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**It's time for a
new generation**

of leaders

By [Alexander J. Cotoia](#) • 6/07/10, 10:28 am



Alexander J. Cotoia

On June 1, I lost the Democratic nomination for the District 7 **Public Education Commission** seat. As a 24-year-old college student and first-time political candidate, the result was somewhat anticipated, but nonetheless frustrating.

After three months of attending candidate forums, speaking to diverse audiences and engaging in one-on-one conversations with the residents of District 7, I felt encouraged that so many people wanted to work with me to expand instructional support and remediation for minority students, modernize vocational-technical education, and expand our existing charter-school framework to provide students with genuine opportunities for academic and personal growth.

But while my loss was disappointing, I was even more disturbed by the losses of other credible young candidates throughout the state, each of whom brought vision and passion to their respective races. I think any one of them – including my friend, fellow Democrat and former District 36 candidate Nicole R. Parra-Perez – would have brought much-needed change to a static system that seems, to quote former President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to be “frozen in the ice of its own indifference.”



This lack of demographic diversity simply isn't conducive to sound public policy. While experienced policymakers may have the benefit of hindsight that younger candidates lack, there is something to be said for the vision and vitality of young people and their willingness to look beyond what's orthodox or conventional for solutions.

A number of our sister states, including Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Ohio and others, have at least one member of their Legislature under the age of 30. New Mexico has none.

According to a 2003 study conducted by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, out of nearly 7,000 state lawmakers nationwide, only 321, or a little over 4 percent, were under the age of 35. That's hardly a positive attribute for a representative democracy.

It's no wonder primary turnout was abysmal. Faced with the same alternatives election cycle after election cycle, the voters were rightfully suspicious of the hyperbole that this election was any different.

A new generation of leaders

We cannot continue to correlate longevity of service with quality of service. Faced with perennial debates over taxes and spending, the proper size and function of state government, and a litany of other vexing social and economic problems with long-term repercussions, young people deserve a seat at a table.

I don't claim to have all the answers on how to bring about such a dramatic change. But I do support the expansion of term limits to legislators and public financing of all political campaigns, not just judicial and Public Regulation Commission races, as a positive first step. In the absence of the Legislature implementing these policies of its own volition, I think it's incumbent upon the electorate to be more conscious of alternatives at election time and hold legislators' feet to the fire when their rhetoric isn't supported by their record.

I also believe that there is strength in numbers, and that younger candidates can benefit from forming political action committees designed to maximize their financial leverage and level the proverbial playing field.

The major political parties would also do well to encourage younger candidates to step up to the plate. In an era of pervasive political apathy and rampant voter distrust, we need a new generation of leaders to restore the public's confidence in government and right a ship of state that seems to have capsized.

Cotoia was a Democratic candidate for the District 7 Public Education Commission seat, which encompasses the entirety of Doña Ana County and portions of Otero County. He is also a legal assistant and a New Mexico State University student.

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1. *rebavalos*

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It would be nice to elect young people like Cotoia and McCamley but I recommend that they go and get work experience first because reading about them makes me think they don't have much to offer, except wanting to be professional politicians and government workers.