

TABLE of EXPERTS

LEGISLATIVE RECAP

Albuquerque Business First sat down with leaders from various sectors to discuss the impact of the 2019 New Mexico legislative session. Moderated by ABF's Will Martinez, the leaders gave insights into the repercussions on the business community as well as what to expect in 2020.

MARTINEZ: Within our business community, there has been a buzz about this past legislative session almost more than any other year in recent memory. It is a really good thing that we have the three of you coming together as you each come from different professional backgrounds. What were the big issues in legislation going into this year's session?

BLACKWELL: I would say education was huge. The overall big momentum behind everything was the fact that we had a budget and we had dollars that people could actually reasonably request money for, whether it's for education, social services, business, whatever interest you might have.

So, for me, it was education. I'd like to touch on the way that it started was for us, as a non-partisan, bipartisan organization is the rocket docket that was formed in which bills that had already been passed by both houses that clearly had to have bipartisan support were collected and reviewed and then they got to go on through.

That was, to me, nonpartisan, bipartisan work for the good of the state, and also it allowed all the bills that, perhaps, had been pent up over time to have a chance to be heard. So, from our perspective that was pretty big.

BALZANO: I agree with Pamela. Education definitely was huge. To add to the educational piece though, legislators worked diligently on several pieces of legislation, especially the ones benefiting tribal students. For example, Diné College and the legislators worked together on the lottery scholarship fund bill which allows tribal colleges to have access to the lottery scholarship fund.

I also want to make sure that the business community understands what the rocket docket does and what it is for. These were bills from the 2017 and 2018 legislative sessions that, both House and Senate, unanimously voted to pass. There were about 42 bills under the rocket docket this session that were sent to the governor's desk. Bills like, Native American Student Needs Assessments, Career-Technical Teacher Development, and Use of Teacher Attendance for Evaluations, which would allow teachers to take at least 10 sick days annually without their evaluations being negatively affected.

All of these bills were vetoed by former Gov. Martinez without explanation. While a few of the rocket docket bills encountered opposition and lost momentum most of them advanced quickly and gained broad support. This legislature worked together to make

sure that all the bills under the rocket docket would get to the governor's desk as fast as possible, especially since all of it had strong bipartisan support.

CHEMWENO: I would add as background to the previous legislative session is the minimum wage bill that Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham made as one her campaign promises. She was able to streamline that and get support from the House and the Senate and move forward and get the bill signed into law.

I think it can be positive both on the community side but also on the business side as they have to adjust to increasing the minimum wage for people who work in their environments or their organizations and potentially increase their prices as our community can sustain those price increases to make sure that economic development continues to grow in a steady fashion.

I think that Gov. Grisham maintained that promise, and we'll see what she's able to get done as the next legislative session approaches.

MARTINEZ: Do you think the rocket docket and having a new governor was movement toward success in this session?

BALZANO: Definitely. We could all clearly

see everything was moving with a sense of urgency. One of the first things that I heard from other lobbyists, as well as all the talk in the halls of the capitol, was "They are working every single hour of the day!" My team and I experienced this right away, in the first two weeks of the session. Half way through the session we were all looking at each other asking "What's happening?" We were mentally and physically exhausted with what we were experiencing. But because everybody was working together, we delivered to our clients what they needed or wanted. And we define that as success!

I think collaboration also goes along with the legislature and governor success this session. It takes working with both sides of the aisle to get something accomplished. The governor can't do anything until the legislators do their work. And the legislature had been waiting eight years to have a governor willing to support the work that they do and the change in the governor's office gave such a positive energy during this session that it was felt everywhere in the capitol. As a result, the legislators did what they had to do during this session. They worked together with the Governor and stakeholders and I call that a step forward towards success.

BLACKWELL: Usually that first month is a little bit slow. And you're like, oh, our bills are moving. Let's go. And, perhaps, it's with every new administration and it had been some time since we had one, there's just more positive energy overall from the work that we do in good government and effective government — just more openness on everyone's part to



Cris Balzano, of Balzano Gov't Relations (left) and Johanniuss Chemweno of Inverse Medical discuss the highs and lows of the session.

