



2007 State of the City Address

**Delivered by Mayor David Coss
July 12, 2007
Santa Fe Southside Library**

Good evening.

Community leaders, business leaders and neighbors, thank you all for being here.

Before we get started, I would like to introduce the members of the Santa Fe City Council who have joined us this evening.

Introduce Councilors

Recognize other officials

Santa Fe is my community and a community facing change. The Santa Fe I grew up in was a small town. Today, Santa Fe is a city. While that doesn't mean we no longer value our history, culture and environment, we have become an urban city facing urban issues. Unfortunately, one of those issues is crime.

Tonight, I want to report to you on our city's progress and challenges. I also want to speak to you in depth on three areas that are most important to me: our safety, our youth and restoring our River.

This spring, our community suffered a streak of violent incidents -- increased gang graffiti and property crime, sexual assaults, and young people shooting young people. This shook me to the core. Male or female, we all lost sleep. But we also came together.

For a mayor, there is no more important issue than our safety and I want to begin my Address with this.

Community leaders and organizations developed a roadmap, based on a long overdue conversation about the relationships between crime in our neighborhoods and the opportunities we do or do not offer our young people. Crime is a community issue. It starts long before a child enters the juvenile justice system. Successful solutions will depend on

cooperation and collaboration between government, the schools, local businesses and community organizations.

The Police Department dedicated every available resource to the rape investigations. We also provided women with the knowledge, skills and tools to continue with their daily lives and not live in fear. The City Council women -- Rebecca Wurzbarger, Karen Heldmeyer and Patti Bushee -- saw to it that the city provided free self-defense classes to 139 women and nearly 900 free taxi rides to women. Our partners in the Santa Fe County Sheriff's office and various local businesses also offered free personal safety classes.

The Police Department established a 24-hour hotline, increased the Crime Stopper reward money and held a series of community meetings in each City Council District. The Rape Crisis Center and police held an additional joint public forum to answer questions and concerns. We have hired a Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Liaison to develop a coordinated community response to end such violence in Santa Fe. As your mayor and as a man, I encourage other men to take on this issue.

I recently attended the U.S. Conference of Mayors, where almost every mayor talked about spikes in crime and officer shortages in their communities. As we have seen, we are not immune to these trends. But we are not alone.

Law enforcement agencies everywhere are suffering from the impacts of police officers serving in Iraq, would-be recruits serving in Iraq and much-needed funding going to Iraq. And, on top of that, cities began seeing double-digit increases in homicides, assaults and robberies following elimination of an important federal grant program.

For a long-term approach to crime in Santa Fe, we have developed a "Three Point Plan" that focuses on gang and drug activity, calls for a stronger community response and depends on recruitment to expand our police force.

The property tax passed by the City Council last fall allowed us to establish the biggest police recruitment budget we've ever had. I am going to take a proposal to the Council to double the recruitment budget without taking away from the needs of the police department.

Our current budget has helped us recruit 11 police officers in the last year, seven of which have been hired in the last five months. I met with three of the new officers yesterday. I was impressed by their sense of duty and public service. I am thrilled to welcome them our police department.

We are offering bonuses to new recruits and to employees who make referrals that result in hires. We changed our testing procedures to make our department more attractive to police officers who are already commissioned by other law enforcement agencies. Because of these measures, we now have five additional lateral hires and seven cadets in the testing process.

One of the biggest obstacles to attracting officers and keeping them in our community is the cost of housing. We are currently exploring homeownership and rental assistance opportunities as incentives for officers to live and work here. We will get 10 officers into houses in the next year.

We must also give our officers the equipment to do their jobs. I went on a ride along with Police Sergeant Gillian Alessio. The sheer volume of calls she responded to that night was daunting. I saw that without the proper equipment to access data, her ability to do her job would be seriously compromised. The Governing Body has recognized this as well in this year's budget.

This budget gives \$575,000 dollars for vehicle replacement. This is more than three times the amount allocated last year. We have also budgeted for new patrol car computers, digital cameras and a partial renovation of the police headquarters.

We must continue to meet the changing needs of our community. We have been adapting to the rising challenges, but I know we must do more --- and we will do more.

We are trying not only to solve the problems of today -- from police recruitment to garbage collection -- but we are also addressing larger issues that will impact Santa Fe for generations to come.

I ran for mayor to make this a city that works for all of us -- un lugar para todos. So far, my term as your mayor has been full of challenges. Change is hard and does not come without struggle and resistance. I believe some of these problems are evidence that we are making progress.

