

Talking out the issues

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
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Rep. Steve Pearce shares plans for NM gubernatorial bid

On a day when most Americans across the country were spending time with family and friends while cheering on their respective football teams, Congressman Steve Pearce was in northwestern New Mexico to talk about his gubernatorial campaign.

His Feb. 4 visit to Gallup focused on the economy, education, poverty and crime in the state, including solutions to the inter-related issues.

At the core of these matters is strengthening families and protecting natural resources, and keeping an educated workforce from leaving the state in pursuit of employment opportunities elsewhere.

Raising the minimum wage, Pearce said, is not the answer.

“I would rather improve the number of jobs,” he said. “What I would do is make it to where entry level workers progress up and get into higher paying jobs. The minimum wage was never meant to be a living wage, it was just a starting point.”

Bolstering middle college opportunities for students, including apprenticeship programs and training is the answer, he said. The same opportunities can be applied to the underlying problems of crime, he added.

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"We've lost the mobility from the minimum wage into the higher paying jobs and that's what I'd try to re-establish," Pearce said.

With 30 to 32 percent of the state's economy dependent upon the oil and gas markets, it's time to find other sources of income, he explained.

At one time, there were more than 120 mills operating in the rural areas of New Mexico, he said.

"I would definitely start cutting trees again," Pearce said. "In doing that, (we will) improve our watershed and make it to where our streams and aquifers are just recharged naturally. Water is a huge problem for the future."

Building a refinery for oil and gas would keep those industries from leaving the state and improve the economy, he contends.

"We ship our oil to Houston and make it one of the richest cities on earth," he said. "I think we should be helping our people instead of helping Houston."

Manufacturing copper and keeping the precious metal from leaving the state is another area of pursuit the lawmaker believes will help turn the economy around. Pearce also supports uranium mining.

"Those are some of the rural aspects of the economy. I would also get a hi-tech component that would (include) the spaceport and the film industry," Pearce said. "The main objective in all of this is to keep the next generation here."

Poverty is not the root issue of crime, he said. Instead, he believes that getting people off of drugs will begin dealing with the underlying issue: addiction.

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“I think getting people back in the workforce is going to help and again, the apprenticeship program is going to be key,” he said. “Getting a job when you get out of jail is one of the best indicators that you’ll stay out of jail.”

Pearce has a wealth of knowledge from his various life experiences aside from representing the 2nd District of New Mexico.

He served in combat as a pilot during the Vietnam War and flew more than 518 hours of combat flight and 77 hours of combat support. Pearce was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Air Medals and seven other medals and exceptional service awards and attained the rank of captain during his military service.

Pearce said a cornerstone of American life was the key to building wealth.

“I’ve been taking the lead nationwide on Native American housing,” he said. “That’s how my family made our way out of the pit, one little old house at a time. And if it worked for us, I believe that we can help alleviate poverty and get people basic living conditions.”

Pearce was referring to HR 3864, the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2017, which he sponsored and introduced in the House on Sept. 28, 2017.

He said New Mexico tribes must diversify the holdings and not rely solely on gaming revenue.

“I think that one of the tremendous things, one of the unique things about New Mexico is this unique mixture of Tribes, Hispanics, Anglos, whatever. We just seem to get along for the last 400 years,” Pearce said.

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“There have been some ups and downs, but basically, I think we can set a tone for the entire nation on working together across political lines, racial lines, cultural lines, religious lines,” he added.

In another effort to support tribes in the region, Pearce said he pushed for the distribution of Ft. Wingate.

“The Department of Defense was stalling that out for years. So we put in language last year, again into the National Defense Authorization Act, to distribute this land,” he said. “That’s economic vitality along the interstate.

“One tremendous aspect is that for Zunis, it’s their only touch on an interstate in their whole tribal holdings. For them, it has opportunity,” Pearce said. “I think that it’s a magnificent spot for the Navajos, too.”

Hailing from a district that touts 34 percent Republicans, Pearce’s uncanny ability to win is again rooted in his hardworking blue-collar ethic.

“I win because I show up. I have a good heart for the rural areas.”

Traveling the state and speaking to constituents along the way, Pearce said he has 150 pages of single spaced issues that he is prepared to resolve as governor of the Land of Enchantment.

Information: www.peopleforpearce.com

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