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share, to educate on issues, to be willing to take a little step forward to make some progress.

CHEMWENO: I would add to that that it started previously while the campaign was going on and that energy streamlined right into the session. So, as Gov. Grisham and other people were campaigning before the election, there was a huge amount of energy going into the session before we even knew who was going to be our next governor.

So, that energy continued. And like you mentioned, that energy just continued to steamroll to new bills, more and more bills being promoted and discussed and educated in

terms of transparency throughout the entire process.

So, we'll see how that transitions into the summer in interim committees, but going into next year, I think it is going to be nothing but positive.

MARTINEZ: Cris, what were the big surprises for you, if any? What were the wins? What were the losses?

BALZANO: There are several, though two come to mind right away. The first example was one of our clients worked together with Rep. Linda Trujillo on a bill called School Security Personnel & Deadly Weapons. Through the

MEET THE EXPERTS

CRIS BALZANO

Principal
Balzano Gov't Relations

With over 10 years of experience in diplomacy, public policy, and government relations, Cris Balzano has built a reputation as an artful negotiator and top-notch government relations strategist. During law school Cris interned in the White House for the Executive Office of the President and U.S. State Department. Prior to creating his firm he worked for the NM House of Representatives as a bipartisan analyst for the Judiciary Committee. His areas of expertise include, public financing, education, energy, and economic development, health and human services and tribal regulations. He has been heavily involved on government relations campaigns in the four corners states.



BALZANO GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
WHERE STRATEGY MEETS SUCCESS

JOHONNIUSS CHEMWENO

Chief Executive Officer
Inverse Medical

Johanniuss Chemweno has devoted his career to the healthcare industry, which includes medical devices, pharmaceuticals, and direct healthcare services. He has extensive experience in executive management, strategic sales, business development, regulatory, manufacturing, health insurance, and complex healthcare transactions. His recent activities include direct patient services in the post-acute environment, health insurance and complex regulatory affairs. He is working with manufacturers, physician groups, providers, health insurers, public government officials and the State Legislator to implement DevicePath™. Johanniuss is the primary director and source for marketplaces that require specific attention to increase healthcare access and innovation to rural and under-served markets.goes



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PAMELA BLACKWELL

Interim Executive Director,
New Mexico First

Pamela Blackwell's family has lived in NM for more than seven generations, and she grew up in Santa Fe and Albuquerque. She formerly served as project director for Health Action New Mexico and the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists in Washington, DC as well serving as a legislative assistant for U.S. Representative Steve Schiff. Pamela earned her B.A. in journalism at Colorado State University and her J.D. at George Mason University School of Law. She resides in Albuquerque with her husband and three children and enjoys swimming, hiking, travel and cooking for family and friends.



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legislative session, we were able to draft and refine this piece of legislation to clearly define who can carry a weapon on school property. This was huge, it reflected the careful drafting of the bill and involved several stakeholders' input. It took a bipartisan effort and a precise crafted strategy to move this bill through the legislative process. Now, there is something defined on who actually can carry a weapon on school property. The second example was the Property Tax On Certain Solar Systems. This bill didn't make it to the Governor's desk yet. However, I still define it as successful session because our client is expanding the market and providing jobs in NM. This bill went through two committees and seeks to clarify that HB 233 (2010) would include both residential and business personal property tax exemptions for all residential solar energy installations regardless of ownership structure. Solar installations have been taxed as tangible business personal property.

This premium adds an expense and makes third party owned solar options, like leases, less cost effective for New Mexicans, which limits the number of New Mexicans that can go solar. Equitable treatment is important for access and choice,

but is particularly important for low- and moderate- income New Mexicans who choose third party ownership more often than direct ownership. The bill opens the door so mid- and low-income residents in the state can have access to solar. This informative aspect of the bill was effectively delivered and debated.