Santa Fe continues to top readers' polls for best places to travel, best for the arts and best for small businesses and careers. But we also need to make Santa Fe one of the best places to live. We must work to balance our traditions and history with the changing times we face. This means managing our growth, neighborhoods, services, and water resources so that Santa Fe is a viable, sustainable community.

Before I talk about my other chief priorities -- youth and our River -- I want to take some time to tell you about the many accomplishments we have made toward creating that viable community.

Today, I am honored to be able to give this speech in the heart of the growing southwest sector at the new Southside Library. Since opening in March, this valuable community resource has welcomed 33,000 residents through its doors.

The first person to take a book home was Samantha Rivera, the 9-year-old daughter of our Fire Chief, Chris Rivera. Nearly 1,000 children are visiting our libraries this summer, learning to love books through our summer reading programs. This is an increase of 33 percent over the last two years.

Downtown, we have two of the biggest Public Works projects underway in Santa Fe history. Our new, green, state-of-the-art civic center is 30% complete and on schedule to open in the fall of 2008. It's very exciting to watch new layers of the civic center take shape while conferences and conventions are already reserving dates.

Our new, highly experienced and innovative director will lead the Convention and Visitors Bureau and ensure the success of our new civic center.

At the Railyard, we broke ground on the Park and Plaza and the new Farmers' Market Building. We will have more than 1,400 new places to park in the downtown area once these projects are finished.

Many of these ongoing projects were made possible through the work of current and past city councilors and administrations as well as our community partners the Trust for Public Land, the Farmers' Market and Santa Fe Railyard Development Corporation. We are also grateful for the support and funding from our friends in the State Legislature.

Santa Fe is moving forward in so many other areas.

Residents tell me all the time that our parks have never looked better, and it's true. Our Parks Division is actively working on 23 sites across the city according to its 5-year renovation plan. We also have an additional \$18 million dollars in trails that are now in the design phase.

Our Affordable Housing staff is working hard to keep local families in Santa Fe and strives to make buying a home more accessible. In 2006, more than 270 new affordable homes were sold in Santa Fe through our community partners Homewise, the Santa Fe Community Housing Trust, Tierra Contenta and Habitat for Humanity.

The Office of Affordable Housing is also working with the community to develop a master plan for the Northwest Quadrant. Our goal is to create affordable housing in the northwest side of town, leading to a more equitable Santa Fe.

Last fall, I established the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force to End Homelessness, which includes the Affordable Housing Office, our homeless community, service agencies, local businesses and other interests. The Task Force recently presented the Governing Body with a very ambitious plan to end homelessness in five years. They are now asking the Governing Body and community to get behind this plan to provide the necessary resources to our homeless families, individuals and teens.

The City continues its dedication and commitment to implementing the Angelou Economic Development Plan. We reorganized our approach, and from this, we will establish a business plan for the department -- and ultimately the community -- which integrates economic development with housing and long range planning.

This integration will also help us move the city toward a greener future. We have a “Green Team” and a refocused Sustainable Santa Fe Commission working on important projects such as a solar access bill, a Sustainable Santa Fe plan, and preparing to convert the city’s building code to the International Building Code with additional green components. We are now in the process of hiring an Alternative Energy Specialist to further our energy conservation plans and goals. I thank Councilors Calvert and Wurzburger for their work on this.

It was an honor for me to be able to give this year’s Small Business of the Year Award to Cedar Mountain Solar, a growing, locally-owned and nationally recognized leader in the solar energy field. This is exactly what our Economic Development Plan calls for to make Santa Fe the water conservation and renewable energy capital of the nation.

Our economy is healthy with our latest gross receipts tax figures showing a year over year increase of 4.35 percent. Santa Fe’s unemployment rate is also well below the state and national averages.

We continue to get national and international attention for our leadership on the Living Wage. It has been good for our workers, our community, and our economy. I have always believed that our working families deserve a living wage.

It makes me very proud that today, we announced an historic amendment to Santa Fe’s Living Wage Ordinance. This proposal calls for extending the Living Wage to all workers by dropping the 25 employee limit. This means that all employees in the city will earn \$9.50 or more beginning New Year’s Day 2008, with cost of living increases starting January 2009.

Joining me in sponsoring this bill are Councilors Matthew Ortiz, Miguel Chavez, Rebecca Wurzburger, Chris Calvert, Ron Trujillo and Carmichael Dominguez. With this law, workers and families will be given the dignity they deserve. They will make a fair and equitable wage.

