget for the next year. Neither task will be pleasant or easy. More than two-thirds of our state budget is devoted to public schools, higher education and Medicaid, all of which are critical to our economic and social well-being, and it will take a monumental effort and strong commitment to avoid cutting those budgets.

But I believe that most members of the Legislature, and especially the members of the Senate with whom I am most familiar, are committed to making that effort. We must not sacrifice the education of our children, the retraining of our work force or the health care of low-income New Mexicans in the name of fiscal prudence. We must instead wring every last bit of inefficiency and waste from government spending and continue our investment in education and health care. Instead of raising taxes on working New

Mexicans during a recession, we must ensure that everyone is paying the taxes they already owe and that the myriad tax breaks we've offered are still worth keeping.

This is a time to invest in what we know works, such as public education, and in those programs critical to our well-being, such as health care and public safety. This is a time to unleash the ingenuity and ambition of ordinary New Mexicans who are striving to better themselves and provide a bright future for their families. We can best do that by giving New Mexicans the tools and support they need to succeed.

We all know that a good education is the key to a successful future. Good teachers and good schools support the work of parents in producing good students, who eventually grow up to be productive workers and business owners who are involved in their communities. New Mexicans are eager to learn new skills, to broaden their knowledge and to increase their marketability. We in the Legislature can and must do our part to help our constituents reach those goals by dedicating the necessary financial resources to our public schools, community colleges and universities, to ensuring that all New Mexican's have access to good, affordable health care when they need it and by protecting all of us from those in our society who would do us harm.

The upcoming legislative session will be where that commitment is manifested.