Success for us is clearly defined by creating opportunities. And we are in the business of creating opportunities for our clients. Opportunities don't happen, we create them. We work together with our clients to understand the legislative process and successfully deliver a government relations and lobbying strategy.

BLACKWELL: This was actually a really tremendous session for us. We have a small team. We had three of our five bills pass and be signed into law. Others that we supported also got signed into law or they were funded, which the funding is a really important thing.

One of our big wins was the passage of the college affordability fund. That fund was swept and it's an endowment. This fund actually helps those students who are nontraditional who actually are most of your students in New Mexico. Now, they would get \$1,500 per semester toward higher education, community college or four-year and beyond.

So, we were able to work bipartisan with Rep. André Romero and then Sen. Gay Kerman to pass that bill. We got \$20 million in that bill. The thing is we will have to go again. We went for more, you go for it all, but we'll have to go again. That means students will now, in this next year, be able to get that really needed full scholarship funding again.

Another one that we were involved with was providing our rural communities and smaller communities with the tools they need to have meaningful economic development. That bill didn't quite get through because of different



The majority of the bills presented by New Mexico First passed, said Interim Executive Director Pamela Blackwell.

sign into law is increase the JTIP funds and increase the LEDA funds. I think that will have a major impact across Inverse Medical but also other organizations that are either looking to relocate to New Mexico or start something new in terms of entrepreneurial activity.

I think that was a major area that she was able to be successful on. Well, it's still too early to see the impact of that, so I guess we'll see in about one to two to three years in the long-term aspect of how those funds will transition New Mexicans into greater opportunities in the future.

In addition to that, the Rural Health Tax Credit Act was one of the major promises — that was also passed into law. I'm excited about that because for Inverse Medical, we are looking to extend and enhance service lines across provider communities. That means chiropractors; physicians; hospitals; facilities; small, rural health clinics in terms of making sure that patients have better access to additional services that the major cities like Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Farmington and Santa Fe already have.

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“I think that overall openness by everyone in the roundhouse was just a different energy”

Pamela K. Blackwell, JD, Interim Executive Director, New Mexico First

tax bills and things like that, but we were able to raise the level to allow local communities to have more resources for economic development because there is a disparity there.

Then we switched gears, and we were able to get an agriculture bill passed, and this is a paid internship for our next generation of ag producers. So, if we have more agriculture produced here in Albuquerque and throughout the state, we're going to be able to keep more dollars here and produce more.

A lot of our bills, interestingly, really do cross over from education, economy and workforce and that's actually how it's supposed to be. That means we're bridging those gaps and ultimately coming up with better solutions for the state.

MARTINEZ: *Johanniuss, I know your perspective is probably different than anybody else at the table as the leader of a private company. I'd love to hear just how you worked through the legislative session? How you balanced things? And then what is most important to you?*

CHEMWENO: To bounce off what Pamela was saying in terms of economic development, another major promise by the current administration is the LEDA funds and the JTIP programs in terms of job training, as well as additional funds.

So what Gov. Grisham was able to do and

I think that is a major way to incentivize more providers to go into those communities and offset their student loan debt and on and on. So, I'm excited about what that's going to offer.

MARTINEZ: *Going into some of the summer months and into next year, what are you most looking forward to as a nonprofit? And how do you, as a nonprofit, direct your way through these sessions?*

BLACKWELL: As the leader of New Mexico First, we are very proud to be able to be the voice of people from throughout the state who have come together on solutions. That being said, as a nonprofit, we are not a full-time lobby group. I'm a registered lobbyist and so is my colleague and that's part of our job.

We know that to make things happen, you have to be present through that interim session. You have to make some of your bills more known. Sometimes they just die because legislators don't know them, they're not familiar with them. So, being present during those interim sessions to provide them with that information, the legislators or cabinet members is vitally important.

As a nonprofit, though, it can be a strain because we do have limitations on how much we can spend on lobbying. My colleague and I, we

literally would bring our lunch every day. Now, we might be healthier for that, but we were watching what our lobbying dollars were going toward — getting ourselves there and making sure we were there when we need to make some decisions and move things.

