

Legislature Faced and Addressed Serious Issues

By Senator Pete Campos

The 2014 legislative session will be dubbed the "no-nonsense session".

Legislators worked extremely hard to forge compromises on everything from the \$6.2 billion state budget to proposals to ensure that college students still get help from the lottery scholarship program; from paying for water projects statewide to saving our local hospitals; and from banning texting while driving to protecting schoolchildren from life-threatening allergic attacks.

I'm especially pleased that the senate, under the leadership of the members of the Senate Finance Committee, crafted a compromise budget that was acceptable to a majority of the legislature and the governor. This was not an easy task, as evidenced by the dramatic 34-34 tie vote on an initial budget in the house of representatives.

The budget we approved, and that now awaits action by the governor, represents a five percent increase over the current year's appropriations, a welcome and sure sign that our prudent spending in the past and our economic development efforts are paying off. We put a high priority on creating jobs, improving health care and investing in our children. We increased public school spending by 5.8 percent and higher education spending by 6.6 percent, and we added \$28 million to early childhood programs, \$1.5 million for job training and recruitment programs and nearly \$6 million for nurse and physician education programs.

I am also pleased that the budget includes enough money for a modest pay raise of about three percent for public school teachers and state employees and slightly bigger raises for public safety officers and hard-to-recruit employees.

We also approved about \$400 million in public works projects, some of which are subject to voter approval in November, that will provide needed infrastructure around the state and put many New Mexicans to work. Included is funding for Bradner Dam in Las Vegas, the Maxwell well in Colfax County, the Vaughn domestic water system analysis, improvements and emergency repairs, the Power Dam at Santa Rosa, improvements to Morphy Lake dam in Mora county, the Upper Holman fluoride treatment facility and many other important water, health and public safety projects.

While we've improved the process of selecting, funding and monitoring public works projects, we still have a great deal of work to do to ensure that we use our precious state tax dollars wisely, investing in projects that can be completed, that provide necessary infrastructure for economic development and that improve the quality of life for New Mexicans statewide.

Take, for example, the choice we were forced to make between approving funding for the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute Meadows long-term care facility and Bradner Dam. For nearly 25 years, we have worked to complete the Meadows facility, and we've made great progress since the first dollars were approved for planning in the very early 1990s. Those investments have paid off as the people who live and work at the facility are doing so in a state-of-the-art home that is safe and comfortable.

Because of the parochial manner in which our capital outlay funding is distributed each year, we were forced to make a hard decision between completing Phase III of the Meadows long-term care facility or shift state revenue to Bradner Dam. The decision was made to fund Bradner Dam in the amount of \$10 million and seek full funding for Meadows next session.

A successful legislative session, like the one that just concluded, takes communication, compromise and concern for the entire state. As we seek resources to fund these large projects, the people of New Mexico will benefit. I encourage residents from Amalia to Anton Chico, from Raton to Mora, to contact me about the issues facing their communities as we prepare for the 2015 legislative session.

We will continue to do what we can, set priorities and address the needs of people to the best of our ability, as the legislature proved in the 2014 session.