



State of the City Address

Mayor David Coss

Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2009

Good evening fellow Santa Feans, neighbors, elected officials and guests. It is my great honor to welcome you to my fourth annual State of the City Address.

Each time I have stood before you delivering the State of the City, I've been struck by what a profound honor and privilege it is to talk to you about the city I grew up in and all the truly wonderful things that are happening here, along with the critical challenges we face.

Over the last four years I have worked for a City that works for all of us – un lugar para todos. My vision for Santa Fe is and has always been a city where local businesses prosper and where work is dignified by a just wage. It's of a city where we not only use green energy and alternative transportation, but serve as a model for other cities. My vision is of a city where civil rights are respected and upheld regardless of sexual orientation, immigration status, or any other contrived barrier.

A Santa Fe where people feel safe and where we celebrate and respect our ethnic and cultural diversity instead of using it as an excuse to hurt one another.

This year we commemorate the 400th birthday of Santa Fe. Four hundred years. It was once said to me that a community that has 400 years of history is a community with an abundance of confidence, strength, and profound resilience. I am reminded of that confidence and resilience every day as mayor. I see it in the people I meet, the communities I serve, and throughout the city streets.

We're gathered today in the state's new History Museum. They've done a magnificent job telling the stories of the people and events, the triumphs and struggles that have shaped the great state of New Mexico. It's the perfect location for tonight's event, the story of Santa Fe in 2009; where we've been, where we are now and where we're headed, the State of our City.

Tonight, I will focus on three areas: the economy, our quality of life, and sustainability. Before I get started I'd like to recognize the members of the Santa Fe City Council who have joined us tonight as well as the first lady and other dignitaries.

THE ECONOMY

In Santa Fe and in cities across the nation, hard choices are being made about how to survive the current economic crisis without jeopardizing the future. We will get through these difficult economic times, the way Santa Feans have always gotten through hard times – by working together.

When faced with difficulty, Santa Fe finds its confidence and resilience in community. We gather in the face of the greatest challenges, by supporting one another and working toward the common good.

So, let me give you a piece of the good news first. Our unemployment rate remains half of the national average and considerably better than the state average.

Unfortunately though, aligned with national trends, the number of workers losing their jobs in Santa Fe continues to rise; Thornburg Mortgage, one of Santa Fe's largest, high-paying employers filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy; and our local newspaper industry, like news organizations around the country, is struggling to survive.

We've seen the economic downturn take a direct hit on our city budget, and we had to make some very difficult decisions this year.

Almost \$13 million in budget adjustments and cuts were made – and we did our best to maintain

morale and service to the community. We struggled to avoid laying off employees, which would have added to the jobless rate and created distress for city workers and their families.

With all the hard news, I'm pleased, and perhaps a little grateful, to still have more positive news to share with you.

During the budget process, the City unions stepped up to the plate and helped us figure out ways to contain our costs while being fair to our employees.

I am very thankful to City employees for all the hard work they do and for their tireless efforts to serve our youth, our families and our seniors; to maintain the roads; keep our city clean; build up our parks; review land use plans and building permits; and ensure that the City is running as seamlessly as possible.

When our gross receipts tax revenues came drastically under budget just before the close of the fiscal year, we were prepared with a viable plan. Because of our prudent approach to this year's budget we have maintained a strong contingency fund.

This professional process worked because we took a comprehensive and realistic look at Santa Fe's economy. The bursting of the national housing bubble and financial manipulation on Wall Street showed us that so much of our national economy was not real. The only way for us to recover from this crisis is to commit ourselves to replacing the ruins of the false economy with a real economy.

So how do we do this?

To our credit, Santa Fe has largely been able to evade the economic devastation felt in communities across the country because of our confident, deliberate and progressive policies.

Our laws requiring affordable housing in new developments as well as partnerships with affordable housing providers and down-payment assistance programs has helped shield us from the foreclosure crisis by providing most homebuyers with housing options they could afford.

We fought to implement one of the highest Living Wages in the country because we recognized long ago that workers' wages are the primary base of a just and equitable local economy.

We've focused our economic development strategies on buying local, understanding that money spent at Santa Fe's local businesses stays in Santa Fe.

A real economy policy considers how short-term decisions impact our city in the long-term. We build a real economy by investing in our infrastructure. We do it by forming community partnerships that bring people, business and government together to achieve our common goals.

