

## The New Mexico leadership vacuum

Years ago I worked in the Bill Richardson administration. I was a political appointee but my conservative politics escaped the Governor's vetting machine so I was hired as the Director of the Office of Science and Technology and worked as the liaison to the Governor's Science Advisor, a top physicist seconded to the State by the Los Alamos Labs. He was widely respected in his field and he understood how government worked. He believed in building bridges between the 'silos' of the scientific community that weren't accustomed to communicating with each other.

For nearly four years we worked on a number of projects in renewable energy, biotech, IT, lasers, aerospace and healthcare, to name just a few. Governor Richardson was not the kind of chief executive that sat back and delegated everything. He liked science and believed that involvement at the highest level could help the state take some giant steps forward. He was also a good salesman, something any top executive needs to be in order to succeed. He had his failings, too, like overpromising and overspending on projects like the Rail Runner, the Spaceport and the NM Computing Applications Center. He sometimes forgot he was the Governor of one of the poorest states in the nation and was no longer Secretary of Energy or Ambassador to the U.N. with big budgets and large staffs.

That didn't stop him from dreaming big with the state's dime. He was convinced that we could put New Mexico on the map for out-of-state and foreign investors. And because I was experienced in creating partnerships with foreign countries and companies, I developed good relationships with overseas delegations like one from Japan that had taken a great interest in our 'Green grid' program of promoting solar-based energy in the state. The Japanese were methodical AND they took their time - way too much time - to move from point 'A' to point 'B'. This frustrated many who wanted a faster track on our bi-national cooperation, but 75 other 'cooperators' from the state's research institutions and universities hung in there. Thankfully, we consummated our *marriage* with the Japanese group (NEDO) and a local utility.

I mention all this to underscore one simple fact. Good leadership requires engaged and involved leaders with vision...and one foot (at least) planted firmly in reality. Leaders are more than just caretakers of an economy and they can come from the Left, Right or the middle of the political spectrum. They also need the backing of their legislators, from local companies and the general public to succeed. Without that backing, even the best ideas will die on the vine. Unfortunately, our current Governor lacks those skills. She may have a vision, but I haven't seen or heard it. Good leaders have both passion and compassion and can identify with the weakest as well as the strongest of constituents and they never take advantage of them. While they can occasionally appear 'parental' in their management style, the successful ones make us believe that their decisions are made in our best interest. Rarely do they rely on raw power to govern as our governor has done since the pandemic started.

Voters don't like to be treated like children. They want the important decisions taken to be ones that have been thoroughly discussed at the grassroots level. They realize that nobody ever gets everything they want, but that should not stop them from insisting on having a seat at the table, something missing here these last several years. New Mexico has huge problems and continues to be at or near the bottom of the good lists and near the top of the bad ones. We've had systemic problems that we've been unable to solve for decades through several administrations and we must acknowledge the fact that we're never going to solve them with a top-down iron-fisted approach to governance. Our Governor has done a poor job of understanding the importance of citizen involvement in decision-making especially when it comes to managing the Coronavirus pandemic. Locking down our companies and imposing grossly unfair measures against public gatherings and choosing winners and losers in our business community were colossal mistakes. Her administration has completely ignored the economic and social impact that lockdowns and capricious regulations have had on our people. Our economy has suffered. The weakest among us have suffered. And confidence in our government's ability to lead has suffered.

This bell cannot be unring. The damage has been done, but hopefully it can be repaired over time. Our governor was elected to serve us not control us. Leadership is supposed to inspire people to be the best they can be. It does not conspire with our fears to rule us through the abject exercise of power. New Mexicans want and need leadership. We deserve it and should demand it NOW because later will be too late.

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