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Mayor Does Not Have the Secret to Success at APS

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The Journal reports that the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce supports giving the mayor power to appoint three of the seven board members for Albuquerque Public Schools.

We believe this is a bad idea, much as we believed the Chamber's magic bullet ideas in 2001 on how to improve education in the state of New Mexico were bad.

The Chamber's ideas were implemented and essentially have had no effect so far. New Mexico is still ranked almost at the bottom of the national report card (number 48 on the National Assessment of Education Progress). The Chamber's magic bullets have not resulted in an increase in student achievement.

Other worthy projects are underway to do that. In fact, we believe that the state has been extraordinarily lucky to have an excellent secretary of education, Veronica Garcia. She and her staff have survived a mass exodus from the Public Education Department, and still managed to initiate some very good and meaningful programs to pull New Mexico out of the cellar. Even with the uphill battle they have fought, we have great confidence that they shall do so.

Education improvement is a very difficult task for both the state and for APS. But, for APS, there is no evidence that simply replacing all or part of the APS school board will improve student performance and fiscal responsibility.

Mayor Martin Chavez and the Chamber certainly mean well. They do not, however, have special knowledge about education. The Chamber's specialty is business. A mayor's specialty is politics and city administration. Good intentions are simply not enough.

Now, the Chamber is encouraging the Mayor's Office to implement his magic bullet with the Albuquerque Public Schools. How? By replacing three of the seven board members with mayoral appointees.

The Chamber's position paper says in part, "APS, the community, students and the board itself can only benefit if deliberations are better informed through the addition of a broad spectrum of professional points of view."

We disagree; the board members appointed by the mayor would be beholden to the mayor, serving at the mayor's pleasure, and would follow the mayor's wishes concerning education.

And why would we expect that "professionals" would be appointed? Were a future mayor truly knowledgeable as to the educational requirements of APS, then this might improve APS education. But

a mayor — any mayor — is not necessarily knowledgeable regarding educational needs and complexities.

Right now, board members are elected from districts, each of which does have special needs. Every board member is required to go through training on how school boards can best operate. They will make mistakes, but will learn as they go, and with staggered elections, they cannot do significant harm if they do make mistakes.

If they do not do their jobs properly, there is already a mechanism for turning them out. It is called voting. If the mayor is empowered to appoint three of these people, they will not be answerable to you or me ó the public. They will be answerable to the mayor.

They may change every time a new mayor is elected so that each can shoot a new magic bullet at education. Additionally, the remaining four APS board members will represent a much larger areas with a near certain chance of effectively disenfranchising rural Bernalillo county voters.

There are better ways. Clearly, the Mayor's Office and APS should cooperate. That is Imperative. But, the key term is cooperate. Not take near control, as Chavez proposes.

Please do not misunderstand. We do not wish for fiscal irresponsibility or decreased educational effectiveness. Quite the opposite. We simply believe that the mechanism already exists for improvement.

We do not need any more magic bullets from people who know little about the complexities of education in New Mexico.

Instead — please — everybody vote. Not just the usual 10 percent. In February, vote for someone who you think is qualified to help direct APS down the right path.