As a nonprofit, it's vital to continue to be present and have that voice that others can't always have and get back into that 2020 session and see what we can do next.

CHEMWENO: I want to take a step back, because there are a lot of areas in which we can enhance our legislative sessions. It is so short right now in terms of trying to get an agenda moving forward that we need more time, and I know we're going into the summer months like you mentioned earlier with interim committees and all these other steps that we can take.

Can we get there earlier on to make sure that these issues that need to continue to be developed, to make sure that the bills that are being presented have embedded, are viable, and we can move forward in a diligent way to ensure that when the governor does review it, it has already been discussed? She knows of the topic, she knows of the issues, she knows of the opposition, as well as who supports the various bills so that we can do what's right for our community.

I would say we need a diligent manner, based on each county, versus what's most in favor of Albuquerque and how that might relate to the Farmington market or Carlsbad or these other small little counties across our state. They don't have the larger voices of the bigger counties, like in Bernalillo, for example. That's something I want to continue to focus and support is ensuring that we have the right process for New Mexico moving forward and it's competitive to make sure that we're attracting businesses that have the right agenda to attract more economic growth.

I've met with a lot of the senators, and they're in favor of a different model moving forward to make sure we have a timely process that isn't as crazy as the 60-day session that we saw. Because you're right, it's difficult to navigate that entire process without having the right lobbyist to make sure that you're talking to the right person at the right time when they're going to be voting on the bill that's in front of them.

As a business, when you're choosing a lobbyist, it's important to have the right team and vet the right lobbyists. Check referrals, use your resources, see what they've been able to accomplish, talk to a variety of different businesses that maybe have gotten agendas passed.

But on a larger scale, doing what's right for the community. I think as we move forward, we're realizing that the community should come first, and business interests coincide with what the community's interest can be.

So, I'm excited to see what the future holds. I think going into the interim session, I know there's a lot already being discussed. As an entrepreneur, as somebody who's been able to

lead a company from scraps to where we are today, it is exciting for us to meet the right lobbyists at the table and then just try to make sure we're having the right conversations.

MARTINEZ: *So, Cris, as a lobbyist, I would love to hear what a day during the session looks like.*

BALZANO: I don't think there is a way to tell you what a day during the session looks like. My day starts at 4AM and ends at midnight. One might say; stressful, fast-passed, or overwhelming. All of that might be true, but its all about how you react to dealing with any kind of environment. I have found that my experience working on the federal level and overseas, which are high pressure and stressful envi-

So, I always emphasize with our current and prospective clients that we have to build and manage the relationship before we can communicate, inform, and educate. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

I want to add as well, I feel that my day is far more successful when I work together with legislators to support and help them by informing, educating, and assisting them with whatever they need to get their job done.

BLACKWELL: I think the best lobbyists are the ones who truly are educators and coaches. You are leading and guiding people through the process. Certainly, there are wining and dining lobbyists. The ones I want working for me

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ronments, have helped me learn how to manage a fast-passed environment with limited time-lines constrained by events that you may or may not control. The truth is that stress doesn't come from your boss, your business, the legislative process, your spouse, traffic jams, health challenges, or other circumstances. It comes from your thoughts about these circumstances.

Throughout the years I have adopted several practices that help me mentally, emotionally and physically. With that said, every day I seek to focus on how to support my clients when they go up to Santa Fe to spend a day in the Roundhouse during the legislative session. Keep in mind things will change really fast throughout the day, every hour, or every minute. Through a solid strategic plan combined with effective time management, our clients and our team are prepared to effectively react to incidents out of our control.

On a daily basis, my job is to be a coach and an educator by letting our clients know how to navigate the legislative process and educate them on our unique cultural political framework. Sometimes business owners go up to Santa Fe with a business-to-business mind set, which will not take them very far. Do not get me wrong, that's the mind set they need to operate a business every day, I understand that, I am a business owner too. However, I'm here to effectively support my client on the business-to-government mind set. And that is why we are here and that's why every business needs a lobbyist. A lot of times I have prospective clients come during the session: “Help me. I need this bill killed” or “I need this bill passed.” Then I think, OK, but you are late, even though it's Jan. 15th.

