

**Overcoming New Mexico's Challenges
Requires More Cooperation, Collaboration, Less Partisanship Than Ever Before
By Senator Pete Campos**

The 2012 election season was one of the most divisive, partisan and personal that New Mexico has faced. It will be hard and it will take time to heal the wounds, but it is critical that we do so and move away from campaigning and toward governing as fast as possible if we are to make any progress overcoming the tremendous challenges facing New Mexico.

The breadth and depth of the challenges facing our state are well known: high poverty, especially among children; a dearth of jobs, especially high-paying jobs with good benefits; poor access to health care, especially in rural New Mexico; and — at the root of it all — struggling schools that produce struggling students who are not reaching their academic potential. Unfortunately and predictably, the discussions of these and the other challenges we face focus on *who is to blame* for them rather than *how to fix* them.

It is time to change that discussion. If we don't, we will endlessly debate the question of who is to blame without ever resolving the issue, and the upcoming legislative session will be one of gridlock and bickering. But if we put the campaigns in the past and refocus the discussion on how to overcome these challenges, the 2013 legislative session can be a model for communication, cooperation and collaboration.

We have all the ingredients for a successful session. Coming together in January will be a healthy mix of veteran and new legislators, each committed to helping New Mexico thrive. The state's budget outlook is the brightest it has been in years, with a small, but significant, amount of "new" money available to restore some of the budget cuts of previous years. And New Mexicans, weary of the election season rhetoric, are not only ready to accept, but are actually demanding, thoughtful discussions of the challenges we face and the difficult solutions to overcome them.

We have our best chance of achieving long-term success by initially focusing on three areas: early childhood education, access to health care and job retention and creation. Policymakers agree that these are critically important issues that deserve our full attention. There will no doubt be disagreement about how best to address them, but we must ensure that those disagreements are rooted in policy, not politics, and remember that, ultimately, we agree on the common goal of improving childhood education, broadening access to good health care and increasing the number of jobs throughout New Mexico.

The connection and interdependence among these and other issues must not be forgotten either. Paying for better early childhood education and broader access to health care with burdensome tax increases that drive jobs away accomplishes nothing in the long run. At the same time, deep tax cuts intended to create jobs but that also result in public school and social program budget cuts do nothing but exacerbate our problems. On the other hand, strong early childhood education and quality health care throughout New Mexico will lead to a more educated, healthy and productive work force, which will lead to better and more jobs, a more vibrant economy and, ultimately, a stronger state budget, which will allow for increased funding for education as well as tax relief.

A balanced approach, supported by mutual respect for each other's positions, will help us achieve our goal of a perpetual cycle of improvement.

We know all too well what the future holds if we resort to politicking and bickering. The next election is two years away and we should not tolerate any campaigning until then. The legislature and the governor should do what New Mexicans elected them to do: govern.

To do otherwise risks the future of New Mexico and its residents.