It was with this understanding that the City of Santa Fe took the historic step to purchase the College of Santa Fe, providing access to higher education that is essential to building a real and confident economy for our community.

I'm proud of the work done by this community, the many students and faculty who stepped up to save the college, and I'd especially like to thank the City Council, state legislators and Governor Richardson for making this possible.

The city will now lease part of the purchased land to Laureate, which will continue the four-year arts college in the tradition of the College of Santa Fe. We will also be saving the Santa Fe Art Institute, which will lease from the City. And finally, we will have a downtown campus of the Santa Fe Community College, as well as a new branch of the New Mexico Library.

I fought hard to save the College and will continue to fight to make sure this acquisition is a success. Some have argued that the city can't afford to buy the college. I believe that this city can't afford to lose it. Our future cultural and creative economy depends on it. This acquisition will also ensure hundreds of jobs and bring millions of dollars pumping through our economy by way of rentals, visitors, and dollars spent locally.

Our theory is pretty simple - provide people in Santa Fe opportunities, teach them here, offer them jobs and housing here- and they'll stick around and spend their hard-earned dollars here in the process. That's why we've pushed the buy-local campaign – encouraging locals to spend their money locally. We're also working to get more people to Santa Fe for the same reasons,

and I'll describe those efforts shortly.

To this end, the city's Economic Development Department and Convention and Visitors Bureau has partnered with a broad range of organizations, including the Santa Fe Alliance and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as businesses and local media outlets on two buy local campaigns: "Home for the Holidays" and "Santa Fe Buy Into It."

Through these efforts, we're encouraging residents and businesses to spend money in Santa Fe whenever possible because every local purchase supports Santa Fe workers, Santa Fe employers and ensures that business in Santa Fe continues.

In fact, some small-business owners have said that buy-local efforts have helped insulate them from the worst of the economic downturn.

One of our other community partners, Homewise, quickly recognized that while buying and spending money locally is good for the local economy, you can't get people to buy local if they don't live local. That's why Homewise is spearheading a business campaign for home ownership in partnership with local businesses and government. The nonprofit has already helped hundreds of local employees including teachers, firefighters, nurses, police, and state workers buy homes and is now working with over 100 local employers to help more workers buy their own homes.

It's these kinds of collaborations that make our city so great.

As I mentioned before, we're also doing more to bring people to Santa Fe.

Does anyone remember what the Railyard used to look like? I think we can all agree it's been a tremendous transformation nearly two decades in the making. This project involved participation from thousands of community residents who wanted a new community-gathering place.

Already, our newly revitalized Railyard is becoming the hub of community activity we have envisioned for so many years. Since the Railyard opened, the Farmers Market is bigger than ever, Fanman Productions started a free movie in the park series, and we hosted the Santa Fe Gay Pride celebration and the biggest and most successful Bike to Work Day yet.

We stand ready to work with Speaker Lujan to secure financing to complete this project and bring additional economic development to our community - and with Governor Richardson to make the downtown depot station fully functional for all commuters and visitors.

The success of the Railyard is no surprise. Throughout history, railroads in New Mexico have served as powerful economic engines for the area.

The past now meets the present with Santa Fe Southern Railway as our historic anchor on the Railyard and Governor Richardson's successful Rail Runner commuter train transporting hundreds of people to and from Santa Fe daily - to shop in our stores and eat in our local restaurants. In June, the Rail Runner celebrated its two millionth passenger. And Sunday service is about to begin.

On June 11, I was honored to take the first American Eagle Airlines flight from the Santa Fe Airport to Dallas/Fort Worth. After years of work to bring commercial service to Santa Fe, we now provide daily service to and from DFW. The popularity of the service has already resulted in an additional daily flight to Dallas starting in November as well as roundtrip service between Santa Fe and Los Angeles, offering travelers connections to virtually anywhere in the world. And putting people to work.

Other large investments are also starting to pay off for the City, including the new Community Convention Center. Since we opened our new Community Convention Center last fall, we have generated hundred of thousands in revenue and pulled in much more in local hotel and retail sales. The Community Convention Center is truly helping to keep downtown vibrant. Just last week 900 doctors and nurses were here for a conference. Weeks before that, the center played host to the SOFA West show, putting Santa Fe in the same league with Chicago and New York. SOFA organizers are already talking about coming back next year. In fact, the Convention Center is already booked for 44 out of 52 weekends next year and there are 23 national conventions and events on the books which alone will bring in more than 20,000 visitors to our city.

