

Testimony of Mayor Martin J. Chavez before the Senate Energy Committee

Albuquerque: A Hub for Sustainability Innovation and an Example of Synergy Between Local, State and National Governments

Thank you for providing Albuquerque with the opportunity to host this hearing on fast tracking of energy and climate change technology. I want to commend Chairman Bingaman in this regard, and Ranking Member Domenici as well for their continuing leadership in this critical area.

My name is Martin J. Chavez. It is a privilege to talk with you about the role of the State, Federal and Local partnership in addressing the urgent challenge of energy innovation and climate change, and the many opportunities generated by a coordinate, pro-active approach in answering the challenge.

Cities As Epicenter for Innovation

To some, a city like Albuquerque might seem like an unlikely epicenter for the global sustainability movement. But a failure on the part of the present Administration in Washington to take seriously the threats to our environment posed by global climate change has prompted states, and indeed over 600 localities across the country, to step up and rise to the challenge.

And a confluence of circumstances has given communities such as Albuquerque an early opportunity to transform how we live and, by example, be a leader that communities worldwide can look to and learn from.

In terms of clean air, metropolitan areas like Albuquerque got a jump start years before most communities because of our periodic inversion layer. The same recirculation that makes us the hot air ballooning capital of the world, also made it imperative that we greatly reduce emissions.

Today, thanks to emissions testing, particulate mitigation strategies, fuel reformulation, CNG and Hybrid-Electric buses and many other innovations, Albuquerque air is healthy and cleaner than it had been in decades.

But it is worth noting that while the impetus may have come from the grassroots, the authority had to involve federal imperatives such as come from the EPA under an Air Quality Management District. We could not have had the success we have worked so hard for without the federal government as an active and authoritative partner.

Natural/Built Environment Interface

In terms of the interface between our built and natural environments, Albuquerque today garners a variety of national awards and recognition, from arborists to cyclists and from open space enthusiasts to fitness gurus.

Today's leaders in these areas can point back to the middle of the last century, when Mayor Clyde Tingley built parks, set aside open space and initiated a particularly ambitious tree planting program. We now build on that legacy with initiatives such as the 3000 acre Bosque Restoration Project, renowned trails and open space acquisitions as well as world class sports and cultural amenities. We also recently kicked off a 'Million Tree Challenge' by handing out 5000 free saplings to the community.

But again, open space and park land acquisition would have been greatly limited if not for our federal partners. We would not, for example, have the degree of protection we enjoy for the Petroglyph National Monument, or for the Sandias or even the Bosque.

Water Sustainability

And in terms of water sustainability, it was an alarming discovery back in the early 1990s that our aquifer was not nearly so limitless as had been thought, which prompted one of the nation's most ambitious and successful water conservation programs as well as the biggest public works project in the city's history – the San Juan Chama surface water diversion.

Here too, we took the legacy of forethought from those federal, state and local leaders two generations ago who purchased rights to 40,000 acre feet per year of Colorado River water, and we built dramatically upon it. Today Albuquerque boasts not only a sustainable water future on a par with any other major city in America, we actually garnered a World Leadership Award on the subject.

And again, as much as we might have the will, without the federal partnership we all too often lack the ways and means to accomplish our critical environmental goals.

Water makes a great allegory for energy in New Mexico. We have reduced our use by a third, even while we were growing our number of accounts by just about as much. When every level of government comes together as we did over water sustainability, such results should not be unexpected and I believe we can do even better with a similar effort toward energy sustainability. Indeed, it is every bit as imperative that we succeed because our very future depends on it.

Albuquerque as Hotbed of Innovation

It should also not come as a surprise to the world that we are a hotbed of innovation, since New Mexico hosts two of the nation's premier energy laboratories as well as major research and development institutions. Even groups that are normally focused elsewhere, such as the National Hydrogen Association, came away impressed with Albuquerque after they chose us as the site for their first Renewables to Hydrogen conference last Fall.

What has become increasingly true about Albuquerque and New Mexico is that the innovations that get their start here are more often sticking around to fruition. We are finally coming into our own as a metroplex capable of hosting the most sophisticated of production operations while attracting, cultivating and retraining the world's most creative minds.

Advent Solar now produces a superior solar cell at the South end of town with a technology that was hatched right here at the federally funded Sandia National Laboratories. And companies such as Eclipse Aviation and Tesla Motors, who could have taken their innovative manufacturing anywhere, have chosen us as well.

Missing Elements

But to stay on this path toward sustainability that is economic as well as environmental, we must continue to work the game plan that has brought us here and map out our next moves wisely.

Some key elements to the nascent federal, state and local partnership are still missing.

For one, we lack the resources the federal government can bring to bear. While we now dedicate 3% of our bond revenues to energy conservation and distributed power projects, this amounts only to about \$3 million per cycle. A great down payment, to be sure, but not the kind of resource infusion that is going to sufficiently shrink our carbon footprint or transform our sustainability prospects by itself.

Fortunately, it is our understanding that the critical Energy Block Grants to localities that the Senate sent over to the House have remained whole in that body. So we are optimistic that this element of the partnership may soon be falling into place.

Another area, where we are greatly alarmed, is the lack of CAFÉ standard increases. This is especially embarrassing, when we compare ourselves to the rest of the world. Even China is putting us to shame in this regard, and it is an area where we are at the mercy of the federal government to set the standard.

While buildings may account for a plurality of greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere in the country, here in New Mexico the number one contributor is transportation. This is partly the result of relatively mild weather shrinking our buildings' emissions somewhat, and also partly due to the fact that we register more miles per year of per capita vehicle travel than most.

This is one area where the localities and states must look almost totally to Washington for leadership.

Conclusion

The goal has always been an Albuquerque where our children or grandchildren don't have to leave town to realize their dreams. Thanks to smart planning about sustainability and decisive action, and working thru NGO partners such as the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives, we are making great gains toward that goal.

And we have learned that action toward sustainability can actually be good for both our economic wealth and our quality of life, and that the two goals support each other when we 'push the green envelope.' It is also, quite simply, the right thing to do and the greatest moral imperative of our time. Because our grandchildren will either look back to us in this time and celebrate that we had the foresight and will to change course, or they will curse us for what we will have left them.

For those remaining folks who disbelieve the scientific consensus about man's influence on global climate change, I would also just like to add briefly that our present reliance on foreign oil -- adding billions of dollars per month to our foreign trade deficit -- is something we ought to rethink.

But it is also clear to us that there are some things we cannot do alone, and others where we need a 'force multiplier' of a partner in the federal government.

So I would respectfully urge the Committee to stand fast on proposals for block grants to municipalities and to make another run at a serious improvement to our now antiquated CAFÉ standards.

And I would also invite a review of our sustainability blueprint, which will be posted on the sustainability link from www.cabq.gov once it is finalized.

With that, thank you again Mr. Chairman on behalf of Albuquerque and all of New Mexico, both for what you do in the realm of public service and for giving us this opportunity here today.