

## Hinkle leaves Chamber for Council of Governments

Written by By Chrissy Largo Gallup Sun Correspondent  
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David Hinkle, now the former president for the Gallup-McKinley Chamber of Commerce, recently announced his departure after nearly two years of service.

He has a new role as economic development program manager for the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments.

He talks with the Sun about why he left and what his goals are for the upcoming new year.

**Sun:** Why did you decide to leave the Chamber of Commerce?

**Hinkle:** A wonderful opportunity arose for me to work in regional economic development with the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments. It was an opportunity that doesn't come around every day and it is a closer match for my interests, education and skills.

I love Chamber of Commerce work. It is just absolutely wonderful. It is helping people and I am very glad to say that the membership is strong and energized. There is nothing that could derail that. They are on the right track. They got plenty of money and they got the best staff that I've ever worked with.

**Sun:** Is there anybody that will immediately fill your former position?

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**Hinkle:** Not right now, probably after Christmas. There are several highly qualified people, from the local area, either temporarily or permanently, and they are just really top-quality individuals. I will still be working in and living in Gallup. I will still work in McKinley County but I will also be working with Cibola and San Juan Counties. I will still be doing the same stuff, but I will be working on a regional basis rather than a county-wide basis.

**Sun:** What will your new role entail at COG?

**Hinkle:** I will be the economic development program manager for the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments. Economic development, in general, is working to improve the economic conditions of the citizens of McKinley, San Juan and Cibola counties. So I will work to bring new jobs and higher paying jobs into the region and work with the existing employers to help them create more jobs.

The Council of Governments is an association of all the counties, three counties, McKinley, San Juan, and Cibola, and all of the cities that are within. I am really doing the same thing. There really isn't a difference in what I am doing. The only difference is that now I am working with three counties instead of one. It is a big territory but it is always what I've done. I was the Deputy Director for the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and this a little closer to that role, but not nearly as big as in area or number of clients.

And it will also be working with the Native American tribes, it is all of the governmental organizations and business sectors in northwest New Mexico. We are trying to help uplift the economy, through the creation of jobs and the retention of the businesses.

**Sun:** You touched on how COG will help to work with Native American tribes, how does COG plan on doing that?

**Hinkle:** Well, they are a big part of the economy, in New Mexico, and particularly, in Northwest New Mexico.

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For instance, the Navajo Nation is big into mining and natural resources, and mostly all the other tribes are too. They also got a real interest in creating jobs that will improve job opportunities for their tribal members, as well as helping the general economy grow.

We are reaching out and we continue to do so. There has always been a big effort and we've worked with all of the Nations. We have a continuing outreach and all we got to do is work harder to expand the economic opportunities for all citizens and working with the tribes because they got a lot of resources, that they can also put towards this effort. It makes sense that we all work together, towards the same goal.

I met with the Navajo Nation not too long ago, while I was still at the Chamber, but we were talking and I said, 'you know, it is not practical to have a prosperous Navajo Nation inside a poverty stricken county and it is not possible to have a prosperous county with a poverty stricken Navajo Nation. We have to do things that raise all ships and that we all got to work together.'

I'm a member of the Choctaw Nation, I know how difficult this all is. You look at all the missed opportunities and all the potential. We have just got to keep reaching out. If you were looking at the non-Native population, they've got to recognize that the Nations have to prosper and the Nations have to recognize that yeah, there is going to be other people that prosper but there is no way to shut each other out while we are living in each other's geographical boundaries.

When the Navajo prospers, Gallup prospers. When Gallup prospers, Navajo prospers and Zuni and Laguna. We are all part of this same economy.

**Sun:** Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

**Hinkle:** I lived here in the Gallup-McKinley area for nearly two years now. I was educated at Oklahoma State University with a bachelor's and master's degree in business. Over the last 30 years, I have been working in economic development organizations, both large and small and also, in banking.

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**Sun:** What are your goals for 2016?

**Hinkle:** If I had to look at something and say one thing that would really define my philosophy, the goal would be is to improve the economic welfare of the citizens of Northwest New Mexico. It would simply be that the service to others is the highest goal and achievement that you could have.

Chamber of Commerce Board member, Neal Butler, has worked with Hinkle within the year, and he said, "It was pleasure working with him in the past year, on the Chamber Board, and I wish him all the luck in the world with COG."