Where were you during the interim session?

and the type I would like to be are the coaches and the people who are guiding. That makes a tremendous difference.

Also, I'd like to see more institutional knowledge at the legislature or paying our representatives in some way so that a lot of different kinds of people can be legislators so that we have more diversity in that respect.

The budget process is very difficult. It's very difficult and it's not as transparent even for those who are experienced. This year, we had this opportunity to have the junior bill process and even for experienced lobbyists, it was a little bit crazy, to be honest.

MARTINEZ: *Tell me what you mean about the budget.*

BLACKWELL: If you have a bill that has dollars attached to it, you're trying to get something funded. For example, we had a SunPath bill. It's a program at 11 of our community colleges that accelerates students through health care programs.

That's a bill that we had proven, promised, but we didn't have time to go through the interim process. Everything has to be thrown into that budget bill, but the newer innovative ideas don't necessarily have as much of a chance to be heard.

So, then you have to scramble to try and get that and we got pretty far but that means we do have to come back around. That's how our budget becomes what it is for the state. Because we had extra money this year, we had this junior process in which you could also try and quilt together legislator's funding that they've been handed out to then pay for your bill. That worked for some bills but that's also really difficult to maneuver and it's up to the lobbyists or advocate to do that.

The other part is there's a certain form and you have to go down a certain hallway at a certain time to fill out the form and make sure it gets the exact right coding. If you miss that day, and we almost missed it, your bill is gone. It doesn't matter whether it's been passed and supported. That is actually, from a good government standpoint, that's really difficult. That means that good ideas are left. I would improve that process.

BALZANO: What I would suggest to the general public is to go ahead and reach out to your state legislator, because what is happening in the state legislature will directly impact your life. Lobbying is protected by the constitution and we all should exercise that right. Now, to the business community I say the same; however, their reasons might be more complex than the nature of the business itself. So, get yourself the right kind of lobbyist to implement your lobbying and government relations strategy.

MARTINEZ: *Johanniuss, what would you recommend to an entrepreneur looking to engage the legislature?*

CHEMWENO: Get involved in the process as early as possible, because it's going to take time to get any agenda even on the docket to discuss. Why not start out earlier by discussing with lobbyists on what might be the best strategy? Or should I even approach the legislator? Just go in and exercise your right as a citizen to understand what topics are going to be a discussion point.

From an entrepreneurial standpoint, I'm huge on education. We need more and more younger people being educated within our public school system, even the independent private schools, to continue to stay in the communities that they were raised in essentially.

Obviously, bigger cities offer great opportunities, but come back and serve as a community citizen, whether you're starting a business or you're going to be involved in legislature from a political standpoint.

There's so much opportunity just within our community. As I have more and more discussions about my experience within the community, more and more people are relying on my feedback, and I appreciate that because it gives me an opportunity to educate our young population about the value of staying in your community and our current government is moving agendas forward. Can we get people to stay here and be entrepreneurs?

Can we focus on high-tech jobs? Can we get Sandia National Labs involved in terms of internships? There are engineering opportunities. There are science-based positions in terms of how the university interacts with the private sector.

There's a lot going on, and we're in a position now as a community to further that discussion in terms of all the educational opportunities and bills that are being introduced.

MARTINEZ: *Do you think it's easier to have a*



'I think the majority of New Mexicans don't have a grasp and understanding of how easy it is to access the legislature,' says Balzano (left.)

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voice here than in other states?

CHEMWENO: I think it's easier in New Mexico. It is much easier to pick up the phone and call Albuquerque Business First and say, I have an idea. Why don't we have a discussion?

So, for me, New Mexico presents a great opportunity where it's easier to have a dialogue and a discussion either through the government, any representatives within your community or businessmen or businesswomen in the community.