One of the most important critical infrastructure investments for a strong sustainable economy is

securing our water supply. And that is why we have pursued the Buckman Direct Diversion Project. A joint project of the City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County, Buckman has been in the planning stages for over eight years.

With construction now underway, this \$216 million project is scheduled to begin providing drinking water to the Santa Fe community in the Spring of 2011. The project will diversify our region's drinking water supply so that the regional aquifer can rest and recharge, and so that reliance is reduced on Santa Fe River's reservoirs.

Another investment we are making today, which we expect to impact Santa Fe far into the future is the new Green Collar Jobs program, a community response to the rising drop-out rate and the difficulty many local businesses face finding qualified local employees.

The Green Jobs Program came about through a series of round-table discussions between the Santa Fe Alliance, the Santa Fe Public Schools, the Living Wage Network, the city's Economic Development Division, Santa Fe Community College, Earth Care International and local business leaders. It was implemented in partnership with YouthWorks! and local builders.

I was proud to see our community's young people at YouthWorks! Partner with the community college and Habitat for Humanity to build a green home for a family in need. This program is clear evidence that when local groups collaborate, great things can happen.

What we're doing is so impressive that two young people from YouthWorks have been invited to speak at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus in Washington DC to talk about Santa Fe's Green Collar Jobs. They will accompany Congressman Ben Ray Lujan and Van Jones, the current Special Advisor for Green Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation at the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Like other cities across the nation, Santa Fe is seeking help and partnership with the federal government. We finally have a president who understands that in this country, change comes not from the top down, but from the bottom up.

To date, we've received more than \$11 million in federal stimulus money from President

Obama's Recovery Act. Our strategy to maximize the benefits in Santa Fe is to use the money for projects such as city infrastructure, transportation, energy efficiency, alternative energy, affordable housing, public safety, and job creation.

In the coming months we also hope to see federal Recovery Act funding for The Broadband Initiative. This initiative is the result of a collaborative effort between the City and County of Santa Fe, the State and the Santa Fe Community College. The Broadband Effort will expand the capacity of local businesses and residents to access high-speed internet services that also have the capacity to transmit large packets of information quickly and effectively. This will result in Santa Fe businesses being able to be more competitive both locally, regionally and internationally.

This project will cost approximately \$6M and will be built out in 12 months once construction begins.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Just as we are investing in our economy, we must continue to invest in our quality of life. Our high quality of life is the reason families have been proud to call Santa Fe home for centuries and it's the reason we draw millions of visitors every year from all over the world.

Of paramount importance to maintaining our quality of life in these tough economic times is public safety.

Both the city's Fire and Police Departments have undergone major changes in the past year. Last spring Fire Chief Chris Rivera and Police Chief Eric Johnson announced their retirement and I had some big shoes to fill. Fortunately, two standout candidates made the decision easy; they could have succeeded in any field, but placed service to the public and the city of Santa Fe above all else.

Barbara Salas was a clear choice for Fire Chief, and it was an honor for me to name her as Santa Fe's first female fire chief since the department's establishment in 1880.

Barbara's story of perseverance is an inspiration. In some ways, she had to fight her way into the

department. At just 5 feet tall, Cadet Salas had to pass the same test every firefighter takes to qualify, including carrying a 50-pound hose up and down four flights of stairs. When she first started, some at the city thought she wouldn't make it. But Barbara refused to give up, and I'm thankful for that. Not only do I have great confidence in Chief Salas' ability to lead our fire department, but I know she will serve as a model to our community's young people.

While getting through the most difficult budget cycle in many years, the Fire Department has had some great successes, including hiring 20 new firefighters and working closely with Airport Manager Jim Montman on implementing and maintaining a plan for firefighters at the Airport in order for commercial flights to come to the City of Santa Fe.

Like the appointment of Barbara Salas to the fire department, Aric Wheeler was an obvious choice to head our police department. Chief Wheeler has deep roots in the community. His great grandfather and great uncles were founding members of the Santa Fe Fire Department. His commitment to our community extends beyond that of law enforcement, demonstrated by his work with Santa Fe's youth and service to our domestic violence shelter and treatment center.

