

Albuquerque Journal Guest Columns
N.M. needs an ethics commission

By Viki Harrison / Executive Director, Common Cause New Mexico | Sat, Aug 10, 2013
The people deserve a strong, bipartisan, transparent panel

In Harvey Yates' op-ed published in the Journal on August 1, Yates calls for an oversight committee to be established in New Mexico "with authority to investigate alleged bad acts within New Mexico government."

We could not agree more.

While the majority of elected officials in New Mexico are honest, hard-working people, the few that skim the edges of the law and do not conduct themselves as the citizens believe they should are basically left to do as they please with no oversight from the Legislature or the executive branch.

Common Cause New Mexico, along with the League of Women Voters of New Mexico, the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government and other good government groups, supports a truly independent ethics commission to hear cases of corruption, mismanagement of state funds and ethical concerns by the public.

We are ready to support a comprehensive bill that would accomplish such a commission without infringing on anyone's First Amendment rights.

New Mexico is one of only nine states without an ethics commission, and New Mexicans deserve a strong, independent, bipartisan ethics commission that operates transparently.

For many years numerous legislators have attempted to pass an independent ethics commission, only to see their efforts fail. Unfortunately, some of the proposed legislation allowed the commission to keep almost its entire work secret – while threatening whistleblowers with fines and jail time for speaking out.

Common Cause New Mexico has worked diligently on a model ethics commission bill, and we are working to see it introduced in the upcoming legislative session.

Common Cause New Mexico is a non-partisan nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring the core values of American democracy, reinventing an open, honest and accountable government that serves the public interest and empowering ordinary people to make their voices heard in the political process.