I think it's easier to navigate the relationship and build new relationships than other states. We do business in Arizona. We do business in Texas, as well as Colorado. While those states have their positives in terms of what they've been able to do in economic development as well as education, I think New Mexico has that future ahead of them, and I'm excited to be a part of where we go from here.

BALZANO: I think the majority of New Mexicans don't have a grasp and understand how easy it is to access the legislature. Some of them don't even know that a session is happening from January to March. I don't blame them; everyone is busy working and living their lives. However, if they invest a small portion of their time to take a look on what the debate is about they would see how a considerable amount of legislation will impact their lives.

Here in New Mexico anyone can send a text message and have a cup of coffee with their state senator or representative. I have worked close with many of them over the years and I guarantee that whatever you're telling them, your story, they're listening. They're seeking to understand, don't hesitate to reach out and keep that communication going.

The result, they will remember you when you show up in Santa Fe; and they will help you. Sometimes we all get trapped on the national level politics. Because of my experi-

ence working in the White House and with members of Congress, I will tell you to take advantage of the great opportunities the New Mexico legislature body offers when it comes to having access to them. There is nothing like it. Your story is the key.

BLACKWELL: In the work that we do, I think people don't realize that their story is the one that carries the day. I can be influential, knowledgeable; I'm from New Mexico, generations back, all of that. But if I can bring someone with me, if the committee hearings happen when they should and all of that, which is sometimes difficult, but if I can bring that person to speak to their legislator or they've already spoken to them in their local community, that is what makes a difference.

I'm not sure that people realize the value of their story, even the value of their experience. That's really what it's about is they're sharing their story and experience because you're doing the work that you do so that their lives actually can be better as your clients or for us or town hall participants.

I would say a challenge with New Mexico is our geographic distance. We can't teleport ourselves, but that physical in-person relationship-building that they do with people in their community who are leaders is so important and them knowing the value of their story makes such a big difference.

BALZANO: That's what I do. Bring our clients and let them sit down and talk to the legislature and present. Let's bring these students and let them share their experience, how they feel when they know that there is a lockdown at school, and share that with the legislature. It is a much more profound impact than myself testifying before them.

BLACKWELL: I would say for business owners, entrepreneurs, small business people, regardless of your background or your job and pro-

fession and affiliation, we need all those voices up there.

MARTINEZ: *Is there anything you're looking forward to in 2020 in terms of health care that our readers should know about?*

BLACKWELL: We're going to bring back what we call the SunPath bill. So, the community colleges from throughout the state have this accelerated program and they're moving students, adult students directly through school, directly into jobs. There's no gap. We're finding they're staying in their own communities providing services that are in need and in demand.

This is one that the timing was rough but one that the legislators need more information on. We want to get matching funding. It's not even asking for funding entirely from the state. It's really schools changing their systems to meet workforce demands instead of graduating people and hoping they find something. So, really promising. It just needs some more airtime to move that through, so that's our big one.

CHEMWENO: I completely agree with where Pamela is in terms of what they're addressing in health care gaps. Coming from an expert in the health care continuum, there is so much that we can do. It makes me excited just to talk about health care.

We have to think about, 1. the infrastructure. Do we have an adequate amount of providers that can provide greater access, if not improved access, in the rural areas in New Mexico? We know how sparse and how large New Mexico is geographically. We need to think about jobs or incentives that incentivize doctors to go out in those communities to provide services.

Last year, this last session, they had introduced various bills and they did get signed into law by the governor. As we move into interim committees, we know that the safety net and the Medicaid program will continue to be a major discussion point.

We know that strengthening the Accountable Care Act will be a major topic of concern for the governor as well as the entire administration for the Health and Human Services Department.

We have to further understand how we can provide greater transparency between the health insurers, the health insurance carriers, the provider community as well as the medical device and the pharmaceutical industries as they're all trying to come together, those ancillary providers, to make sure patients get the services they need and in a timely fashion.