I'd like to take a moment to thank both Chief Chris Rivera and Chief Eric Johnson who retired this year, for their dedication to Santa Fe public safety and their long years of outstanding public service.

In the last four years, under retired Chief Johnson's leadership our Police Department has taken tremendous steps forward. We have modernized equipment and facilities, purchased new vehicles and updated technology. Through intensified recruitment efforts I am proud to say we have now fully staffed our chronically short-handed police department. Last year we even started a bicycle patrol to help assure public safety downtown, in the Railyard and in parks and trails.

Also, I'm very pleased to announce that as a result of a grant provided by the Obama administration's COPS Hiring program we will hire an additional 8 officer positions this year.

In financially difficult times, we see an increase of social ills that affect our communities. As mayor I see how challenging these issues are and how resilient the people of Santa Fe have

become.

During difficult times, we cannot forget the members of our community who do not have homes. This year the City partnered with St. Elizabeth's Shelter and a coalition of faith groups to provide emergency shelters for the homeless. I'm glad to report that as a result of these efforts there were no deaths due to exposure this year among the homeless population. The City will continue to work with partnering organizations to provide services for the homeless and address the root causes of homelessness such as poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

Along with other factors, the recession has contributed to a 13 percent increase in domestic violence cases.

This is unacceptable and causes me deep concern. As many of you know, I consider fighting domestic and sexual violence in our community a priority of my administration. My vision is of a city where all people feel safe and secure and where our agencies provide safe and effective responses when domestic violence is reported.

In 2007, we created a new position; a domestic violence and sexual assault liaison, to improve the way the police and community agencies work together to address domestic violence. This new coordinated community response has helped, but we must do more.

We have engaged hundreds of people in community conversations about domestic violence and more victims are reporting and getting the services they need. Our police department also remains committed to ending domestic and sexual violence in Santa Fe. In the coming year I'll be pursuing resources and looking into effective models to engage more social workers in the immediate response efforts to break the cycle of domestic violence. Through the efforts of the police department and the community, sexual assaults have dropped by 37 percent in the city.

Crime is of vital concern in our neighborhoods. I have fought hard to improve our public safety in the last four years, and our investment in the police department is paying off. While we have seen an increase in burglaries this year, property crimes in general have decreased by 4 percent. Physical assaults, robberies and crimes against persons were lower during the first six months of 2009 compared to the first six months of 2008. These factors are still a threat to our

public safety and will continue to be addressed. Traffic safety has also improved significantly as there has been a large drop in motor vehicle collisions (down 8.7 percent) as a result of aggressive traffic enforcement programs.

This summer was a devastating one for our community. I attended far too many funerals and memorials for young people. Overall this summer there were eight violent deaths – 3 related to domestic violence, 4 from drunk driving, and 1 gang related shooting. My heart goes out the grieving families. All of our hearts do.

That's why elected officials of the city and county convened, with the help of Cynthia Delgado and other community activists, to determine what more we can do because we must do more. Two days from now, the City Council will meet with the County Commission to examine a recent assessment of local programs that deal with drunk driving and alcohol abuse. We hope to have proposals within a month that will outline additional education, treatment programs, and enforcement to reduce the incidence of drunk driving, domestic violence and other impacts to our community from alcohol abuse. We plan to go to the legislature and seek more resources and authority to help boost our efforts to deal with these issues that continue to hurt our loved ones.

We need creative, culturally appropriate and relevant ideas for prevention. We will continue to work on these issues together, as a community, to ensure that more lives are not lost. We have the partnerships and capability to address these problems. This is the 20th year of City-funded Children and Youth Commission programs, several of which assisted families and young people with the grieving process: Gerard's House, Warehouse 21, New Mexico Suicide Intervention Project and Youthworks. This year \$1 million in grants is going to 29 programs that help make Santa Fe a child-friendly city.

SUSTAINABILITY

In these times of change and unprecedented challenge, ensuring a sustainable Santa Fe through water conservation, energy efficiency, and smart policy becomes even more important.

I'm happy to report that our public transportation system, Santa Fe Trails, is growing and ridership continues to increase. A viable public transportation system is essential to a

sustainable Santa Fe.

