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My Turn

Airport expansion would be positive for Taos

John Wilson

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In response to Seth Brown's "Selling Taos" op-ed in the Dec. 4 issue, I can honestly say I've never read anything that more blatantly attempts to disguise personal opinion as fact. There are references to "our little group," "people at Taos Pueblo," "other two parts of our culture," "Phoenix orange groves," etc. Karl Rove would be proud of the letter's purported relating of the facts.

As to his curious reference to his home's lack of plumbing, I ask: "what is the point"?

I grew up with relatives who lived without running water, cooked on wood cook stoves and used outhouses. Their offspring do not look back on that detail of their young lives with yearning. They do not consider it a "badge of honor" but simply a matter of circumstance – one they would not choose to revert to.

Seth's brother-in-law built my house in 1989. Seth's brother was also very active in the construction industry here for years and his other family members have been or currently are dependent directly or indirectly on visitors to Taos to make their living. And there is certainly nothing wrong with that – it is simply a fact, a fact that most of us who live here deal with day to day and year to year.

I have been involved in four different types of businesses here and am currently a landlord of two small commercial properties which have not seen a rent increase in six years. I see my tenant's struggle every month trying to pay rent, utilities and labor and take home enough to pay personal bills.

We need renewed economic growth and vitality in Taos both to sustain our current residents and to retain our youth who find little economic vitality to keep them here. And a larger tax base to help fund education and infrastructure wouldn't hurt either.

In Paul Christie's letter of the same issue, "It's about more than just the airport," I found myself agreeing with the title, but that's about all. As a matter of transparency let me say that in years past I opposed both the airport expansion and the former golf course development in Las Colonias. I also currently support Amigos Bravos, The Taos Land Trust, CAV and a variety of conservation organizations. However, as good as the closing of the Moly mine will likely be for the health of the Red River it's been a huge blow to its former employees.

But Mr. Christie's criticism of the new owner of the Ski Valley does a disservice to the man's courage and foresight in investing in a major economic lynchpin of this community.

The Ski Valley in my opinion was in a desperate, downward financial spiral. Without Mr. Bacon's interest and investment in it we likely would never see the improvements necessary to make it once again a world class facility that attracts much needed skier/boarder visitors. And the potential loss of that employer would cripple this community irreparably. In Karon Fowler's letter (again the same issue) she honestly relates the thinking and decision-making that led to her group opening part of their facility in Questa. We need a lot more business like that and wouldn't it have been great if their entire facility were here? I imagine Questa residents looking for work would say yes.

Lastly as a former student pilot I am in favor of the airport expansion because of the safety factor. In July 2013 my instructor was killed in an accident at the Taos airport. A few months previous to that another pilot made an emergency landing and survived.

The new runway will provide a huge margin of safety for pilots whether they are wealthy or not, flying jets or small experimental "home-builts."

Also we have lots of jets that land in Taos on an almost daily basis. We seem to be living with that circumstance just fine.

The existing runway will continue to be the primary runway as it is oriented into the prevailing wind direction.

But there are many occasions when a crosswind runway would be a real god-send.

And if it just happens to convince more companies to open up their business here, or brings more visitors to the Ski Valley or results in the construction industry finally recovering for real and putting more people to work on building sites, at Randall's and at Ace, then that is a good and positive thing – in my opinion.

John Wilson has been a property owner and business owner in the town of Taos and Taos County since 1989.