So, we're excited about what the future holds for health care in terms of at least moving a discussion forward through the interim committees. As we think about Medicaid expansion, ACA, we also think about further education, post-secondary education for health care providers, whether it's the residents or the fellows who are being trained at the UNM Hospital and how we can provide better incentives for people to have debt reductions from

student loans and things of that nature.

Inverse Medical supports a variety of new bills that are being introduced with more providers and strengthening that network so we can make sure that we can provide more services through providers that are seeing patients in those communities.

BLACKWELL: We have town halls every year. Our next town hall in the spring is going to be on health care, with considerable emphasis on mental and behavioral health and access there that is more tough.

The cost to businesses for lack of access to care for their employees or for themselves, whether it's for medical or mental or behav-

fourth estate with the idea that we need quality journalists and reporters to be able to continue to do the oversight, to continue to provide insight and real, truly good information to all of our communities so they can make smart decisions in their business, in how they vote, in where they spend their dollars.

We've done a lot of research on the state of journalism in New Mexico, and it's hurting. It's very difficult. There's deadlines that have to be met. It doesn't give you much time to cover the policy.

Likewise, journalists are being asked to be the videographer, the writer, the blogger, the personality in the community, all of those things. So, it's getting harder to keep people

“Behavioral health is definitely one of those debilitating issues that we’re tackling.”

Johanniuss Chemweno, Chief Executive Officer, Inverse Medical

ioral health, that's a real impact on the bottom line for those businesses. Consequently, their families and the employees' families, as well. So we're looking at health care, certainly, in the context of caregivers and that people get care that they need in a timely manner. It really is an economic issue for everyone. We're trying to blend in that. So, we're, likewise, very excited about the opportunity to explore a little bit more on some innovation on how to improve access to care in our state.

CHEMWENO: I want to add to that because behavioral health is a major issue across our state. We think of the opiate epidemic amongst other issues that extend into the household in these families is that behavioral health is one of the number one reasons of a reduction in the workforce.

Most of the representatives we had an opportunity to be with in the previous session were bills around health care and behavioral health issues. Now, it's easier to have this discussion, but now we need to make sure that this is even more accepted across the legislature and how we can enact new policies and new laws to tackle this and make sure that we stay ahead of the curve instead of minimize our effort.

So, behavioral health is definitely one of those debilitating issues that we're tackling.

MARTINEZ: *Pamela, tell us about First Forum.*

BLACKWELL: We have a town hall one year and then every other year we have First Forum lecture series, and we pick a topic that's of concern to the state.

It is a fundraiser for our organization, as well, but it's a fundraiser with a purpose and a lot of substance to it. So, this year, our topic is on quality journalism and preserving the

there but also get the next generation of journalists. We need those to provide good government and oversight and form our democracy.

If we're not informed, our democracy is at real risk. Gene Grant with New Mexico PBS is going to be interviewing some journalism leaders as a part of this panel. Our other part of the program is called our Spirit Awards, in which we provide awards in the spirit of bipartisanship. Rep. Rebecca Dow and Sen. Clemente Sanchez are two of our awardees for bipartisan leadership. They've worked across both aisles. We also have a civic leadership award for Katherine Friedman with United Way of Santa Fe County. She's done a lot in early childhood education.

KOB-TV will also get that award, as well. We did a project with them in which we did a mural and gubernatorial debates. We got regular people together to come up with questions for live-televized debates that help inform listeners and readers.

Trip Jennings from New Mexico In-Depth, he did a tremendous job in covering the state ethics commission work, and I was actually quite involved in that legislation. It was one of those moments you read the paper and say that's exactly what's going on and it took a lot of time and effort on his part to do that.

So, we're recognizing good journalism and excellence in all those things. It's informative but also celebrating in this time it's very hard to see where people are working together. But in these awardees and even those who are nominated who they might get this the next time, it really happens. People actually do work together. It might be a little quieter than all the rigmarole that goes on when people are disagreeing.

