

State of the City Speech

Delivered by Mayor David Coss October 19, 2006

Good morning.

The State of the City is good, and getting better.

It's an honor for me to be here today to begin what I hope will become a very important tradition.

When I was elected mayor earlier this year, I wanted to start setting measurable goals for our city. It's important for you to know what your elected officials and city staff are accomplishing. To do that I'd like to talk about where we have been, what we are doing and where we are headed.

This is a very exciting time for our City. After years of community planning, we now have two monumental projects under construction --- the Railyard and our new civic center. I look forward to giving this speech at the new civic center in the near future.

Before we get started, I would like to introduce and thank the Santa Fe City Council, a very dynamic group of individuals with a broad variety of experiences and perspectives. They work very, very hard to set the policies and objectives of our City. I'd like to ask them to stand and be recognized as I read their names:

Mayor Pro Tem Miguel Chavez
Councilor Patti Bushee
Councilor Karen Heldmeyer
Councilor Rebecca Wurzbarger
Councilor Carmichael Dominguez
Councilor Matthew Ortiz
Councilor Ron Trujillo

I'd also like to recognize Councilor Chris Calvert...who could not join us today.

We, as a Governing body, have been learning how to best work together, and I think we are now on our way to making this a city that works better for all of us.

I am proud to have the opportunity to serve as mayor and work with the Council. We are united by an important shared value: our commitment to you, the people of Santa Fe.

I'd also like to thank our City Manager, Asenath Kepler, for her strong leadership. There has been a great surge in employee morale since she came on board in May. We're very fortunate to have her as our top administrator.

I must also thank all of our city employees. They are the nuts and bolts of city government. I consider today an important opportunity to let city employees know that their hard work and dedication is recognized and valued. The quality of government - and the quality of the services you get from the city - depends on a strong relationship between the City Manager, the City Council, and City Staff.

I would also like to thank all of the former Santa Fe mayors who have laid the foundation for the important work we are doing today.

Additionally, I would like to recognize and thank all of the members of the Board of County Commissioners and the Santa Fe Public Schools Board of Education who are with us today. Board of Education President Mary Ellen Gonzales and Superintendent Leslie Carpenter will make some remarks about our public schools later.

And last, but not least, I would like to thank the Lensic Performing Arts Center for donating this space and to the Nambe company, which generously donated beautiful vases to be given in appreciation to each of the mayors who have joined us today.

Santa Fe is fortunate to have such a rich base of community resources.

"Morning Coffee with Mayor Coss," a program I started to improve dialogue between city government and the community, has illustrated just how many resources we have. At our Morning Coffee on Youth Issues, the Council Chambers were filled with more than 140 people whose eyes literally widened upon realizing how many organizations are dedicated to making Santa Fe a better place for our youth.

In the work that lies ahead, we need to make better use of these resources and the partnerships between all of our community groups and local government. I believe there is a distinct role for everyone to play in making Santa Fe a place that works for everyone.

While we are collectively committed to making Santa Fe a better place, our challenges are great. We are faced with a Santa Fe River that is in disrepair, violence in our schools, alarmingly high teen suicide rates, overstretched city staff --- including our first responders --- and a City Hall that is not meeting the needs of its residents.

We must recognize these immediate challenges and not fall short of our potential.

My vision for Santa Fe is a place where we have a healthy environment, a strong economy cultivated by our support for local businesses and a place where our youth feel safe and involved. We have identified these three areas --- the environment, economy and youth --- as priorities. But to move forward we must also make City Hall a place where government services are efficient and user friendly.

There are things we can and are doing now, in the short term, to set a foundation that will pay off in the long term. Let's use our strengths to address the problems that our community faces today.

The state of Santa Fe's natural environment shapes our lives. Throughout my public career --- first with the state and now as I stand here with you today as mayor --- I have always felt that our future is dependent on changing the way we manage our natural resources.

