

Big money in politics hurts state

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When I started in my furniture business, Dapwood Furniture Co., in Albuquerque seven years ago, I set out to build a profitable company that contributes to a healthier and happier community.

Today, my company is succeeding, with over 30,000 satisfied customers, six employees and New Mexico's first manufacturing Certified B Corporation, a new type of business categorization that meets higher standards for social and environmental performance.

Unfortunately, in many ways, my small business is a rare bright spot in an otherwise struggling economy in New Mexico. Our state once ranked among the top 15 states in employment growth over the last 40 years, but as of September of 2014 we ranked 50th, according to the University of New Mexico Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

What's happening? Money is coursing through the state's election system, and that system keeps our elected officials continuously focused on raising endless sums of cash for re-election campaigns rather than focused on building a stronger state economy.

Between 2005 and 2012, New Mexico political action committees spent almost \$45 million on political campaigns.

In 2013, there were some six lobbyists for every state legislator. All of this money and lobbying contributes to a broken system that makes our elected representatives ever more attentive to a small number of well-connected influencers who have a large enough checkbook to buy special access, and ever less attentive to the many challenges facing everyday New Mexicans.

Legislators are well intentioned, but they're caught in a bad system. From my experiences in the Roundhouse I know they do listen to constituents, but it's hard to have an equal voice when corporations fund re-election campaigns, entertain in skyboxes and hire lobbyists to have the legislators' ear all year round.

As a small-business owner, there is no way I can afford these special services and perks, and most other citizens can't, either.

Our democracy depends on the founding principle of one person, one vote. But when money calls the shots that foundation is tossed out. Many other New Mexicans agree.

Eighty percent think the impact that large donors have on the outcome of elections is a serious problem.

It's time we fix this broken system so that legislators can get back to work ensuring a better education system, more high-quality jobs and a booming business environment so more small businesses can thrive. The time is ripe for such fix.

The groundwork has been laid over the past two decades and there is now a real opportunity for reform in New Mexico. That is why I'm supporting the New Mexico Pledge campaign.

A critical part of improving the system is bringing meaningful transparency to elections and to those who influence decisions at the Roundhouse. We can improve disclosure with new technology that makes reporting about election and lobbying activities easier, more transparent and more affordable for the state.

Additionally, the creation of an ethics commission to ensure strict enforcement of ethics and campaign finance laws

would give confidence to the public and to those who can help bring jobs to our state that our government isn't in the business of shady deals.

The longer we wait to bring these common-sense reforms to Santa Fe, the heavier the price everyday New Mexicans will pay for the overwhelming influence of money in politics. And after another quarter of anemic job growth earlier this year we've surely paid enough already.

It doesn't matter if you're a Democrat, Republican or independent, join me in taking the New Mexico Pledge so we can build a better state government and a better future for our children and grandchildren here in New Mexico.