NM’s rankings indicate problems

New Mexicans long ago grew weary of leading national lists with negative attributes and holding the cellar on the lists with positive results.

The lack of ethics in the state’s government is not isolated. They’re also not isolated, they’re simply politicians taking money home to support those who supported them. Including in many cases, lobbyists (more about them later).

Nathan listed a few of the poor appropriations in Think’s annual report. One 2005 project was a $50,000 paving project on private land where a registered lobbyist happened to live. Another was $65,000 for a public sculpture garden in Santa Fe. That’s what Santa Fe needs, more art projects. Fortunately, the city turned away the money when it couldn’t even find the sculptor who had proposed the project.

Additionally, most of the pet projects are multi-year requests. Much of the money requested sits unused for many years or is not used at all. In 2014, 852 projects were funded with $229 million in taxpayer money. Of those 852 projects, 701 showed $174 million in unspent funds. That’s money that could be used to accomplish badly needed real infrastructure work in the state, such as repairing/ replacing highways and bridges.

New Mexico is the only state in the country that allows elected officials to decide infrastructure spending. Most states decide infrastructure funding by committee. Committees range from small to large, minority and majority members, with some requiring construction industry, lawyers or bankers on them.

What all committees have in common is they’re all working for the greater good of the state, not the individual politicians wanting to buy their next re-election by funding pet projects with our money. One poor politician is quoted in Think’s literature as honestly stating, “Of course we have to take money home to constituents. How else can we get re-elected?” Here’s a thought: Do something solid.

We wish Nathan luck and will do what we can to help him succeed. But he’s asking legislators to revoke their own license to legally steal taxpayer money. That’s a tall order, sort of like asking them to be accountable and enforce some ethics.

A few weeks after Nathan released Think’s next legislative project the 2015 State Integrity Investigation released the state’s report card. To no one’s surprise, New Mexico has abysmal results.

According to the release, “New Mexico scored only 61, a letter grade of D-, and landed tied for 34th place in the 2015 State Integrity Investigation, an assessment of state government accountability and transparency conducted by the Center for Public Integrity.”

Common Cause, a New Mexico non-profit working to reform state and local government, has an effort in place to educate the public on the importance of state and local government accountability and transparency. Common Cause has its own unique mission has its own unique lack of oversight and ethics.

This behavior begins with city and county boards where future state politicians are trained on how to use taxpayer money to their personal benefit. We have a very healthy crop locally. Many are ready to move up to the triple A league and steal from state taxpayers.

Until New Mexico gets a handle on its miserable ethics...
record, lack of accountability at many levels and starts tying capital projects to real needs, we will continue to bounce along the bottom of many lists. That's where many (not all) of our politicians are comfortable, with other bottom feeders.