I am excited to say that groups with often differing views have united on this issue. This amendment is already supported by the Chamber of Commerce, Santa Fe Lodgers Association, Santa Fe Restaurant Association, Santa Fe Alliance, Santa Fe Living Wage Network, the Northern New Mexico Central Labor Council and AFSCME International and Council 18. With our business supporters, we are one of the most progressive cities in the nation. Many small businesses already pay the living wage or higher, even though it’s not yet required.

With this historic legislation, we will continue to lead the nation by having the highest living wage in the country that covers all sectors of the community.

As we work to improve the quality of life for our lower-wage workers, we are also actively trying to attract clean businesses that pay high wages. With the leadership of Councilor Wurzburger, the City Council approved Industrial Revenue Bonds for Thornburg

investment companies, which has built two very successful businesses here over the last 25 years. Thornburg employs more than 300 people in high paying jobs and directs millions of out-of-state dollars into New Mexico. This is truly the kind of economic development we are looking to foster in Santa Fe.

I was honored to take the first flight off our Airport's newly reconstructed runway. The completion of this \$4.5 million dollar project was something we've been looking forward to for six years.

An even bigger accomplishment is the Airport's recent upgrade in service status to make Santa Fe more accessible to everyone, giving tourists, residents and local businesses better travel options on quiet, low-impact aircraft. It will be particularly attractive to northern New Mexico's growing film industry. We are currently in talks with several commercial airlines and are looking forward to making a big announcement soon.

The City's Historic Preservation Division is planning the 50th anniversary of the law that protects our historic structures. Because of this law, about 6,000 buildings -- representing 20 percent of our community -- today enjoy some form of preservation.

A committed group of people have been working long and hard to capture the city's spirit, history and culture in advance of the commemoration of Santa Fe's 400th Anniversary. Santa Fe was full of life for centuries before the area was visited by European explorers. This commemoration will showcase Santa Fe's artistic and cultural richness as well as create a better understanding of New Mexico's ancestral Pueblos.

As we look forward to this 400-year commemoration, we are also turning corners in providing day-to-day public services, including Solid Waste. While we still have a ways to go, we have improved our customer service and our response to complaints. Solid Waste is now 72 percent automated with plans to be 100 percent automated by December.

We are also looking forward to again providing the community with weekly recycling service. Another initiative in the works is a plan for volume-based billing, so that residents who produce less trash do not have to subsidize those who produce more.

Our Fire Department plays an important role in public safety. I am pleased that through the City Council-approved property tax increase, we have hired 15 new firefighters this year to keep pace with our city's growing needs.

This has been a big year for Public Works. In addition to progress on the civic center, the Railyard and our parks, Public Works battled the biggest snowstorm of the century. We did the best we could with the resources available at the time. We have since evaluated and strengthened our emergency response plans, including increasing snow removal equipment by 40 percent and increasing manpower by 100 percent during times of emergency.

If you've been caught in traffic lately, it's because we're spending millions of dollars repairing our roads. We undertook a major downtown repaving project to repair damage

from the snowstorm. Our Public Works Department is now halfway through the Rodeo Road and Richards Avenue safety project as well as the Santa Fe Rail Trail between Siringo Road and St. Michael's Drive. The Cerrillos Road and St. Michael's Drive intersection is under construction and the downtown urban trail pedestrian and safety project along Alameda is complete.

We are also working to convert the city's traffic signals to energy conserving LED light bulbs. This will save hundreds of thousands of dollars over time.

In the Land Use Department, we have made headway in a number of important areas, including the recent appointments to the Planning Commission, which will help us address growth and infill. This year's budget prioritizes revision of the city's land use code, Chapter 14, which many of you know is rife with inconsistencies. This process will involve builders, developers, neighborhoods and community activists.

Land Use has also reduced staffing vacancies from 30 percent down to six percent, a major accomplishment. To improve customer service and reduce backlogs, the department has upgraded its technology and cross-trained staff.

We are also moving forward on the Buckman Direct Diversion project, which is on track to be operational by June 2010. This project will bring nearly 9,000 acre-feet of drinking water to the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County and Las Campanas.

While these many initiatives are underway, we continue working to improve basic city services. Our Constituent Services team fields approximately 200 calls each week and works with staff citywide to find short- and long-term solutions to community concerns and needs.

Finally, we are developing two new resources that will help residents and visitors access critical information on government services from the convenience of their homes. Our new government cable channel, SFGTV, will launch in the fall and we are anticipating the unveiling of a completely new city Web site around the New Year. The new site will be infinitely more user friendly. E-Government is coming to Santa Fe.

