



THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

My Turn

It's about more than just the airport

Paul Christie

The Taos News, 12/4/2014

At this point I imagine many people who have been involved with the Taos Regional Airport expansion are going numb.

As the proponents say: it's been over 20 years we've been talking about expanding the airport. It's time to do something. They also say, we've had years and years of public comments – it's time to close the deal.

What they don't say is that, yes, we've had years and years of public comments — and they've been overwhelmingly negative. If we 'have to do something' lets finally put a stop to the project and focus our attention and money on the greater needs of our community — things like education and sustainable high wage economic development. And our acequias.

Everyone in the town government, with the notable exception of councilors Fritz Hahn and Judi Cantu, are for the expansion. After all, there's \$24 million from the feds waiting at the end of that particular rainbow. Problem is rainbows are ephemeral and as it turns out after we use up that money there will be precious few – if any – permanent jobs that will result from that investment.

Can you spell "trickle down"?

Because that is what the airport represents: the old debunked system of trickle-down economics where investors, all too often feeding at the government trough, make off with the meat and the rest of us left gnawing at the bones.

A \$24 million investment and we may see zero permanent jobs as a result?

Really?

And now, can you spell Taos Ski Valley? Because there's a tycoon up there who's going to be getting a brand new modern landing strip big enough to accommodate some real jets — jets big enough and fine enough to cater to other wealthy Wall Street tycoons. And he isn't shelling out a dime; not to construct it and not to maintain it. Nice deal for him, not so nice for the residents of Taos who will be maintaining the expanded airport. And not so nice for Taos Pueblo who will inevitably see more flights over Pueblo lands.

But we can't blame the tycoon. Who wouldn't be pushing for the same free ride?

The blame falls squarely on our elected leaders, and especially the dynamic duo who brought

us the command center fiasco and the annexation debacle. Yep, you guessed it, none other than councilors Andrew Gonzales and Fred Peralta. (Past time for them, by the way, to finally explain their support for both those issues).

And that brings me to the larger issue, namely who is ultimately responsible for the behavior of our elected officials. The town attorney? The town manager?

Hardly, since they both serve at the whim of the council.

There is only one arbiter of the behavior of our elected officials, and that is the very person reading this, or any other article in today's paper. "The people" starts with each and every one of us. We can't allow bad behavior from elected officials any more. If you don't like the way a councilor or commissioner votes, and you think s/he sold out to special interests, then you have a duty to speak out. And not just at the ballot box. There are bi-monthly town council and county commission meetings.

As Thomas Jefferson said, 'When the people fear their government you have tyranny; when the government fears the people you have democracy.'

We don't have to threaten or intimidate our elected officials ... we just need to hold them accountable and make them uncomfortable for their misdeeds.

Paul Christie is a resident of Taos. He writes he has been "an active member of this wonderful community for 20 years."