Poll: New Mexico Business Leaders Concerned About Ethical Behavior of Elected Officials and Support Solutions

February 7, 2016 – Albuquerque, N.M. and Washington, D.C. – Today, a poll of New Mexico business leaders found widespread concern with the history of unethical behavior from New Mexico’s elected officials, the impact that big campaign donors have on state government and how contracts are awarded in the state. They believe that the campaign finance system needs significant reform and voiced support for proposals that increase transparency of lobbying, disclosure of contributions and spending in elections. They also advocate creating an ethics commission and reforming the state’s gross receipts tax laws and exemptions to prevent favoritism. The poll was sponsored by the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED), a nonpartisan, business-led public policy organization, and conducted by Research & Polling, Inc.

250 business leaders from across the state were surveyed between January 13th and 27th. Highlights are as follows:

- 91% believe New Mexico has had a very or somewhat serious issue with the ethical behavior of state elected officials over the past 20 years; 57% think the state has had a very serious issue.
- 74% strongly or somewhat agree that too many government contracts in the state are awarded on the basis of political influence rather than merit; 29% strongly agree.
- 86% strongly or somewhat support continuing to place limits on how much individuals and PACs can give to candidates; 59% strongly support.
- 55% say the state’s campaign finance system needs a complete overhaul or major reform; 17% want a complete overhaul.
- 61% think New Mexico’s elected officials are more responsive to lobbyists than to voters.
- 86% said big campaign donors have at least some impact on state government corruption; 41% said they have a great deal of impact.

“The business community spoke definitively in this poll: They support common sense reforms that increase transparency and accelerate ethics reform,” said Ray Smith, President of Klinger Constructors LLC.

Many of the poll questions mentioned above were also asked in the February 2015 CED poll of New Mexico business leaders. A comparison of the 2015 and 2016 poll reveals a now-greater sense of pessimism in multiple areas. Takeaways from the two polls are as follows:

- Just 24% of business leaders feel that things in New Mexico are headed in the right direction in the 2016 study, compared to 39% of those surveyed in the February 2015 study who felt things were headed in the right direction.
- 57% believe New Mexico has had a very serious issue with the ethical behavior of state elected officials over the past 20 years; that view was shared by 44% in the February 2015 study.
- 51% of those surveyed in the 2016 study think most elected officials are looking out mostly for the needs of those who finance their campaigns rather than the needs of their constituents; 38% held that opinion in February 2015.

While poll participants expressed significant disdain for crony capitalism and other unethical behavior, they expressed equal enthusiasm for proposals to combat it. Select proposals they support the legislature enacting include:

- 89% support requiring that lobbyists make public the bills or issues for which they have been hired to advocate.
- 87% support requiring that all political contributions and expenditures from all sources be made public.
- 82% back the creation of an independent ethics commission.
- 79% support reforming New Mexico’s gross receipts tax laws and exemptions.

“Implementing these practical reforms would go a long way toward attracting new businesses to New Mexico and creating a business environment conducive to growth,” said Michael Stanford, President of Payday HCM and member of the Association of Commerce and Industry.
The poll and its methodology can be read here. The findings come on the heels of a CED-sponsored report detailing the causes of, and solutions to, crony capitalism. Released in January in conjunction with the University of New Mexico, *Crony Capitalism, Corruption, and the Economy in the State of New Mexico* can be read here.

**About the Committee for Economic Development**

Founded in 1942, the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, business–led public policy organization that delivers well–researched analysis and reasoned solutions to our nation’s most critical issues. CED’s work is grounded on seven core principles: sustainable capitalism, long–term economic growth, efficient fiscal and regulatory policy, competitive and open markets, a globally competitive workforce, equal economic opportunity, and nonpartisanship in the nation’s interest. Learn more at [www.ced.org](http://www.ced.org).