New connections to Rail Runner stations have been implemented and additional connections are planned to new stations as they open in the coming year. We received \$1 million under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to purchase new buses, new bus shelters, and mobile security and surveillance equipment, which will significantly improve security throughout the system. Combined with our trails system, green alternative transportation is becoming a reality in Santa Fe.

In addition to the work I've already outlined on green jobs efforts, the City is working towards building a sustainable green economy. To ensure that Santa Fe continues to be a leader in energy efficiency, we're pursuing stimulus monies to retrofit houses so that local residents can save on energy costs.

We're also pursuing more alternative forms of energy. Solar energy is a smart investment and we've already signed contracts with SunEdison for 1.8 megawatts of solar electricity - which will ultimately save Santa Feans on their electric bills and reduce the City's carbon footprint by 5%.

As mayor, I am particularly proud of the City's work to revive the Santa Fe River – which is one of the most historically, culturally and environmentally significant natural features in the region. Yet it was neglected for decades.

Today, a growing number of residents, businesses and community organizations have come together to address the challenge of creating a living river.

Importantly, we've formed a critical partnership with ¡YouthWorks! to help with clean up and erosion control projects. While cleaning up the river, this YouthWorks! program has helped over 100 of Santa Fe's at-risk youth transform their lives.

For example, Javier, a young man who dropped out of Santa Fe High in the 11th grade because he was getting into trouble and felt that school was not teaching him what he needed. Javier's mother told him to get involved with ¡YouthWorks! with the hope that the program would be a way for him to get direction while continuing his education. Today at age 20, Javier has

developed a work ethic that will serve him throughout his life. In his own words, Javier said, “I don’t think I would have gotten far if I hadn’t got a job at ¡YouthWorks!” More than that, he says it feels good to help the community. This goes to show what hope and opportunity can achieve.

Personally, I am so proud of our work to create a living river. We are the first city to set aside part of its water rights to ensure a living river with constant flow. My friend Dr. Jerry Jacobi reports collecting aquatic insects and other aquatic life in the DeVargas Park reach of the river. Life is returning to our river. I was riding my bicycle along Alameda, not far from where I played as a child, when I came up to the area near Alto St. Park. There were families picnicking and children playing in the water. Some of the kids were climbing on the rocks and jumping in the river. It was delightful to see the river come to life in that way.

It’s also very exciting to see new segments of the River Trail under construction. This year we will complete the trail to Frenchy’s Field Park and complete restoration of a native river reach between Camino Alire and Frenchy’s. Soon you’ll be able to ride your bike on a trail from the point in the County where the river passes under NM Highway 599 all the way downtown. Again, this is an example of a project that could not be done without enormous collaboration between staff at the City and County of Santa Fe, local residents and community groups.

In the next year we’ll need to perfect policies ensuring the release of water to sustain the flow. I will also ask the Santa Fe River Commission to lead the community in developing a vision for the Santa Fe River in our historic downtown to make our river clean, attractive and alive for all of us.

I am incredibly proud to be Mayor at a time when residents are not only conscious, but accepting of the challenge of leaving a sustainable city to future generations. Thanks to the people of Santa Fe, our river is no longer dying, we are a leader in alternative energy, green building and energy efficiency, and we’re decreasing our carbon footprint.

CONCLUSION

As we commemorate the 400th year in Santa Fe I am pleased to report that the state of our city is strong, confident and resilient.

While the last year was packed with difficulty and tough decisions, the community has persevered with integrity and I believe we are moving forward in a good direction. The budget cuts were hard, but our prudent approach will ensure the City's stability and resilience for years to come. And we are on the right track to strengthen our economy, provide our families a good quality of life, and to ensure a sustainable future for our children.

I am proud to serve as mayor of a city that does not shy away from challenge but is confident in its strength. It's inspiring that a community can come together and rescue a college and make it both a center of higher education to serve our people and an international center of excellence in the art world.

Santa Fe can and will continue to grow our creative and green economies, with healthy local businesses providing jobs that pay just wages. We will continue to work together to address social ills that plague our community and we will find solutions. And finally, we will continue to advance our energy efficiency and alternative energy strategies to keep us at the forefront of what's happening nationally.

The world admires the resilience and the confidence of Santa Fe. It has served us for over 400 years and serves us still today.

It's an honor to be mayor of this great city at this time in history. I look forward to the challenges that await, and know we can tackle them by working together.

Thank you.