



RENEE VILLARREAL

Santa Fe City Councilor, New Mexico
First Elected 2016



WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO ACCOMPLISH AS AN ELECTED LEADER?

Since being elected, I have sponsored or supported policy measures and worked on community issues with an eye towards social and gender equity, inclusivity, environmental justice, and government transparency and fiscal accountability.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING YOUR COMMUNITY?

Santa Fe is experiencing another wave of gentrification due to our housing crisis, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. We have unsheltered individuals who are in need of safe living spaces, and we continue to need more affordable and workforce housing options. Our housing crisis is contributing to climate change as more and more workers are forced to take long commutes from outside the city limits.

We are also feeling the effects of the climate crisis with unprecedented mega droughts, which has led to unpredictable weather patterns, taking a toll on our finite natural resources. Climate change has contributed to dramatic forest fires displacing many deeply rooted families and destroying sacred homelands and ecosystems in the region.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE CONSIDERING RUNNING FOR OFFICE FOR THE FIRST TIME?

I think it's important to look from deep within and reflect on why you want to run for office. Elected officials should be conduits for community voice, particularly for those communities that are most marginalized or under-resourced. If you are leading by ego and individualistic ideals, then you should not run for office. I would like to see more women of color and gender nonconforming folks run for elected office. I would suggest participating in programs like Emerge that provide tools and training for progressive women to run for office.

IS THERE A CONSERVATION, CLIMATE, OR DEMOCRACY-RELATED RULE, POLICY, OR IDEA YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IMPLEMENTED AT THE LOCAL, STATE, AND/OR NATIONAL LEVEL?

I'd like to see the City, nonprofit, and private sectors come together to invest in Santa Fe's aging housing stock to provide families on fixed incomes assistance with energy efficient home repairs. By providing funding for weatherization retrofits, home improvements, energy efficient appliances, and other sustainable home repairs, families will be able to stay in their legacy homes and live in safer, more efficient environments, while also preserving our affordable housing stock.

YOU'VE INTRODUCED A LOCAL RESOLUTION TO PRESERVE AN AREA BETWEEN RIO GRANDE AND SANTA FE KNOWN AS CAJA DEL RIO. HAS THIS RESOLUTION PASSED, AND CAN YOU DISCUSS FOR THOSE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE AREA WHY THIS LAND IS SIGNIFICANT AND IMPORTANT TO PROTECT?

The Permanent Preservation of the Caja del Rio Cultural Landscape and Wildlife Area resolution passed unanimously by the City of Santa Fe Governing Body on June 29, 2022.

The Caja del Rio is located on 106,883 Bureau of Land Management and 17 U.S. Forest Service acres of public lands in north-central New Mexico and has the most potent combination of cultural history and critical wildlife habitat in the entire country. The petroglyphs and cultural sites are unmatched, and its wildlife corridor connects critical habitats across the state.

The Caja del Rio is also a place of spiritual connection and importance to Pueblo peoples since time immemorial, to Spanish settlers going back more than 13 generations, and, more recently, has importance to conservationists, environmentalists, sportspeople, outdoor enthusiasts, and even spiritual leaders. Unfortunately, we are seeing petroglyph defacement, vandalism, and theft; illegal shooting and poaching of wildlife and livestock; illegal dumping; theft of stock tanks; unlawful off-road vehicle usage and habitat fragmentation from illegal roads; unmanaged/unlawful recreation; and other issues.

The best way to tackle these issues is for leaders and elected bodies of all neighboring cities and counties, as well as Pueblo governments, to formalize our support for permanent, cohesive protection of the Caja del Rio to safeguard its protection and enjoyment of future generations.



WHAT ARE ADVOCATES ASKING PRESIDENT BIDEN AND THE NEW MEXICO CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO DO TO PROTECT CAJA DEL RIO?

We are asking the Biden administration and the New Mexico Congressional delegation to permanently protect the Caja del Rio, engage local communities in co-management of this incredible cultural and historical landscape, and to be more responsible stewards of the land, water, wildlife, and remarkable antiquities of the Caja.

ARE THERE WAYS OTHER LOCAL AND TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS IN NEW MEXICO CAN GET INVOLVED/LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS ISSUE?

Yes, I want to encourage local communities and tribal governments to work with the Caja del Rio Coalition. I'd recommend getting in touch with Andrew Black, who is helping to spearhead this diverse coalition, which consists of Tribal and Spiritual leaders, Hispano traditional land stewards, conservationists, sportspeople, and local, elected leaders, among others.