Unfortunately, in this generation we have neglected our environment and let our parks and watershed deteriorate. Our parks system and Santa Fe River are in need of repair. In order to begin this restoration, we have created a Parks, Trails and Watershed Division. This division oversees the health of our parks and open spaces. You may have already noticed our staff working hard to improve parks across the city. We will begin investing \$4.5 million in well-planned trails to improve our transportation system and make our city more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. I welcome Councilor Trujillo's interest in the restoration of our parks and their aesthetic and recreational use.

Restoring the Santa Fe River, which has historically been a cherished source of pride and enjoyment for Santa Feans, is a priority for my administration. I look forward to a day when children don't ask where the Santa Fe River is because they can see the living river and tell us about it.

Bringing back a living Santa Fe River was a primary reason for creating this new division. We have hired a River Coordinator to move forward with making this initiative a reality.

Tying in to watershed health, the city's water supply is an issue that Santa Fe leaders have been concerned about for decades.

Recently, Councilors Wurzbarger, Ortiz and Bushee introduced an innovative "check off" program to allow Santa Fe utility customers to contribute toward the purchase of environmental water rights to benefit the Santa Fe River or the Rio Grande.

The Council has taken a number of other steps to ensure a sustainable long-term water supply for Santa Fe. A major milestone was the recent amendment to the San Juan-Chama Project contract, converting it to a permanent agreement. This endeavor was years in the making.

With the upcoming construction of the Buckman water project, we anticipate reducing our reliance on groundwater and using San Juan-Chama water to relieve the demand on our own underground aquifers and allow them to replenish themselves. This is a major step to securing the city's water future.

I'm very happy to report that the Buckman project is moving forward. The City and County recently approved the Buckman Facility Operations and Procedures Agreement, the third in a series of critical water agreements to address the long-range water resource needs of the region.

This agreement represents over a year and a half of work by elected officials and staff to reach consensus. This project is crucial to our water supply over the next 100 years.

As we work toward making the Buckman water project a reality, we must also continue to work on conservation.

I'd like to thank the community for their extraordinary water conservation efforts to date, which have enabled Santa Fe to reduce its water usage down to among the lowest of any municipality in the country. Today, the city's average water use per customer has dramatically decreased to an average of 108 gallons per capita per day, down from 168 gallons in 1995.

Santa Fe as a whole should feel extremely proud of this concerted effort to protect our resources and become a water conscious society.

I am also working closely with the Council on another issue of crucial importance to our environment --- land use codes that work well, permits that are processed promptly and efficiently, and overall policies that promote sustainable development and water use that make sense for our community. I'm happy that Councilor Calvert has taken the lead in working to create Green Building and Green Design standards for our City.

The actions we take or do not take today in the downtown, in our neighborhoods and at the rural interface, will set a pattern for what Santa Fe will look and feel like for generations. We must not miss this opportunity to keep our neighborhoods livable and protect rural areas from sprawl.

As we further develop our growth management strategies, we must continue to move forward on annexing urban growth regions. Incorporating these areas into the city will enable us to provide those neighborhoods with parks, comprehensive public services and allow residents to participate in our democratic processes.

Moving on to my second area of focus, I believe that securing Santa Fe's future is dependent upon diversifying our economy. Our administration is proactively developing new strategies and supporting existing initiatives to strengthen our local economy while recognizing that the health of our environment is integral to the health of our economy.

In this community, we have an agreement that we have to live by more sustainable means. We all agree that global warming is one of the most serious challenges facing our world today. In our 2004 Economic Development Strategy, we called for the city to become the Water Conservation and Clean Energy Capitol of the United States. During

our recent City strategic planning process, the Council has been clear that Santa Fe must become a Green City.

As we move to accomplish these ambitious goals, I'm proud to say that Santa Fe is already becoming a national leader on this issue.

We were the first U.S. city to formally adopt the 2030 Architecture Challenge, which sets timelines for buildings to be carbon-neutral by the year 2030. This means no fossil fuels will be used to heat, cool or light our buildings by 2030.

