



Title: **Wasteful Capital Spending Practice Needs Repair**
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Wasteful Capital Spending Practice Needs Repair

House Bill 307 is an effort to reform infrastructure spending by creating a council that would look at New Mexico's needs and fund as appropriate. This would be in contrast to our current system where each legislator is handed a bag of cash at the end of each session to take home and make it rain on those he or she adores (or owes).

In 2015 each house member was given \$600,000 to do with as he so chooses. Senators were given \$1 million. We all know the manner in which that money was distributed was biased and political. Needs of the public weren't met. The needs of political pals were.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Zach Cook, a Ruidoso Republican, and Sen. Carlos Cisneros, a Questa Democrat, would create a council, whose members would be appointed by the House and Senate New Mexico Legislative Council. Each would appoint nine members.

Should the bill become law, two things would happen immediately that would help all citizens of the state. First, the choice and process of which projects receive funding would be transparent and second the funded projects would be needs, not wants by a special interest group or a public body with hooks in a certain legislator.

The current process divides approximately \$300 million among 112 legislators to fund an average of 1,500 projects. None of these projects must create jobs, fill a commu-

nity need, enhance safety or meet any state requirements. It's a simple matter of whomever kisses the ring or screams the loudest, gets funded.

This leads to the longtime problem of most funded projects not being completed. That makes sense because most of the projects being funded aren't planned, surveyed, budgeted or even drawn up by an architect. They're mostly wish lists asking for partial funding. When the remaining funds (some matching) are never raised or pulled from a public budget, the project "goes south."

Think New Mexico, a bipartisan group bettering New Mexico one issue at a time, is pushing for the capital outlay reform. According to Think, over \$1 billion was appropriated from 2010 through 2014 that has not been spent. While our roads are crumbling and bridges approach failing point, money that could be used to repair them sits idle just to salve a politician's ego and enhance his re-election chances.

Another problem with many capital projects is constructing buildings that the responsible public body can't afford to heat, cool, insure, maintain or even populate with the properly trained employees. We have buildings all over Rio Arriba County that sit empty due to poor/no planning.

We continue to fund go-nowhere projects or unplanned projects that will never see completion, knowing it's a poor way to bring New Mexico

into the 21st century and serve its citizens, who pay the bills.

We do it because politicians of every stripe can't give up that purse. Each January he or she shows up in Santa Fe with an empty purse and leaves with it bulging with taxpayer dollars. Then it's home to those who got him or her elected where the booty is shared and plans are made for the next raid they'll make on taxpayers. House Bill 307 is asking these very politicians to pull the needle out of their arm and go cold turkey. Few are strong enough to do that.

Real thought, professional planning by an engineer or architect should be at the top of the requirements of which projects receive funding. These criteria can be reviewed and approved by a council appointed by the two legislative houses.

It's a great idea, in practice, in one form or another in 42 other states. It's good for taxpayers, citizens who use the state's infrastructure and those trying to promote a dilapidated state to the rest of the country and world.

It's just not good for the politicians addicted to the money. It should not be but it will be difficult to get elected officials to do something good for the state and its inhabitants, that is not good for the politicians personally.

Encourage your favorite legislator to support HB307. It's good for everyone and will make the state more competitive.