It's June 6 at Heller Hall in the Popejoy

complex at UNM. Tickets are \$30.

MARTINEZ: *Any other things looking into 2020 that you think are really pertinent for business leaders?*

BALZANO: Definitely! We are already working with our clients on their legislative strategies for the 2019/2020 legislative year. There is a lot happening in the different policy areas; like, solar energy for low-mid income customers, workplace issues, employment law, workercompensation, public education, alternative adult education in jail system, medical and recreational cannabis, and tax reform.

CHEMWENO: Back to health care, I would add that, really, what we're looking for is better transparency in health care and services for providers, consumers and businesses with essential information including pricing and how that affects the consumer.

That being said, value-based purchasing decisions. That seems to be a very important metric that relates to outcome-based health care for an everyday patient who has various simplified medical conditions to complex medical conditions.

BLACKWELL: Something that we're going to be looking toward with the legislature with any government entities is evidence-based outcomes for the programs that we spend money on.

There are so many great ideas out there and just adding that component of measurement of the outcomes with the understanding that sometimes you're not going to have outstanding outcomes for a few years.

We should be investing wisely just as anyone should and looking toward programs that show a return on investment. What is the outcome on this and finding measures that match that appropriately.

MARTINEZ: *Lastly, and it sounds positive moving forward into 2020, do you have a grade that you would give the 2019 session?*

BALZANO: I think it goes back to the beginning of our conversation. It really struck me to see, right from the beginning of the session, how pro-active and energetic legislators were. That stayed until the last day of the session. I definitely give it a B, because there is room to grow and work together to move our state out of 49th/50th rank on everything we do. For now, it seems like we got the energy. We and our clients hope that we can work together to focus this energy to move New Mexico forward.



Will Martinez, left of Albuquerque Business First, moderates the legislative recap Table of Experts.

ANNA FRANKLIN | ALBUQUERQUE BUSINESS FIRST

CHEMWENO: I would say based on previous administrations and going into where we are today, I definitely would agree with Chris on A.

But moving forward, there's still room for growth. So, to me, I think we've got to give them a B+. We still have so much more to do as a state. There is still so much room for growth, and we have to increase expectations to make sure that we're still growing as a state and we're competing on a global basis, not just in New Mexico but bordering states. We've got to compete against China. We've got to compete against countries or states across the Midwest and Europe.

BLACKWELL: I would do the B to B+, with the same recognition that there was good energy, there was good effort, there was overall some really great things that happened. Not enough, though. And it has to be sustained. So there needs to be more done, more innovation, more inclusion. Better process for getting those good ideas through in a more timely way so that we don't continue to be behind by 10 years, 20 years, all of that.

CHEMWENO: To add to that, I think New Mexico relates to sometimes a third-world county in terms of how we operate our legislative session. So I can probably downgrade my grade from a B to possibly a C or a C-. It's because there is so much more in terms of efficiency. I can appease to the people that are making these decisions in the legislature right now and give them a better grade but that would be doing a disservice for where we need

to go as a state. We have a very good team in place to move the needle in terms of where we need to go as a state.

BALZANO: This is the time! We have a great group of legislators in the Roundhouse. There is a positive-energy coming from the legislators from both sides of the isle... that is happening now and businesses got to be part of the conversation. This is the time, now, to do that and let's use this as a leverage to help our state move on a path to be sustainable economically.

If you are an executive or business owner, you need to be aware of what is happening during the interim and regular sessions. You need to monitor state and municipal levels of government. What I often see from these two groups are the traditional tendencies to "hang out in your ghetto of information." You've got to be involved in our state legislative and regulatory process. You invested in your business and in the state; so, you have to invest in a professional government relations liaison to represent your interest and protect your investment. In New Mexico, lobbying and government relations involves much more than just influencing legislation, it is building and managing relationships, it is educating and informing, engaging and leading. I hope through this discussion, business owners and executive feel the urgency and say, "No more, it is time; I want to be part of it. I want a seat at the table."

Thank you to our participants

