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District 3 council candidate says he'll fix problem if elected

A former city parks and recreation director, who is a candidate in the March 14 city council election, wants the city to explain to taxpayers why the Ford Canyon Senior Center isn't open.

Moreover, Esco Chavez, a Gallup native and a New Mexico State University graduate, wants to know why the city persists in allowing Gallup's other senior center on the north side "to go overcrowded and a constant inconvenience to senior citizens."

Chavez held a news conference on the matter Feb. 16 to inform voters in District 3 that the smooth operation of the Ford Canyon Senior Center is something he plans to tackle if elected.

"Why is the Ford Canyon Senior Center closed?" Chavez said at the beginning of the 30-minute conference, conducted on the front steps of the Ford Canyon along Buena Vista Avenue. "I don't like it. Nobody likes it and the city really should do something about it."

Chavez said when the city closed Ford Canyon in October 2016, it forced the North Side Senior Center to open its doors that much wider. Attending the news conference was Margaret Diaz, a former supervisor at the North Side Center. Gallup is the sole municipality of its size in New Mexico that has two senior centers. The city has said Ford Canyon closed due to understaffing.

"I agree with everything he (Chavez) said," Diaz said. Diaz retired from the city a little more than

a year ago. “I still keep in touch with a lot of the seniors who go to the North Side Center. They don’t understand why Ford Canyon is closed.”

Chavez said what makes matters even more difficult to fathom is the fact that the city not long ago paved the parking lot at Ford Canyon – which he said cost around $64,000. “Does that make sense? Why do the parking lot and then close the center?” Chavez asked the eight people attending the event.

Most everyone attending the news conference said that something must be done with the Ford Canyon Senior Center. “I am concerned about the Ford Canyon Center,” long-time Gallup resident Gene Pacheco said. “I don’t know why they closed it.”

Chavez cited the federal Older Americans Act which provides funds to municipalities to spruce up places like senior centers. He said all somebody at the city has to do is look into it and make telephone calls.

“That money comes from (U.S.) Congress,” Chavez said. “I want the seniors to know that I’m here for them.”

Pacheco said he’s equally put off with the city’s poor job of maintaining streets. He said he’s seen more pot holes in Gallup over the past few months than what he’s seen in his decades of residing in the Indian Capital. Pacheco asked Chavez to make the maintenance of city streets part of this political platform.

The District 3 post is currently held by area hotelier and incumbent Yogash Kumar. The election is March 14. Gallup councilors serve four-year staggered terms and at an annual salary of $21,000. Also in the District 3 council race is Angela Chavez who owns and operates Angela’s Café on East Historic Highway 66.

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