

Senator frustrated with UNM's decision to terminate GON contract

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 20 May 2016 09:23

The University of New Mexico proudly calls itself our state's "Flagship University" with good reason. It offers students unparalleled educational opportunities and has long been a leader in conducting research and providing health care.

But UNM's recent decision to terminate its contract to host the annual Gathering of Nations Pow Wow at The Pit showed a bizarre lack of judgment — and unintentionally created what teachers call "an educable moment."

David Harris, the university's executive vice president, claims the university had been losing money on the deal. After this year's event, the university was nearly \$2,400 in the red for cleanup expenses after the event. Frankly, that sum amounts to a rounding error in a university budget totaling \$2.6 billion.

When we're talking about jeopardizing an event that supports jobs and provides a \$20 million shot in the arm to New Mexico's economy, the math just doesn't add up. What was the real reason behind this decision? Why couldn't the pow wow's contract have been renegotiated to cover all the expenses — or even generate income for the university?

New Mexico residents deserve a more plausible explanation.

Here's what we do know: New Mexico's economy is hurting. And UNM has been doing its part to improve the economic picture by supporting initiatives like Innovate ABQ that could help jump-start new industries in our state. Given those facts, canceling an event that draws thousands of visitors from across the country harms the economy, shows disrespect for our Native American citizens and gives New Mexico another black eye in the national news media is nothing short of an unforced error on UNM's part.

Gathering of Nations organizers say they want to keep the event in Albuquerque and are in negotiations to find a new home. Meanwhile, it's time for UNM's leadership to get their house in order and put all their cards on the table. The people of New Mexico expect nothing less.

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State Senator

George Muñoz