

## Editorial

### **Airport expansion a lesson in Taos politics**

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Ah, the absurdity of politics in Taos. Case in point: the airport expansion. For starters, we have two governments: the town that owns the regional airport and the county, which must decide whether to grant a construction permit for a second runway. Never mind work on the \$24 million project, funded largely by the feds, has already started. First, the county planning director gave his approval. A group of residents appealed that decision to the county's planning commission, as is their right, and after that body gave its OK, they took it to the county commission, which held a hearing Tuesday (June 9).

The proposed airport expansion has been debated for decades, with the greatest opposition coming from Taos Pueblo before the tribe's concerns were resolved.

Then, the Crdova administration stirred up things when it tried to annex land in El Prado to make the airport contiguous to the town. That idea was dropped when the Barrone administration came into office last year.

So much time has passed, and the players have changed. The former assistant county attorney, who worked against the annexation, now is the town attorney who wants the expansion to go through. The county manager is now the town manager. A county commissioner is now the mayor.

Then there was the latest maneuver by the opponents' legal team, which claims commissioners Tom Blankenhorn and Jim Fambro should recuse themselves from discussing or voting on airport expansion.

Why? Because Blankenhorn and Fambro have said publicly in the past they would favor the expansion for safety reasons. Blankenhorn even wrote an op-ed in *The Taos News*. Fambro let his position about the airport be known when he campaigned for office last year.

County land use regulations state a commissioner can't participate in or vote on a matter if that person "prejudged or fixed his or her opinion on a matter prior to hearing the evidence and argument of all parties at the public hearing."

Blankenhorn and Fambro declined to recuse themselves. They stated they would weigh the evidence presented by both sides.

Yes, there is merit in expecting those in office to be unbiased when they make decisions for the public's good. Certainly, we have asked that of others.

But after three decades, who doesn't have an opinion about the airport? Certainly not the public officials caught in this fray.

We bet we aren't the only ones who wish this airport issue was finally resolved. However, we predict that won't happen any time soon. The commission continued the meeting until July because they want more information and a tour.

If the commission gives its approval, the case will likely next go to district court and maybe higher. Meanwhile, heavy equipment moves dirt at the airport and local resources continue to be wasted on this case.

Stay tuned for more. After all, this is Taos.

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