

My Turn

'Kit Carson Broadband initiative is nothing less than a God-send'

MOISES MARTINEZ

As a Taos businessman coming up on 30 years, our community had seen economic cycles come and go. Do not believe, however, that we have seen a downturn as severe and long lasting as our current circumstances indicate.

During such times is human nature to lay blame, take out frustrations elsewhere and not at all uncommon to tend towards rash decision making.

Right now, we can least afford for our community to become divisive; what we need most is unity as we work to get through these challenging times.

When the stimulus bill was passed at the federal level, I knew of no one that conceived those resources would ever impact us directly, much less that we would secure the largest investment in the state of New Mexico. The timing could not be better or more needed.

Those of us in the construction industry can recall several years back when our activities accounted for upwards of 25 percent of local economic production. Now, but for a few government projects, many in this sector have been all but decimated economically.

These are not folks that have moved to Taos to enjoy the comforts of their retirement, most are anxiously looking for any legitimate means to provide for their families.

The opportunity for local contractors to work in the construction and installation phase of the Kit Carson Broadband initiative is nothing less than a God-send. In addition to the direct jobs, the dollars will flow through all segments of our economy to include providing needed gross receipts taxes to help keep our government services going as they deal with their own budget shortfalls.

Some question this investment, which is proper, we should question all investments and rate increases. But we should do so rationally and properly focus our time and resources judiciously.

For instance there has been the claim that there is "no plan." It is not likely that we could have won the largest stimulus investment in the state without a plan.

As a contractor closely following the construction phase, I can tell you it is evident that they are methodically rolling this out in a coordinated and planned manner.

The rate hike has also come under scrutiny. No one favors tax increases or rate hikes nor should we. However, the last thing we want to do is under fund the maintenance and investment in our electric infrastructure.

Such “cost savings” often lead to severe problems down the road on the scale of the gas outage we recently suffered. With the substantial increase of nearly all costs of doing business it a wonder that the co-op has yet to raise rates in 25 years.

It would be an interesting question to ask, “How is it that KCEC could have gone 25 years without raising rates?” And when they propose an increase, rates still remain below those of rural areas of similar size.

Perhaps, it is because they have in fact invested and managed wisely in their other divisions.

I don’t know, but we should see more facts before accusations are made. What is most important right now is to move this project forward and get people to work. We cannot afford to become distracted without a clear justifiable cause.

I can see, however, that there may be legitimate differences in outlook with regards to such policies as: the Broadband initiative to install fiber into every home; working to reduce propane costs for those that can least afford the expense; or helping low-income homes with subsidized electric rates.

But that is why we have scheduled elections. Over the years the majority of voting members apparently favored these policies.

In time meantime, while we await the next election, let’s get our neighbors to work!

Moises Martinez is a Taos business owner.