None of these accomplishments could be achieved without the dedication and work of our city employees.

I appreciate the hard work of city employees - everyday. They work hard and need to be supported fairly and equitably so they can provide the essential services our community needs and deserves. To this end, I am pleased that we now have good union contracts for AFSCME and police. We continue working with our firefighters on their contract.

Change in the city, including change in personnel practices and policies, can be very difficult and cause rifts between old alliances. In the best interest of our growing community, we have to look past the personalities and move forward together.

With City Manager Galen Buller, we are improving the City for our residents and employees by building a professional, accountable and efficient staff. I would like to ask all Department Directors and Division Directors to stand up and be recognized.

These are the go-to people who we count on to make sure that city services are delivered to our community.

Special thanks are necessary to Galen, to our Police Chief Eric Johnson and to our Public Works Director Robert Romero. This has been a challenging year for all of you in very different ways and you deserve a round of applause.

Moving on to my next priority area, one of vital importance to a growing and changing Santa Fe -- our youth.

I have been listening to our young people a lot during my term as mayor. During the Community Read in March, we held a student and youth film contest on the theme of "Getting by in Santa Fe." I was truly inspired by the talent. Their work was thoughtful, sincere and poignant, and shared their views on pressing issues facing kids today. These films have been seen by hundreds of people. The winning teenage filmmakers donated their cash prize to Youth Shelters and Family Services.

Our youth tell me that they are not listened to, that they are marginalized by some of the adults in their lives and by their community. A young student told me that her teacher said she might as well drop out of school now, as she surely would eventually. Unsupported, our children may not physically drop out of school until the 9th grade, but they mentally dropped out in the 3rd grade. There is a dropout crisis in our country and in our city. This trend needs to change.

More and more, we are coming to grips with the racial and socio-economic divisions in Santa Fe. We can see it in our children.

Our Police Chief recently told me a story that tragically illustrates what is becoming commonplace here in our city. At Franklin Miles Park -- just days before the shooting there -- the chief witnessed one group of children playing on the green grass field. Another group of children, from recent immigrant families, was forced to play in the parking lot because of this learned social divide. If they can't play together as children, how can we expect them to live together as adults?

This can not be the future of Santa Fe.

Regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, age, wealth or immigration status, our community's strength should be in our diversity.

For Santa Fe, this is a public safety issue.

This is a moral issue.

This is a justice issue.

In May, the Mayor's Youth Advisory Board and Councilor Dominguez were integral in organizing the first Youth Summit held by the city in ten years. Approximately 100 young people participated, including kids from Santa Fe's public, private and charter schools, the New Mexico School for the Deaf, Santa Fe Indian School and Santa Fe Community College. We are now committed to holding quarterly youth summits.

Our youth wrote an action plan in which they listed problems and solutions in major areas of concern. Our young people asked for internship and job opportunities, more respectful relationships with adults and more after-school and summer activities. Our young people want to learn how to successfully resolve problems on their own. They want to be educated, empowered and involved. The message from the youth summit was, "Invest in us, we are worth it."

This year, the city will invest more than \$2.2 million dollars in our young people, including more than \$1 million dollars through the Santa Fe Children and Youth Commission. Additionally, we committed \$1 million dollars to secure Warehouse 21's future on the Railyard.

Our Community Services Department is identifying youth hubs to help young people and parents better connect with activities. The Boys and Girls Club will begin building a youth center on the south end of town and Zona del Sol is currently fundraising for another center. Genoveva Chavez Community Center staff are also looking at how to fill gaps and provide positive places for kids.

Several teens were recently hired to develop youth programs, activities and a Youth Advisory Board through the public libraries. They were connected with this opportunity at my Morning Coffee with Youth.

Also as a result of that Coffee, Santa Fe Trails is working on making public transit safer for teens. They are researching a "Safe Haven" program so that buses can be a place to go if you are in danger. They have developed signage with transit safety tips and are planning additional training so that drivers know how to keep passengers safe. Transit also sponsors programs with various service providers so that homeless youth and families are able to get around Santa Fe.

Two mural contracts were awarded this year to Warehouse 21 -- one at Ft. Marcy and one at Franklin Miles Park. This artwork showcases our youths' talent, beautifies our parks and helps abate graffiti.

Also, our government television station will have regular programming developed for and by youth.