While this is an ambitious goal, more than 200 "sustainable cities" in the United States and other countries have followed our lead and adopted the 2030 challenge.

The City Council has also required our new civic center to be LEED certified. This is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. Our new civic center will be a great tool for economic development and a source of community pride. The civic center will be one of very few LEED certified civic centers in the United States, will be a model for other green building in Santa Fe and will signify our commitment to green technology.

We anticipate that water conservation and renewable energy experts from all over the country will want to use our new civic center while meeting with their Santa Fe counterparts. That will give us a forum right here in Santa Fe to discuss how to take these efforts to the next level. The civic center could begin hosting these meetings as early as 2008.

I'm extremely proud to say that our city is emerging as an international center that makes design a foundation of its economy. This will be showcased in the second annual Santa Fe Design Week --- a major initiative of the city's Economic Development Department.

Beginning Sunday, the spotlight will be on all of Santa Fe's creative people and related industries. With more than 70 events, it will highlight our commitment to renewable energy by integrating our environmental responsibility with designs for living. Design Week will draw attention to the finest in architecture, green building, renewable energy and more.

Many of the Design Week events will be held at El Museo in the Santa Fe Railyards. After more than a decade of community work, the Railyards are really starting to pick up steam. Construction is now underway and leases have been signed.

This year's Design Week also incorporates Santa Fe's designation as the first city in the country to become a member of the Creative Cities Network, a program of the United Nations.

The city of Santa Fe will host the UNESCO Creative Cities Planning Summit --- where over 30 representatives from around the world will gather in Santa Fe to plan the first

international conference on creative tourism and economic exchange. Councilor Wurzburger deserves credit for her tireless work on this.

While there are many Santa Feans who are already in the national and international spotlight, this will bring all of Santa Fe's creative talent to a new level of recognition and dialogue.

I am happy to announce that earlier this week, Santa Fe was voted the second most popular travel destination in the country by Conde Nast Traveler magazine. Santa Fe has been ranked at the top of this list for the past 15 consecutive years. We must credit our renowned art market as a contributor to Santa Fe's popularity as a destination.

However, as the eyes of the international community are drawn toward Santa Fe for its arts, we must support our local and independent artists. I have been talking to members of our arts community and it's clear we need to find more ways to support them with new opportunities to showcase their art here and further support our economic development strategy.

So I am pleased that Councilors Chavez, Wurzburger and Bushee have asked to explore options for the development of an arts incubator and permanent indoor arts market on city owned or controlled land.

Recognizing that our ability to preserve and respect our culture is equally fundamental to our future, Councilors Chavez and Heldmeyer have introduced an authenticity resolution to examine the problems surrounding authenticity of our traditional arts and crafts, and to make recommendations about how the city might address problems of imitation goods.

Our economic success also relies on our support of locally-owned businesses. The City of Santa Fe is a proud supporter of the Locals Care program, launched earlier this year. Locals Care is a customer incentive program that encourages residents to shop locally and keep local dollars here in Santa Fe while also supporting our nonprofits.

A strong economy will also require continued support of a living wage and affordable housing. Santa Fe is providing leadership nationwide in these two crucial areas.

Santa Feans who work full time should not live in poverty.

Our Living Wage and the Santa Fe Homes Program are significant steps toward providing greater dignity to workers and giving working families more housing opportunities so that they can actually live in the city where they work.

Councilor Ortiz's successful efforts to establish an Affordable Housing Trust Fund will enable the City to make more progress in providing affordable housing. As we head toward the third anniversary of the Living Wage ordinance, economic data are positive and our community is proud of this accomplishment.

But there is more that can be done to provide opportunities to Santa Fe's working families. We must work to bring high wage jobs to Santa Fe, and we must focus on job training. A strong pool of workers is critical to business expansion, economic diversification, and creating incentives to keep our young people from leaving.

This brings me to our third area of focus, our youth. The city has partnered with the schools to approach the legislature and start work on the development of a vocational training center at Santa Fe High School. This is something that I am very excited about.

