

Creating A Culture of Responsibility
By Diane Denish, New Mexico Lieutenant Governor

“A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.” Dwight D. Eisenhower

There may be those who believe that New Mexico state government has come close to losing both. There is no doubt that we have seen instances where some elected officials and state employees have valued privileges above principles in the past few years. It must stop. These individuals have weakened the public trust and that is unacceptable. The question is what’s to be done?

There is no doubt that some New Mexicans have lost faith in their state government and the burden is on all of us in elected office to earn it back. We must create in Santa Fe a culture of duty, a culture of transparency. **A culture of responsibility.**

First, we must establish a Governmental Standards Commission. This will be an independent commission, similar to the judiciary’s Judicial Standards Commission. The Governmental Standards Commission will have the authority to investigate ethics complaints and will be armed with subpoena power to get straight answers from government officials. It will have the authority to impose stiff penalties on those found guilty of wrongdoing.

But in addition to investigating complaints and punishing those who abuse the public’s trust, we must also make sure that everyone who works on the taxpayers’ dime understands the responsibility they assume as a public servant. New Mexico state employees must agree not only to always obey the law – but to always conduct themselves in an open, honest and transparent manner. In order to earn the trust of the people they serve, public employees must be held to the highest standard.

Second, this Governmental Standards Commission will be responsible for establishing a Uniform Code of Governmental Standards that will apply to all state officials, state employees and appointees. The Commission will develop a mandatory training programs on the Governmental Standards so all state employees understand these ethical standards.

The great majority of people in government want to do the right thing but there may be times when they are unsure of what is the right thing. Education and training can help provide the foundation needed to deal with difficult situations.

The New Mexico Supreme Court will nominate a pool of candidates from which members of the Commission will be selected by the Executive and Legislative branches. This non-partisan pool of candidates, selected by the Court, will help take politics out of the selection process – and eliminate some the problems confronted by establishing such a commission in the past.

The third step in the process is to establish a state Sunshine Portal, an online command center to ensure that state government is open and transparent. The Sunshine Portal will:

- Allow the press and public to see how tax dollars are spent by agencies;
- Track capital outlay projects from appropriation to expenditure;
- List all scheduled open meetings;
- Include an accessible contractor database;
- Allow the press and public to review all state issued contracts;
- Include a Statebook networking site where all state employees with decision making capacity will have a page including their responsibilities and contact information;
- Include a salary database for exempt employee salary database;
- Include a section for constituents to voice opinions.

Justice Lewis Brandeis said *Sunshine is the best disinfectant* and I believe we need to take that statement to heart and apply it here in the land of enchantment.

Like most New Mexico families, our state government is experiencing challenging economic times, and some may say now is not the time to consider such new initiatives. But in order for the Government to effectively create new jobs, reduce the cost of health care, strengthen our education system – or provide any of the services we count on government to provide – it must have the trust of New Mexicans.

Public service is a high calling. It's time for those who share that belief to stand up and demand the **culture of responsibility** in Santa Fe that New Mexicans deserve.