

## Don't just do something, stand there

It's truly amazing how fast our elected officials can react when they sense a better job is in the offing. Like the Aesop's fable of the dog with the bone who sees his reflection in the stream, they will happily drop theirs to get a bigger one. New Mexico is renowned for recycling its people from one cushy job to the next. This is especially true in economic development jobs. I know because I worked with fifty or so economic development representatives back in 2006-2010. It seemed that whenever a better job opened up (or their current job was abolished) they just packed up their Banker's Box and moved house into another office and hung out their 'open for business' shingle.

People keep telling me that we are a small state and that our pool of candidates for government jobs is equally small, and because of that we can't afford to be picky when it comes to exchanging one government job-holder for another. It can be exasperating, though, especially now, when we need fresh ideas and new energy instead of the 'recycled hot air' we get from job high-jumpers who wouldn't know a new idea if it came to them by registered mail. This game of musical chairs is not confined to economic developers. If anything, it is more widespread with elected officials - politicians - who believe they are entitled to hop from one position to another, and woe betide the citizen who questions their motives for doing so. As an example, our current governor announced her intention to run for the state's highest office two weeks after she won re-election to the House of Representatives in 2016!

Our current Congressman from Congressional District 3, Mr. Ben Lujan (D), is expected to announce his bid for the Senate seat being vacated by retiring Tom Udall (D) on Monday, April 1st - April Fools' Day. What appropriate timing. Both Lujan and Udall have been in their seats, voting with their party in the 95+ percentile range since 2009. New Mexican political watchers like myself are reminded that political families like the Lujans and the Udalls feel entitled (by name recognition if nothing else) to sup at the government table. They are part of the *New Mexico Way* which is characterized by the patron system of servitude. Kiss the right ring in our state and you will be taken care of (read: be given a job or something else of real value) especially if you are a Democrat. In the spirit of fairness, I must say that Republicans have had their own problems with patronage in years past, but nothing can equal the Democrats'. They are truly the gold medalists in the patronage olympics.

This incestuous behavior by the New Mexico True one-percenters does nothing to move us forward. Instead, it forces the rest of us to walk round in circles, because *their* price of admission to power is nailing one of *our* feet to the old patron's floor. We must break this vicious cycle of entitlement power. Maybe the only way to do so is to insist on term limiting them and by creating a new wave of voters that believe in ideas instead of ideology and who will reject the **patronizing** of our state by people who are more concerned with electing agendas than live, thinking human beings.

In the election of 2018, the New Mexico Republican Party supported a number of excellent candidates for national office. One of them was former State Representative, Janice Arnold-Jones. She ran a respectable and professional campaign for CD1, but she lost to a die-hard Progressive Democrat, Deb Haaland, who happened to be half Native American and who was financially supported by billionaire Michael Bloomberg. Haaland's resumé was tailor-made for her district which is predominantly Blue. Like Arnold-Jones, she was a military 'brat' and spent most of her early life up to and through her teen years following her father's assignments in the Marine Corps, never living in the Pueblo where she and her mother were members. While Ms. Haaland did nothing wrong in using her Native American connection to win an election, I believe that she bought into the same kind of identity-based politics that we are now infamous for, here in New Mexico.

Janice Arnold-Jones is a remarkably astute and wise person. I know her, personally, and view her as fair and balanced to a fault, someone who always looks for the best in people. Her back story is one of merit-based success, and while that makes her an amazing person, it was not enough to counter the opposition's identity plus ideology onslaught.

Janice has never been a predatory political animal. That's why most of us who are conservatives wanted her to represent us in Washington. Unfortunately, neither she nor anyone else like her can win in our state by simply being, smart, honest and forthright. To win, you need some combination of the 'right' ethnicity, race, family ties, or ideology. Conversely, if you are already elected and are looking for the next juicier fruit on the political tree you can just run in place, vote with your party and do nothing until the right seat opens up and then stake your claim on it.

The Alaskan Klondike has nothing on the New Mexican high desert. It's just a shame that most of our gold is of the fool's variety.

*Stephan Helgesen is a former career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in thirty different countries, specializing in export promotion. He is now a political analyst and strategist and author of nine books and over 1,000 articles on politics, the economy and social trends. He can be reached at: [stephan@stephanhelgesen.com](mailto:stephan@stephanhelgesen.com)*