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A Roadmap for the Twenty First Century

A Review Essay on *New Mexico 2050*



TOM UDALL, UNITED STATES SENATOR

New Mexico has a proud and unique heritage. We also face great challenges—in education, healthcare, economy, and in the changing dynamics of a historically rural state. *New Mexico 2050*, ably edited by Fred Harris, shows a hard road ahead for New Mexico, one we can navigate with sustained vision and commitment. We owe that to future generations. At its core, this compelling book asks a vital question: What kind of state will we leave the next generation?

New Mexico 2050 takes a hard look at where the state is and where it needs to go. In a series of provocative essays, two critical themes emerge. First, diversity characterizes New Mexico. The state's landscapes, history, natural resources, and culture have a vitality that no other state can match. These attributes have been, and continue to be, a source of enterprise and creativity. Within that diversity, however, there is great disparity of income, education, and opportunity.

New Mexico 2050. Edited by Fred Harris. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015. xiv + 338 pp. 13 charts, 18 tables, epilogue, contributors, index. \$19.95 paper, ISBN 978-0-8263-5555-3.) Sen. Tom Udall began serving as United States Senator in 2009, after two decades of public service as U.S. Representative and New Mexico's State Attorney General. Throughout his career, Senator Udall has been a strong advocate for the hardworking families of New Mexico, for a clean energy economy and the environment, for affordable and accessible health care, and for our nation's veterans. He has fought for college affordability and the resources to ensure every student who works hard in high school can go to college or learn a trade to be competitive in the workforce. He has also been a leader in the fight for campaign finance reform and for making government more accountable to the American people, not the special interests. Senator Udall serves on five committees: Appropriations, Foreign Relations, Commerce, Indian Affairs, and Rules and Administration.

One of the state's greatest challenges is to close those gaps. Second, and relatedly, New Mexico's future depends on critical investments in infrastructure and in addressing the pressing needs of the twenty first century. The road forward requires innovation, new partnerships, and a commitment to the long haul, not the quick fix.

Building a stronger, healthier state requires cooperation. From water scarcity management to improving child wellbeing to building a twenty-first-century economy, New Mexico has a lot of work to do. As a former U.S. Senator, Harris knows as well as anyone that politics is the art of standing your ground while also finding common ground. As we look to the next mid-century point, New Mexico must especially strive to improve child wellbeing. New Mexico tragically lags behind the rest of the nation in access to healthcare, infant mortality, school readiness, and household income, all key measurements of how children and families are faring. This troubling situation has to change. The future of New Mexico—not just for its children, but for its economy—depends on this.

Each of the thoughtful essays in *New Mexico 2050* examines the challenges New Mexico faces in an optimistic way. I agree. We can. However, there is another reality. Not everyone shares this confidence. Most people are not sure it can be done. Two out of three New Mexican voters stayed home in the last election. There are many reasons why this happened, including too much money in New Mexican elections and the need for campaign finance reform, which I have long pushed for. Too few New Mexican citizens see how established institutions make a difference in their lives or how the government works for them.

It is up to us to change that. Local, state, and federal governments along with the private sector must make tough choices and bring something to the table. We will not always agree. Nevertheless, New Mexicans must act under the assumption that they can build a stronger state only if they stop pointing fingers and agree to solve problems together. New Mexico has great challenges, but we also have great opportunities, and we must seize them. *New Mexico 2050* begins a necessary dialogue and is an important starting point to moving our state forward.