

Winter Magazine 2021

New Mexico Notes by Ruben Baca

BOOM! The Bull Is Back; Get Your Wish List Out

OIL AND NATURAL GAS PRICES

Trending Ahead of Forecast Oil Prices are on track to average

An off the charts increase in state revenue growth is now forecast, thanks to a consumer revival and the back to business boom in the oil fields of SE New Mexico.

HUGE STATE REVENUE SURGE FORECAST; Records Fall as Billions Pour In

Astounding sums are accumulating, and if the state's leadership can lay down some markers, we could finally see progress in the social conditions categories where we have languished for generations. Or we could put the money under the mattresses and miss the opportunity of the century, even with surpluses already at historic levels.

General fund receipts are forecast to hit a record-setting \$8.8 billion, making for a surplus of \$1.4 billion over the current budget of \$7.4 billion. Then there's that \$1.75 billion in federal pandemic money that MLG and the legislature are arguing about, but which will eventually be spent. Add in a \$335 million windfall for the new early childhood trust fund.

The largesse is so overwhelming that you wonder how the Governor can hold back a progressive agenda that now has the money and only lacks leadership to see it through. The Governor's agenda for the next legislative session could easily include:

— Finally financing a complete investment in detox facilities for opioids, alcohol and meth. **Beds everywhere needed and in the number they're needed**. That's a direct hit on the state's soaring rate of drug deaths and addiction (2020 saw another all-time high in overdoses) as well as on the drug-induced crime epidemic haunting the state. A call to arms on detox, rehab and early intervention would extinguish once and for all the plaintive cries that we "lack resources" to fight this plague.

— **Broadband now**. The last legislative session saw \$133 million go to broadband expansion. Now that amount can easily be doubled--or more. The problem? Leadership. The state still lacks agency and private sector coordination as well as a timeline for progress. Only a Governor can supply that leadership, and the silence remains deafening. If she can't get it going then legislators should move to have the state start building broadband on its own as has been done elsewhere.

— **The Department of Yazzie**. Well, it might not be called that but MLG and lawmakers could develop an entirely separate budget to comply with the landmark Yazzie lawsuit. That suit found New Mexico violating the constitutional requirement that it provide a solid education to everyone, including low income people of color who are continually left behind. The Governor and legislature have been slow-walking the enactment of Yazzie standards clearly laid out by the court. They no longer have money as their excuse .

Items that suddenly look less daunting include reducing the regressive state gross receipts tax; eliminating tax pyramiding; hiring an additional 1,000 state police officers; salary increases for critical positions such as CYFD caseworkers and drug rehab specialists.

BOOM POLITICS Fed Aid Adds to Treasure Trove

The Governor and Democratic majorities in the House and Senate earned a B grade their first three years. But now "A" is the standard by virtue of this financial fortune. New and old programs that require money annually now have it.

At least \$1.5 billion is forecast to flow into an already robust “Rainy Day Fund” that can be tapped in the event of a decline in future state revenues. Another excuse knocked down.

Effective management is, however, essential. The administration needs to bring onboard heavy hitters with experience, and stop the cabinet’s musical chairs. And beef up the Fourth Floor staff with some names that signal gravitas. And the LFC needs to dilute its stingy DNA and emphasize responsible plans for spending, not hoarding. Finally, about that second gubernatorial term. What exactly is the plan?

MANNY’S Money

Sheriff Manny got a reprieve but his Waterloo still lurks. That’s the takeaway from the decision of District Court Judge Bryan Biedscheid Friday as he kicked the ball out of his court and back to the ABQ city clerk over whether Gonzales will qualify for a crucial \$600,000 of public financing for his mayoral campaign coffers.

Biedscheid ruled that Manny did not get “due process” from the city clerk when he was denied public financing after his campaign was found to have submitted fraudulent donations to qualify for that financing.

The judge ordered Clerk Ethan Watson to redo the process or release the financing. Watson has until Friday to complete that redo, if he opts to do it. City Hall insiders think the clerk has the weight of the evidence on his side and that in a redo Gonzales still stands a good chance of being denied. Gonzales fired this salvo at Mayor Keller as the clerk weighed his next move:

“The Keller campaign is taking shamelessness to a whole new level by asking the Clerk to once again deny us funding, even after losing in court! There’s a big reason why. Tim Keller knows he can’t run on his record. Crime and homelessness are out of control. Keller and his clerk know that the only way he can win this election is to deny us funding in the hopes that voters will never hear the truth and learn about my vision for the future. To put it bluntly, these two elitist politicians are arrogantly trying to disenfranchise voters ...

- *Keller’s campaign stuck to their guns.*
- *The mounting evidence against Manny Gonzales should keep \$660,000 of taxpayer money from him.*
- *If the case does go against him even an undernourished and underdog Gonzales can be expected to stay standing, not by the exemplary campaign he is running, but because of the city crime crisis Mayor Keller continues to grapple with.*
- *There is one thing the sheriff can’t buy and that’s the time lost to the quarreling over campaign money. The topic makes most voter eyes glaze over just as he needs those eyes laser-focused on the sky high homicide numbers.*
- *Meanwhile, radio talker Eddy Aragon says he has raised \$34,000 from his listeners for his mayoral effort.*
- *Aragon also announced that he has nine fundraisers scheduled at which the minimum take is expected to be \$5,000 per event.*
- *Mayor Keller has qualified for the \$600,000 plus in public financing.”*

HAALAND Gets Hitched

Deb Haaland and Skip Sayre didn't have to wait long for a good omen to appear on their wedding day Saturday. A rainbow graced the skies at Hyatt Tamaya, the luxury resort at Santa Ana Pueblo near Bernalillo where the couple tied the knot. The newlyweds sported big smiles as they happily posed in front of the natural wonder.

Not surprisingly the couple were feted by numerous politicians including US Senator Elizabeth Warren and Native American Congresswoman Sharice Davids of Kansas .

Locals at the celebration included US Senator Ben Ray Lujan, US Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez, Mayor Tim Keller, Dem Party Chair Jessica Velasquez, state House Speaker Brian Egolf and State Auditor Brian Colón.

Haaland, 60, is a former ABQ congresswoman who was appointed the first Native American Secretary of Interior this year by President Biden .Sayre, in his 60's, heads up marketing and sales for New Mexico's Laguna Development Corporation which includes the Route 66 Casino. Haaland is an enrolled member of Laguna Pueblo. Haaland and Sayre were united in marriage by their friend Rob Kurz, a businessman and pastor who received his doctorate in ministry from Denver Seminary.

Haaland's wedding dress was designed and sewn by her sister.

The couple travel often as part of Secretary Haaland's duties. When they're not on the road they can be found at their homes in DC and Los Ranchos.

UPCOMING Events

Good news! Looks like Sandia Resort and Casino will be the location of the 2022 NMPMA Convention and Trade Show on **August 22-24, 2022**. Please save the date.

I want to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas, and a safe and prosperous New Year.