Legislative and Policy Perspective

Mary Kay Papen, New Mexico Senate President Pro Tempore

Mary "Kay" Papen is a democratic member of the New Mexico Senate representing the 38th District in Doña Ana County since 2001. She is the current President pro tempore of the Senate being sworn in on January 15, 2013. She studied history at the University of Colorado, has a BS in horticulture and completed master's coursework from NMSU. Currently, Senator Papen is a member of the Mesilla Valley Rotary Club, board member of First Step Center and co-chair of First Step Capital Campaign. She is also on NMSU's Health Sciences Advisory Board and board member St. Luke's Clinic. Her legislative positions include: past vice-chair of the Senate Education Committee and past chair of the Water and Natural Resources Sub-Committee on Water Adjudication. Current positions include Chair of the New Mexico Finance Committee Oversight Committee, member of the Senate Finance Committee, and chair of the Health and Human Services Sub-Committee on Behavioral Health.

Editor's Note: The following paper represents a transcription of the speakers' remarks made at the conference; no follow-up papers were submitted by the speaker. Remarks were edited for publication by the editor. The speaker did not review this version of their presentation, and the editor is responsible for any transcription and editing errors.

Sam, thank you for that introduction. I appreciate it, and I appreciate so much being here today, and being able to speak to you. I have been a fan of the NM WRRI ever since I came into the legislature, and have been trying to give capital outlay to their projects and what they are doing in their research. I really believe in the work they are doing, and their cooperation with other schools, and students being able to get together and work on projects together. So, Sam I applaud you. Thank you.

The wise and efficient use of water is one of New Mexico's important policy issues, and water issues have been one of my priorities as a legislator. Water policy issues impact every New Mexican. Whether it is a farmer in southern New Mexico worried about the allotment from the Rio Grande, or a student in Albuquerque who is worried about water bills. Water policy touches the life of every New Mexican and it touches it every day. I'll admit water policy issues aren't generally a captivating topic. For most, the widespread need for water infrastructure, investment, and long-term planning feels like an insurmountable problem. For policymakers it is not just the technical challenges that cause difficulties in proposing solutions. We can't change the weather or pull water out of thin air.

Navigating the multiple stakeholders, whether governmental or not, centuries of cultural historic rights, and federal and state regulations, create an environment where it is difficult to create solutions that are comprehensive and appease all the stakeholders. We can't ignore the issues because they are hard. With drought becoming the new normal, we need to get aggressive with managing and planning for this very limited resource, and at the very top of the to-do list is figuring out how water works. Where does it come from, and where does it go? How much to we get when it rains? How much do we lose when it's hot? How do we take seemingly useless water and turn it into water that we can use? How much can we use at the oil rig? How much can we use in the alfalfa field, or on the suburban lawn before it crosses that hazy line between use and waste? There are basic questions we must answer if we want to stretch our meager supplies to all of us who need it. We need to know more if we want to balance the competing interest of farmers, cities, industry and the environmentalist. And, while we might not agree about what is the most important way to use our water, I think that everyone understands that all uses have some value and we need to do all we can to not to cut anyone off. The Water Resources Research Institute has been working on these questions since the last great drought in

New Mexico in the 1950s through collaboration among universities and colleges, local, state and federal agencies, national laboratories, stakeholder groups and collaboration impressive in its breadth. This group has been doing the heavy lifting on water research in New Mexico for more than half a century. Their short list of projects includes research on brackish waters resources, quality in desalination, safe water reuse, and produced water from oil and natural gas production, including fracking. They fund thousands of dollars in independent research projects across the state. Their most ambitious project in the Statewide Water Assessment, a comprehensive and detailed modeling of New Mexico's water resources, will answer the big questions of supply and demand. This is critical to New Mexico's water future. Before we can completely manage the resource, we need more information. The assessment project includes scientists and researchers from New Mexico State University, New Mexico Tech, University of New Mexico, Sandia National Labs, U.S. Geological Survey, the State Engineer, and many other organizations. I know New Mexico has been very involved in saline water, as well as measuring precipitation and evapotranspiration, groundwater recharge and storage, surface flow, and water used to establish a holistic view of New Mexico's water. Based on stream flow alone, assessments will quantify the flow coming into and leaving New Mexico. This would provide water managers the data they need to balance the demand and the supply of water. As you know, at the last session the governor requested an unprecedented amount of capital outlay funding of $89 million dedicated specifically for water infrastructure projects. In addition, I was able to secure $1 million dedicated specifically to NM WRRI, the majority of which has been spent on research to develop a statewide water assessment. This assessment will provide the hard science that makes good water planning and management possible, the first of its kind in New Mexico. The water assessment NM WRRI is developing will be a living document being updated yearly to provide comprehensive, dynamic, and science-based information to help legislators, policymakers, and stakeholders make the very best decisions to one of the state's most limited and precious resource—water. In the coming 2015 legislative session, I will be seeking $2 million for NM WRRI, and I might add that our funds are way down. Oil and gas are down, and we are praying hard that we will get the $2 million. Everyone keep your fingers crossed on that. We need this to continue the research and development on desal, brackish water analysis, fracking water use analysis, faculty and student water research grants to support projects we are doing that statewide, and confront the pressing water issues. I just bought the book on water wars that NM WRRI has out there and plan to read that. I think that also gives a wonderful background on where this water war is. This collaborative effort to move forward the research and development of long-term solutions to one of New Mexico's most pressing resource needs is absolutely paramount. As we work to create technical solutions, we must also continue to work together to repair the fragmented and insufficient system for managing water project planning. Investing in water infrastructure is meaningless if it is not effective. While it is true that we can't change the weather, we can do a better job of managing our water resources for the most efficient and effective use, and creating an infrastructure for the future, which is likely to be hotter and drier than ever before. This is not a patrician issue. It is not even a regional issue. This is a quality-of-life issue and a critical economic issue. No one wants to see southern New Mexico farmers forced to decide what crops to let die, or see state parks close because your lakes are dry, or see urban areas turned into deserts. Policymakers, water scientists, water managers, the soccer mom, and the oil engineer, all New Mexicans need to commit to a water secure future for New Mexico. We need to work together, and we need your creativity to address these issues. Thank you so very much and I wish you success on your projects here today, and trying to fill out and look at other solutions that we can come to.

Thank you so very much.