

Progress Made
Time to Work Wiser and Smarter
by Senator Pete Campos

In early June, the New Mexico Legislature met for a one-day session to pass supplemental appropriations for some state agencies, a tax relief package and, most importantly, a \$295 million capital outlay package to inject much-needed infrastructure funding into communities and projects across the state. While it is true that a special session only became necessary because the legislature could not come to an agreement among a majority of its members and the governor, the negotiation, passage and signing of the special session bills are a prime example of how effective policymakers in New Mexico can be when we all agree on the importance of something and are willing to compromise on a solution to fix it.

I am retired now, and so, since July 1, I have spent day after day traveling around New Mexico, beginning in the district I represent. In each community I visit, and with most of the people I speak with, several recurring themes emerge. Communities in every corner of the state, many of them small, rural ones, have educational facilities and state and local highways, bridges and roads in dire need of repair or replacement and small businesses just trying to survive. Community leaders also repeatedly identify a need to improve infrastructure delivery for clean water, wastewater and solid waste systems and good public health care and health care facilities as important.

The State of New Mexico can do a lot more to help these people and their communities! We have a capital outlay system that begs for meaningful reform. Millions of unspent dollars languish in state coffers that realistically are not sufficient to complete a phase or an entire project, and no other alternative exists but to claw back or revert these funds. These funds could be put to use improving roads, schools and public water systems. More could be done to encourage people to take advantage of free or low-cost preventive health care services, which will lead to lower health care costs and healthier lifestyles.

These are a few steps we can take, some simple and others more complex, to continue assisting New Mexico with its immediate problems and simultaneously move toward solving issues that hold back our efforts to improve our health, safety and the economy. This

fundamental approach will prepare us for a more robust economy, a skilled, healthy and happy work force gainfully employed and the basis to keep our children living and working in the state.

Taking these steps will require united leadership, the kind dedicated to planning for the future and not the next election. New Mexicans expect leadership with vision to inform them what we are doing and the courage to complete that vision, regardless of political consequences. We must begin by reforming our capital outlay process, to require better project evaluation and prioritization and more efficient distribution of funds.

While we have made progress over the years, the time is right to have meaningful discussions about tax reform and how best to share precious resources like water. Smart, sustainable revenue streams will have to be established in order to fund infrastructure, like roads, rather than financing this infrastructure with 40% of every tax dollar going toward servicing debt.

I am from northeastern New Mexico, and so while I understand that area best, my 25 years as a state senator and my recent travels around the state have shown me that almost all New Mexicans are interested in the same basic things: better infrastructure, particularly schools and roads; an education system that prepares our children for college and high-wage jobs; reliable health care; adequate water resources; and an economy that helps our small businesses grow and thrive. In the past, New Mexico policymakers have been able to address crises that confronted us, but we must look at our processes to head issues off before they become a crisis. We should begin to use smarter, wiser and more efficient practices to meet today's needs.

These goals are attainable: they simply require vision, dedication, united leadership and courage. It will not always be easy to summon these traits within ourselves, but that's what will be required if we are to realize the bright future for New Mexico we all know lies within our reach.