

# Carruthers: New Mexico has too many colleges

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — With New Mexico's strained budget forcing difficult funding decisions year after year, a familiar question keeps arising: Does the state have too many higher education institutions?

The answer is yes, according to Garrey Carruthers.



Garrey Carruthers

The former governor and current chancellor at New Mexico State University — where he oversees the research institution and its four associated branch campuses — Carruthers said “even I think we (university) presidents agree” on that point.

New Mexico has 31 publicly funded colleges and universities.

But speaking to the business community at Wednesday's Albuquerque Economic Forum breakfast, Carruthers acknowledged that it's a thorny problem since all seven of the state's four-year schools are written in the Constitution. Changing that requires amending it, and the chancellor earned a hearty laugh when describing a friend in South Dakota who once tried something similar.

“He eliminated a two-year college and made it a prison and lost his next race. You want to get a governor right at the end of a term to do it,” he said. “... I will tell you it would take a lot of political courage to do a lot of work on that and perhaps it's time we found somebody with the political courage to do it.”

Carruthers highlighted some of the money challenges in his presentation, noting that higher education — which represents about 13 percent of the state's total general fund budget — has absorbed 44 percent of the state's budget cuts since fiscal year 2016.

He described how New Mexico State has reorganized to achieve better efficiency in the face of the financial challenges. It has reduced management, more closely monitored support staff levels and centralized some financial and information technology

operations. NMSU trimmed its budget by \$38 million from 2015 to 2017. It has eliminated 727 positions in the past seven years.

But it hasn't been painless.

Staff cuts account for about \$20 million of the recurring annual savings, and the repercussions extend beyond the campus.

"That \$20 million, multiple it by 1.4 or 1.5. ... That's the amount of money you're taking out of the Las Cruces economy," he said.

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