On that note, I am happy to now turn it over to Board of Education President Mary Ellen Gonzales and Superintendent Leslie Carpenter to discuss the future relationship of Santa Fe Schools and the City of Santa Fe.

(Remarks by Board of Education President Mary Ellen Gonzales and Superintendent Leslie Carpenter)

Thank you for those remarks.

Over the last eight months that I have served as mayor, it has become clear to me that we must reach out to our youth and show them that they are part of this city. I want every young person to know that our community is concerned about their health, education and well-being, and I'm committed to encouraging the special role of our youth in providing for a strong sustainable economy and community into the future.

This year, for the first time, funding for the city's Children and Youth Commission grant program exceeds one million dollars. 34 grantees, covering 50 programs, are using this money to benefit our children and youth.

Several new initiatives have been identified for the Children and Youth Commission under my administration. These initiatives include increasing funding for programs that serve students in Santa Fe Public Schools. We also plan to create new safe places for youth to gather and to establish green and creative initiatives for children of all ages.

I am excited to announce that the city's Arts Commission has revived the Community Youth Mural Program. This is an opportunity for our youth to use their talents and passion for the beautification of our community. We have awarded two of three mural projects to Warehouse 21, which is a valuable asset to this city.

I am also exploring how the Mayor's Youth Advisory Board may be reorganized so that members can contribute to the community in a more meaningful way. Councilor Heldmeyer deserves appreciation for her work on youth issues.

I am looking at additional ways to get young people more involved, including a city-sponsored mentorship program – ideally one with local businesses, nonprofits, artists, musicians and government agencies --- including the City of Santa Fe --- for students to gain real world experience.

Councilor Dominguez has also introduced a resolution calling for the organization of a communitywide Youth Summit.

In order to move forward on these initiatives in the environment, the economy and our youth, we must improve the way Santa Fe's government works for you. We have made great strides in this area over the past eight months.

Before becoming mayor, I heard over and over again the community's frustration with the level of response from City Hall. I am committed to improving customer service.

We must provide basic city services more efficiently and effectively --- from planning and land use, solid waste, water, sewer and streets --- to libraries, recreation facilities, police and fire. These are all critical components of a healthy and vibrant community.

The Planning and Land Use Department is one major area of focus. This crucial department is experiencing staffing deficiencies and requires massive restructuring in order to better function for both staff and the public. It has become clear that we need to reinvest in the land use process in order to restore efficiency to this important government function. This is a huge endeavor and will take time and resources.

In the short-term, we have adjusted the pay rates for land use planners to try and fill vacant positions and retain planning staff. We have also implemented an over-the-counter, same day permit process for simple projects and are working to expand this program.

A successful transformation of the Planning and Land Use Department is key to moving forward with our green building and green design goals.

Another area that has experienced critical staffing shortages is our first responders. We have not been able to keep up with the growing public safety needs of our city. I am amazed at how much our police and firefighters have been able to do with so little. But this is not sustainable.

I must express my gratitude to the City Council, and in particular Councilor Bushee, for their recent approval of a property tax change that will generate \$1.5 million so our police and firefighters can better serve our residents.

This tax allows us to hire 15 new firefighters and covers most of the estimated costs for higher police pay that will attract new cadets and encourage experienced officers to remain on the force.

The City Council has made a strong commitment to Public Safety by giving them the resources to do their jobs. We are now embarking on a strategic planning process to better plan for future needs. But this is a major step forward. Our Police Chief tells me that these additional funds have peaked interest in recruitment, and when we do get the

additional money for salaries this is sure to have a positive impact on maintaining our Police force.

These new funds will allow us to meet these needs in the short-term, but we must find alternative revenue generating sources and create cost savings through efficiencies and innovation.

Ideas on how to make sure we have the resources to assure our safety may come from the Governing Body, city employees and members of the public. It will take all of us working together to successfully solve these problems.

