

Rep. Patty Lundstrom reacts to removal from House Appropriations, Finance Committee

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Rep. Patty Lundstrom, D-Gallup, was not expecting to be removed from her position as chairwoman of the House Appropriations and Finance Committee, but that's exactly what happened on the first day of the new legislation session Jan. 17.

In an interview with the *Sun*, Lundstrom confirmed that the new Speaker of the House Javier Martinez, D-Albuquerque, stripped her of her title during an evening floor session on committee assignments.

Two weeks following the removal, Lundstrom said she is still shocked by the decision.

"I think generally speaking I'm still incredibly disappointed because there's so many things I could contribute to that committee," she said. "[I'm] very disappointed, and as I watch some of the activities and the process it just seems to me that [there are] clearly some things I could have added to it."

She explained why being on the Appropriations and Finance Committee was important to her.

"I think what drives all legislation in New Mexico is the budget," Lundstrom said. "At the end of the day if there's not money to implement ideas, then all they are is ideas. And that's why it was

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so critical to be on the budget committee and actually chairing it because it was a representation of our area, of McKinley County and the whole northwest corner and all the Native Americans in that area”

Despite the removal from Appropriations and Finance, Lundstrom is still on the House Transportation, Public Works, and Capital Improvements Committee, and now she is also on the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee.

The new committee she’s on will allow her to work on infrastructure and roads, all things that she said Gallup needs to see improvement on. She is still working with Public Private Partnerships, which gets private entities involved with things around the community, including infrastructure development.

Roads are also something she can focus on with her new committee. Lundstrom said working on building more lanes on I-40 is a top priority for her.

“I think that would greatly help us [in McKinley County],” she said. “I mean there’s been people who have been stuck on I-40 for hours whenever there’s a problem.”

Local issues present new opportunities for Lundstrom. She’s also planning on taking a look at the local economic development projects, such as the construction on Carbon Coal Road and the former Escalante Power Plant possibly being turned into a hydrogen plant. She added she wants to help the arts community fund creative arts programs, as well as obtain funding for the Rehoboth McKinley Christian Hospital.

Despite the new things she’s looking to tackle, Lundstrom said she’s going to miss being involved in how things were funded in New Mexico.

“I won’t have nearly as much influence on how things are funded,” she said. “But what little [capital outlay] I get I will certainly fan out to the folks who need help.”

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While she is looking forward, Lundstrom also wanted to take some time to comment on Martinez's actions and how he handled the situation. She said she was only given a warning of the change 20 minutes before he made the announcement.

"He wasn't even going to give me the courtesy of talking to me ahead of time, and it was another legislator who encouraged him to do that. It's just a terrible situation because there's no respect for my seniority," Lundstrom said. "In the old days seniority mattered because that meant experience matters. And I don't think he cared about that or recognized that."

Lundstrom said she has her suspicions about why she was removed from the committee.

"I think I was let go from the position because my political philosophies are very different," Lundstrom said. "I'm pretty conservative when it comes to how money is spent because it's taxpayers' money, it's not my money, and I want to make sure we're getting a good return on investment."

Lundstrom said that regardless of what committees she's on, she is still going to fight for the people of McKinley County.

"People have put me here to represent them and that's exactly what I'm going to do," she said. "I'm sure our leadership here was hoping I'd leave, but I'm not going to do that. My spirit is not broken and I'm going to be fighting as hard for people in McKinley County as I always have."

Martinez did not return a call asking for a comment about Lundstrom's removal by press time.

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