

Autumn is a Time of Hope
By Senator Pete Campos

As a younger man, I viewed this time of year with great hope. When leaves start to fall, days get shorter and nights colder, it's time to plan for new opportunities. As an educator, I saw the promise autumn holds — classrooms full of new faces, eager to absorb new concepts. As a state senator, I view this time of year through even more hopeful eyes — elections bring new faces and ideas and a chance to uphold our promise as elected officials to reflect the values and project the voices of those we represent.

This year, that hope is especially bright, as we find ourselves with multiple opportunities to come together and shape New Mexico's future in ways that haven't been possible in a decade. New legislators, a new governor and, yes, over \$1 billion in new, nonrecurring money mean that we have an opportunity to address some of our most pressing challenges and improve life for all New Mexicans. How we navigate these decisions and spend taxpayer dollars will define us for years to come.

Of course, we must season our hope with tempered caution. Charging into January without collaboration and careful planning could mean that we waste a golden opportunity. In order to transform this hope for our future into meaningful policy, we should begin working on certain issues immediately. We must:

(1) provide better support for our teachers and ensure that children have a safe learning environment. There is perhaps no greater source of hope than our children. Providing them with an education that will prepare them for college and tomorrow's workforce is a commitment from which we cannot waver;

(2) simplify our tax code and remove hurdles to economic development, such as lack of access to the internet and to a highly skilled workforce. We also need to consider increasing the minimum wage to make it easier for all workers to support themselves and their families;

(3) reform capital outlay. The \$1 billion in new money that has been reported recently is nonrecurring, meaning that it must be used for infrastructure projects. Pouring money into projects without careful planning and prioritization is akin to refusing to prepare for a massive storm.

(4) develop a strategy to safeguard the long-term solvency of our public pension plans.

Public employees are a vital thread in the fabric that blankets each of our communities. Educators, police officers and state workers are integral to a productive society and deserve a secure and reliable retirement system. This is especially important in attracting new, younger employees to state government, rather than watching them leave New Mexico for better-paying jobs elsewhere;

(5) diversify our economy to better insulate ourselves from the boom and bust cycle of oil and gas. It's fair to acknowledge that the current economic growth comes from oil and gas development, but it's equally fair to note that falling oil and gas prices played a large role in the state's financial crisis two years ago, which resulted in cutting budgets and important public services. We should consider development of renewable energy resources, better marketing of our tourism and outdoor recreation industries and improving ways to nurture small business development; and

Above all, as we near the end of this election cycle and begin to shift our gaze from campaigning to governing, we must maintain civility at all costs. Partisan and intra-party bickering threaten to undermine progress toward a better life for all New Mexicans.

We have been blessed with the chance to weave the individual fibers of our vital institutions — education, businesses, public employees and, above all, our families — into a fabric that's much stronger than the sum of its individual parts. Through careful planning, teamwork and vision, we can transform the hopes and dreams of the people we are elected to represent into the kind of action that will catapult New Mexicans to new levels of hope and prosperity.

(This article was shortened to fit this newspaper. To view the full text, please visit petecampos.com.)

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