

# SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

The West's oldest newspaper, founded 1849

Robin M. Martin  
Owner

Robert M. McKinney  
Owner, 1949-2001

Inez Russell Gomez  
Editorial Page Editor

Ray Rivera  
Editor

## OUR VIEW

# In final hours, set priorities

**W**ith just a day and a half remaining in the 2014 legislative session, the big job remaining is to pass a budget and to avoid having to return for a special session. That's job one.

Of course, legislators will be trying to push other bills to the finish line. They should concentrate on legislation to improve New Mexico's economy. A trio of bills backed by Think New Mexico, the same group that successfully championed full-day kindergarten and reformed the Public Regulation Commission, should be in the mix in the final hours.

The one that is furthest along — through the Senate and now in the House — is Senate Bill 9, which would create an online business portal providing a one-stop shop to file required forms and pay fees. The online stop would speed up paperwork and simplify the process, making it easier to do business in New Mexico. Eighteen states already are doing this, and New Mexico should join in. A companion bill, SB 8, attempts to increase entrepreneurship in New Mexico by attracting more international students to the state's colleges and universities. How? By offering in-state tuition to students studying science, technology, engineering, math or business. The model is North Dakota, which began offering in-state tuition to many international students a decade ago. Today, 5 percent of undergraduates in North Dakota come from outside the United States, compared to 2.2 percent in New Mexico. Many of those students graduate and start businesses. Just as important is research that shows U.S. students who mingle with international students improve language skills and cultural understanding.

Of the three, we believe SB 10 has the most potential to impact the state's ability to attract new businesses. The legislation would rebate 30 percent of new taxes created by a business expansion or relocation. The catch? The rebates come only after new jobs are created. There's none of these multimillion dollar tax credits or incentives, only to see a company fold without actually hiring New Mexicans. This post-performance incentive has been active in Utah since 2008 and is credited with creation of more than 25,000 jobs there. It's a no-brainer for the state that continues to lag the rest of the country in creating jobs.

Finally, we are encouraged that both Republicans and Democrats understand the importance of the Southwest Chief Amtrak route to rural Northern New Mexico counties. House Bill 241 passed 47-21 in House and is in the Senate. It would authorize the issuance of up to \$40 million in severance tax bonds between 2016 and 2025 to fix the train tracks from Lamy to the Colorado border.

Without maintenance and repairs, the tracks no longer can accommodate the faster speeds of passenger trains. The Amtrak route so vital to small-town New Mexico would be relocated. New Mexico would join with Amtrak, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (track owners), Kansas and Colorado to make the fixes. Rep. Roberto Gonzales, D-Taos, has placed contingencies in his legislation in case the other parties don't allocate their share of the money.

We appreciate legislators who understand the need to act before BNSF stops maintaining tracks in 2016 — the livelihood of communities such as Raton depends on a healthy Southwest Chief route. This comment sums up the situation: "So many times we overlook the needs of the smaller communities," said Rep. Don Tripp, R-Socorro. "And this is an issue where we're dealing with the lifeblood of a community — actually a region."

During these final hours, we hope legislators keep those words in mind. The bills that get to the governor's desk — whether making it easier for businesses to operate or keeping trains running through languishing small towns — could mean the difference between a thriving New Mexico or one that continues to stumble along.