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Jul 31, 2014, 2:42pm MDT

Viewpoint: Why Paul Gessing says a right-to-work law is key to economic recovery

Paul Gessing, Guest Opinion

Recently, site-selection expert [John Boyd](#) was interviewed about New Mexico's chances for getting the Tesla "gigafactory." His comments were very enlightening. He said that manufacturing companies seek reasons to eliminate states when considering where to build major facilities, and the lack of a [right to work law](#) is at the top of the list. In the interview, Boyd again reiterated the need for right to work stating, "I can't underscore how critical right to work status is."

Unfortunately, despite polling data (recently released by Rio Grande Foundation) showing that nearly 85 percent of New Mexicans support such laws, they are controversial. In reality, such laws merely prohibit unions and employers teaming up to force new employees to join a union as a condition of employment.

While most people see voluntary association as an American birthright, many unions see it as a dire threat to their funding and political power. So they kill it every year in its first committee in Santa Fe.

Equally problematic is the "go-along" attitude of so many of New Mexico's business leaders. With 6,000 Tesla jobs hanging in the balance, the need for our legislature to pass a right-to-work law should have been a centerpiece of the recent "Reinventing Our City" conference on Albuquerque's economy, but it was hardly mentioned by the business and community leaders who spoke at the meeting. To be fair, Mayor [Berry](#) has repeatedly noted the importance of right to work in other venues.

Any serious discussion of how to turn around New Mexico's economy must focus on big, difficult issues like right to work, serious tax reform and a dramatic rethinking of the way in which we educate our children and prepare them for the competitive 21st century workforce.

Rather than taking on these difficult but important issues (right to work is actually the simplest and likely the most politically viable short-term reform), New Mexico's statewide chamber, ACI, has recently focused its attention on government contracting. The Chamber is upset that New Mexico's in-state contractor preference is inadequate and not adhered to closely enough.

I certainly appreciate that businesses want a fair shot at government contracts, but as state taxpayers we should get the best deal possible regardless of where the business is located. Taxpayers shouldn't be forced to pay above-market prices for government services and

construction.

Businesses also have amazing ways of making themselves appear to be in-state when in fact they are not. Do we really want to hire a team of taxpayer-funded investigators to check up on businesses to make sure they are truly "New Mexican?" Simply put, government contracting reform is not going to have a major impact on New Mexico's economy one way or the other.

The silver lining about New Mexico's ongoing weak economic recovery is that more and more people are realizing that our state has depended on Washington's largesse for way too long. That situation is changing both due to federal budget problems and the retirement of Senators [Domenici](#) and [Bingaman](#).

This is the time for solutions and that means facing some tough decisions. As explained by Mr. Boyd, a national expert on business relocation, a right-to-work law is a must for any state that wants to grow its economy. It is time for our business and political leaders to upset the entrenched special interests that have been holding our state back for so long.

The alternative is a future of government dependency and poverty.

[Paul Gessing](#) is the President of New Mexico's Rio Grande Foundation. The Rio Grande Foundation is an independent, non-partisan, tax-exempt research and educational organization dedicated to promoting prosperity for New Mexico based on principles of limited government, economic freedom and individual responsibility. Share your thoughts by commenting below or emailing letters to the editor or opinion column submissions to Editor-in-Chief [Rachel Sams](#) at rsams@bizjournals.com.

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