Finally, I am proud to say that the City Council and the Santa Fe Public School Board recently took a big first step toward improving the way we, as a community, approach youth issues. We held the first joint city council and school board meeting in close to a decade where we spoke about proposals for youth workforce development programs and teen centers.

I would now like to welcome and introduce Santa Fe Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Leslie Carpenter to say a few words.

(Recognize School Board Members)

(Dr. Carpenter speaks)

Thank you Dr. Carpenter. I look forward to working with the schools and continuing to invest in our youth so they see a future in Santa Fe.

I am also pleased to report to you that since my last State of the City Address, we have made significant, measurable progress on my last major priority for tonight -- restoring the Santa Fe River.

Our community wants a healthy, living Santa Fe River. I am dedicated to institutionalizing, for the first time in our City's history, a holistic approach to restoring our River. A healthy River will connect our community, from Upper Canyon Road through Agua Fria Village. It will revive our namesake landmark, be a place for our families to gather and be an indicator not only of the state of our watershed but also the health of our community.

Last March, we reestablished the Santa Fe River Commission to work with our River Coordinator and provide recommendations on flows in the River, the River Trail, corridor restoration, storm water effects, community education and budgeting. We received overwhelming interest in the Commission, showing that Santa Fe is truly ready to take on the task of restoring this resource. The Commission is a diverse group of passionate, talented individuals who represent all reaches of the Santa Fe River. Would the River Commissioners please stand and be recognized?

(Max Coll, Melinda Romero-Pike, Tobe Bott-Lyons, Danielle Montes, Rachel Friedman, Phil Bove, Jen Lewon, Gerry Jacobi and John Buchser)

I am happy to announce to you today that I am proposing 1,000 acre-feet of water be dedicated to the Santa Fe River by next spring through adoption of the city's Long Range Water Supply Plan. This means that we will have enough water to keep riparian vegetation alive in stretches of the River during the summer months. While there are still many challenges to work through as we strive for sustainable water policies in Santa Fe, this 1,000 acre-feet will be the first designation of water to a river anywhere in the state.

We expect to spend \$1.5 million dollars on the River in the next year, nearly three times the amount budgeted last year. With the River as a top priority for the 2007 State Legislative

session, we were successful in receiving \$700,000 dollars for River stabilization and the River Trail between Camino Alire and Frenchy's Field Park. We are very thankful for the support of the Governor and our State representatives.

We continue to commit to two significant, ongoing river and trail collaborations with the County. These projects will provide us with a restoration plan for the River.

Additionally, we recently launched the Council-initiated Santa Fe River Fund, a way for residents to contribute donations toward the purchase of water rights for the River.

Perhaps the most exciting and inspiring river related accomplishment this year is the City's collaboration with YouthWorks. This youth conservation corps project is precisely what I am referring to when I talk about providing our young people with a future in Santa Fe and including our young people in building that future.

The teens on this crew recently showed me their work and taught me about their methods. As we walked along an arroyo, I watched them pick up trash that they may not have noticed six months ago. But today, they feel ownership over their parks and river. They care about the wellbeing of their environment and are working hard. This collaboration has shown how committed our youth can be when given the right tools, support, and opportunity.

Since early spring, the crew has removed more than 300 bags of debris, disposed of bio-hazardous waste, and managed vegetation within the Santa Fe River watershed. Using natural materials, they are building bioengineered erosion control structures to maximize water infiltration. This new way of thinking will prevent the type of erosion that was exacerbated by cement river structures built in past decades.

I see that some of these young people are here today, and I'd like them to stand and be recognized for their hard work and dedication.

Thank you for all you are doing.

While this project marks the renewal of physical river restoration efforts, it also helps these young people learn to respect their environment, earn their GEDs and obtain job skills that will open more doors.

We, as a community, are coming together, across neighborhood lines and governmental jurisdictions, to create a living Santa Fe River.

The momentum on the river shows what can be accomplished when young people of all walks of life come together -- when city, county and community organizations collaborate - - when we integrate education and workforce development -- when we address public safety by providing opportunities to our youth -- when we tie the well being of our environment to the well being of our social fabric.

This is how we create a safe, sustainable city out of our small town.

The story the Police Chief told me about the children playing at Franklin Miles Park will not be Santa Fe's future.

I see hope in the enthusiasm of our youth to restore our River and claim their place in our community.

I see hope in the response of our city to fight crime and end violence.

I see hope in our labor and business communities coming together over the Living Wage.

We will continue to make Santa Fe a city that works for all of us -- un lugar para todos. In the words of President Theodore Roosevelt,

“This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in.”

Thank you.