

## **Our Top Priority Must Be Job Creation; Education is the Key**

**By Senator Pete Campos**

New Mexico is one of just a handful of states that continues to lose jobs, prolonging the recession well past its June 2009 "official end" for tens of thousands of New Mexicans and their families. The top priority for policymakers for the foreseeable future must be to create jobs.

We have lost 54,000 jobs during this recession, a devastating drop that has reduced the total number of jobs in New Mexico to late-2004 levels. Good-paying jobs in the construction, manufacturing and professional and business services sectors have been particularly hard hit, accounting for more than three-fourths of the jobs lost. In many ways, the job loss we have experienced since the recession began is largely the result of global and national forces beyond our control. But it is our responsibility to reverse this devastating trend.

The stakes are high. If we are successful, we will ensure that New Mexico remains a vibrant place to live, work and raise a family. Young people can count on endless reasons and opportunities to live not just in New Mexico, but in rural New Mexico, where many of us once lived. Businesses will thrive from the renewed synergy that comes from economic development and the knowledge that business owners have at their disposal an eager, talented and productive work force. Cultural opportunities will spring from New Mexico's unique diversity, making the Land of Enchantment a truly remarkable place to visit.

There are several keys to our success. Our quest to create jobs must involve the concerted, coordinated efforts of policymakers and public employees at the state and local levels as well as private business and labor leaders; it must be devoid of partisanship and attempts to seek personal gain; and, above all, it must be relentless. We did not lose jobs because a handful of big companies went bankrupt or decided to move their operations elsewhere. Our job loss has been a slow but steady decline marked by layoffs of a few workers here and there and the closing of small businesses throughout New Mexico. Our recovery must be equally steady, and we must focus on the basics of job creation.

While we cannot rely solely on short-term solutions, we must recognize the critical need to do something *now* and should support state and local government initiatives — such as public infrastructure measures — that put people to work relatively quickly in high-wage construction, design and engineering jobs and that ultimately provide the roads, schools, water and wastewater systems that attract profitable businesses and the jobs they bring. Similarly, we must be willing to support incentives that entice existing businesses to expand, and new businesses to locate, in New Mexico without irreparably damaging state or local government budgets.

At the same time, we must make an unwavering commitment to improving the education that New Mexico's children receive. This is a big task and requires the hard work of many more people than just policymakers.

Children must start each day at school ready to learn, meaning they are well-rested and well-fed, and end each day not in front of the television or computer, but with a book and under the watchful eyes of their parents. In addition to parents, of course, social workers, juvenile justice workers, health care professionals and others bear this responsibility.

We must put the best, and only the best, New Mexico teachers in our classrooms. Teachers must be able to hold the attention of dozens of students at a time, instill a desire among their students to learn more and more each day and then satisfy that desire with relevant information that becomes knowledge. In short, teachers must be held accountable, and they must be paid accordingly, like the highly skilled professionals they are and commensurate with the enormous responsibility they have to teach children what they need to know to be successful.

Everyone else connected with a school — from members of the boards of education, superintendents and principals to football coaches, custodians and cafeteria workers — must

understand that their duty is simply to do whatever they can and whatever needs to be done to help their school's teachers teach students.

We all must support a robust vocational education system that prepares students for real-world jobs. At the same time, we must honestly evaluate the true cost and examine the feasibility of maintaining a geographically dispersed public education system that spans from elementary school through our university system.

None of this is easy, of course. If it were, someone else would have done it years ago. But it must be done, and it is our responsibility to begin this job now.

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