On the issue of safety, Santa Fe is plagued with disturbing rates of domestic violence and sexual assault. Our community must not ignore the fact that New Mexico ranks second in the nation for reported rapes.

In order to focus on these issues, the Police Department, in coordination with the Esperanza Shelter for Battered Families and the Santa Fe Rape Crisis Center, is hiring a Coordinated Community Responder. This partnership will allow the city to work with and better support our community advocates as we address these serious matters.

As immigration issues continue to be prominent in public discourse, city government will continue to treat all our community members fairly and protect civil rights uniformly.

Building on previous resolutions declaring a policy of non-discrimination on the basis of a person's national origin and creating an Immigration Committee, the Governing Body has formally reaffirmed the city's commitment to civil rights for all.

To improve overall customer service at City Hall, we implemented an Office of Constituent Services to serve as a link between the Governing Body, city services and the community. The Constituent Services Office works to resolve complaints and requests in a timely manner. We are also working to improve traditional city services by taking suggestions from residents and by looking at patterns of complaints to see where there are problems in City operations that can be fixed.

Since March, this office has responded to approximately 2,000 constituent phone calls.

A Public Information Office was also created as a function of Constituent Services. The goal of this office is to improve public access to City Hall and improve public outreach through communication.

A local radio station recently commented to me that they have not seen so many press releases out of City Hall in 20 years. But we are doing much more in the area of communication to keep the public informed. I encourage you to check out the new programming we have on Channel 16, which is just one of the ways we are shining a light on what the City is doing day to day.

Another area where we are improving government service and response is technology.

We are working on rebuilding our Web site --- santafenm.gov. For anyone who's been on there lately, it's outdated and not very user friendly. Our Web site should be more useful and interactive so that residents and visitors can find what they need more quickly.

As part of this effort, we are working toward having E-government, so the public can pay bills online and take care of other city business from the convenience of their own home or office. This will have a great impact on improving government efficiency, and move us toward our goal of making City Hall a place that works for everyone.

We are also now in the early stages of exploring the potential of providing wireless Internet access in the City Council Chambers, the Main Public Library and other public buildings. This is the first step toward going wireless citywide. If this becomes feasible, many doors of opportunity will open. The possibilities are endless.

As another way of reaching out to the public, my administration has begun hosting public meetings called "Morning Coffee with Mayor Coss." So far, this interactive forum has been a successful and enjoyable way to open the doors of communication between City Hall and members of the community. To date, we have held seven Morning Coffees and met with downtown merchants, builders, youth and youth service providers, neighborhoods, the arts community and bicyclists.

As a direct result of these forums and the suggestions from community members we are:

- improving enforcement of illegal banners in the historic district
- moving toward prosecuting fictitious discount sales
- performing a same day, over-the-counter building permit process
- examining the options for expanding BMX and skate park facilities for our youth
- and looking into additional ways to support our local artists.

We will continue to listen to the community and use ideas from the Morning Coffees that will make our City work better for everyone.

As we move forward on all of these measures --- economic development and the environment, youth and improving government services --- we must also remember to preserve the best of Santa Fe --- our culture, heritage and all of the things that make Santa Fe unique.

I am so proud and honored to be the mayor of this beautiful city.

We are approaching our cuarto centenario. For more than 400 years, Santa Fe has served as an inspiring place of breathtaking beauty, rich culture and remarkable diversity.

We will continue to be leaders nationwide in water conservation and clean energy technology, creative design and the arts. Our economy will be strong based on our

support of local businesses, working families and initiatives such as the Living Wage and the Santa Fe Homes Program.

While we have much work ahead of us, by working together, we can leave a proud legacy for our children and grandchildren who will spend their childhoods enjoying a healthy, living Santa Fe River and grow up to buy their first homes in Santa Fe.

Working together, we will continue the legacy that has kept generations of Santa Fe families here and attracted visitors from around the world to share in our history, culture and our future.

The State of the City is good, and with all of us working together, we'll make it better.