

My View.....

By Jerry C. Walker

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“Steps and Missteps”

What are the Lasting Impressions?

Those of us who live in the western part of the U.S. and who frequent public lands, national monuments or parks and wilderness areas are familiar with the “Leave no Trace” efforts that are encouraged.

The idea is simple but effective; We all are responsible for protecting our national parks, monuments, and public lands. It’s important to be conscious of the impacts our actions may have on the land, plants, animals, other people, and ecosystems. It’s not unusual to see markers saying “Stay on the Trail” in our parks and postings to not remove any items such as potshards or arrow heads, or any other item.

Literature can be found telling of the long-term damages that occur when fragile turf is walked on. According to some areas, it can take years before damages heal.

My thoughts are that the tenor set by our lawmakers and governor with bill introductions and statements regarding the business environment can also take years to heal. This session is chock full of examples for many industries.

I want to credit the New Mexico Chamber of Commerce, the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, the New Mexico Chamber Executives Association, and the New Mexico Business Coalition with being on top of these issues and standing up for the business community – including community banking.

Here are some concerns the “Business Lobby” is dealing with:

- New mandatory paid sick leave requirements.
- New mandatory paid family and medical leave requirements.
- Higher unemployment insurance rates.
- Increased Corporate Income Taxes (to the highest in the Southwest and among the highest in the nation (approaching NY, DC, and VT).
- Sweeping new rights to sue businesses and/or industry regulators.
- A minimum wage of \$15/hour and the elimination of the tipped wage rate.
- Higher workers compensation payments (caused by a presumption of workplace COVID transmission).
- Higher health care premiums due to a new tax on health insurance plans (highest state tax rate in the nation).

The Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce points out, “As things currently stand, the Legislature could very well raise the cost of running a small business in seven or eight different ways – in just one session, in the midst of a pandemic. Many small business owners, and those of us who represent the business community, are left asking: “why ever, and especially why now?” Worse yet, input from job creators has been almost completely ignored.” We agree.

The ABQ Chamber goes on to state, “That’s not all... In health care, the Legislature is attempting to raise taxes on doctors and allow larger lawsuit awards against hospitals, physicians, and other health care professionals... Efforts continue to be made to curb oil and gas production, encourage a proliferation of environmental lawsuits against energy producers and all sorts of manufacturers, and establish a patchwork of environmental standards across the state that are stricter than federal standards.”

“All of these policies, the Chamber writes, will jeopardize our state’s fiscal and economic health and will make New Mexico less competitive economically with our neighbors than we already are.”

It has been a very long time since I have seen the “Business Lobby” coalesce like it has during this legislative session. After a year that has decimated the small business community in New Mexico, it is gratifying to see this happen.

The elected members of the New Mexico Legislature and the Lujan-Grisham Administration need to heed the warnings given in our parks and on public lands and remember that once a footstep has been left in protected areas, the damage can take years to heal.

So too it goes with the business environment in the land of Enchantment. After a full year of a pandemic it is fragile territory.

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