

Letter to the Editor: 2020 Mayoral election

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 28 February 2020 06:22

In both 2011 and 2015 Mayoral elections, I wrote letters to all the candidates for the position of Mayor. Only candidate Yogash Kumar visited with me in 2011. In 2015, after it was determined that a run-off election was needed, I was able to have a conversation with both McKinney and Galanis before the run-off election.

I also wrote several letters to the local papers which all were published. The last letter I wrote talked about my conversations with McKinney and Galanis. In that letter I talked mainly about “**Vision for Gallup**” for the next 5-7-10 years.

So, here are the **main 5 priorities** I felt needed to be addressed. There has been some progress, yet I find that all five still need attention in the upcoming election.

#1 - **Deal with the Alcoholics and Homeless problems** that we experience daily in Gallup - the alcoholics, homeless, and mentally ill people frequenting the streets of Gallup. The Liquor Excise Tax doesn't provide enough funds for a “full service” program. Besides, believe me, no amount of counseling will work if the individual doesn't want to change. Also, there are more than enough providers who provide a range of services to address the needs of these people, except maybe for the mentally ill who need to be institutionalized. What has changed since then, NCI re-opened but still averages annual admissions of 22,000 to 24,000, many of whom are repeat offenders. Also, there is a question as to whether these people are “truly homeless”. I know for a fact that many of them have a home near Gallup on the “reservation” and many even have a home [or a place to stay] in Gallup.

They just choose that lifestyle

. So, the approach needs to be something else. For starters, as far as I know, “

No Valid Assessment of the Homeless Population” has ever been done.

Where are they coming from?

Why are they here in Gallup? Or, why are they coming to Gallup anyway?

Are they Homeless? Or, just do not want to go home?

Is this just their “lifestyle” of choice?

The Main Issue now is: We do not want to become a “magnet” for Homeless people like San Diego, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and other cities where they catered to the homeless population and now are being “over run” by these people. We also do not want a new brand name of **: Poverty City, USA or Homeless City, USA.**

My question to the next Mayor: How will you protect our City from being taken over by the Alcoholics, Transients and/or Homeless population?

#2 – Create Jobs through local business development and support. Notice I didn’t use those words “economic development”. That’s because since the Casino opened in Church Rock and the national economy went south in 2008-2010, the biggest issue is our local businesses are really struggling and bringing in another “big box” or building roads and infrastructure for the GLP doesn’t do one bit of good for our local businessmen. Also, the City of Gallup needs to have a more business friendly environment to allow the business community to strive and expand.

My question to the next Mayor: How will you help our local businesses to grow and expand providing for more local job creation and full-time [not just part-time minimum wage] employment opportunities?

#3 – Develop opportunities for creation of affordable housing. Regarding Housing, there is an urgent need for “affordable middle-income housing”. There is plenty of subsidized housing for low income in this area. For those who can afford \$200,000 plus homes they don’t have a problem getting housing. In a market study conducted by the Non-profit I used to work for several years ago, we found there was a “giant gap” in affordable housing in the \$95,000 to \$150,000 range. I am not talking about run-down houses, but I am talking about quality, safe [up to code], sound housing. Many people in Gallup make too much money to qualify for low-income housing, but somehow don’t make enough to buy a nice home in a nice neighborhood. I still see the same problem for the City of Gallup today. Promoting Homeownership for people who exceed the 80% ceiling for low income and for the low-middle income folks needs to be a priority.

My question to the next Mayor would be: What plans do you have to address this matter?

#4 – Plan for replacement of key high cost community facilities before they fall. Two items are the Detention facility and the Detox Center. Both need to be replaced. While neither is totally the City's responsibility, the City will be expected to be involved because they are tied to the County on these two facilities. Another one is the Police Department facility which apparently is near condemnation.

We also need to worry about replacement of aging water and sewer lines

, which continue to blow up on a routine basis, not to mention streets, sidewalks, curb and gutters.

My question to the next Mayor: Realizing there is never "enough money" to meet priorities and other wants and needs, how do you plan to raise or solicit other sources of funding? Don't simply say more taxes – we are overtaxed already.

#5 – Regarding Gallup's Vision for the future. Realizing that Gallup is becoming a Native American City approaching 50% or more and within the next 3-5 years may exceed 65% of the population of Gallup. This is attributed to the influx of individuals, Native Americans from the Navajo Indian Reservation and the Zuni Indian Reservation. They come to find housing, jobs, access to shopping, better schools, medical care and other community support services.

There needs to be clear vision to guide

acceptance of Native Americans as our next-door neighbors and begin the process to integrate them into the fabric of Gallup

as productive citizens

of Gallup. This was what my conversation with McKinney and Galanis was about before the 2015 run-off election.

My question to the next Mayor: How will you actively engage the Native people as well as the current citizens to create a positive, productive vision for a future Gallup which is predominantly a Native American City? I personally think this is the **most crucial social-cultural-economic paradigm shift**

Gallup will face in the next five to ten years. We need a leader trusted by all who can begin and guide that process.

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Sincerely,

Richard F. Kontz, Gallup, NM