

## Sunshine and chili just aren't enough

At some point, even the most devoted among us have doubts, and that goes for those of us transplants to New Mexico who are wondering if it's really worth staying in the "Land of Enchantment." To even admit to these doubts is enough to get us placed on the New Mexico cheerleaders' hit list and to blackball us from all those pro-New Mexico organizations whose *raison d'être* is the promotion of the state to themselves and to outsiders.

As a matter of fact, I can already hear the echoes from all the 'love it or leave it' types that routinely ignore or downplay our state's shortcomings for fear that the truth will set them free from making some pretty important choices of their own. I'm hardly a newcomer after 18 years as a NM resident, but to those original ten or so founding families and all the native peoples, I'm an interloper, a tourist. To them, I'm not qualified to criticize *mother New Mexico*. They put me in the same category as all carpetbaggers or those that aren't "enlightened by enchantment." I'll freely admit that many of those passed 18 years have been good ones, but I've come to the realization that investing any more time in a place that praises a one-party rule with parochialism and patronism and that accepts small-minded governance has its limits.

The sell-by date is quickly approaching. I simply cannot stand idly by and watch, breathlessly and quietly, while we elevate victimhood, ignore education, downplay security, prefer racial equity over equality and glorify backward myopic historical glances while deferring to all the nostalgic tourism hype that experts have proffered as the reasons to build a solid NM foundation for future generations.

It's time to tell truth to the first power (ourselves) and start admitting the obvious. We're last on the good lists and first on the bad ones for a variety of reasons and to ignore those reasons is to pronounce a life sentence of cultural servitude on our children and grandchildren who are leaving this state in droves after their graduation. It's tempting to place the blame on just one thing, like the paucity of jobs, for example, but that would only be partially accurate. In fact, our fundamentals in general just aren't competitive and when combined with our unwillingness to change we discourage new company investment and job growth. We are stamping *second-class citizen* on our children's foreheads by allowing them to be 'socially promoted.' What's worse, we're compromising their freedom of movement to other more competitive states because we've allowed them to grow up unable to read or write English and thereby restricted their mobility...and the prospect of getting better jobs.

How can we in good conscience believe that our climate, our landscape and our food are sufficient reasons for would-be relocatees to come to New Mexico? Why should the young professionals come and subject their children to a sub-standard education? Why should the medically vulnerable come as they did in the 40s with tuberculosis? (We're losing doctors and nurses right and left.) Why should older retirees come when they are preyed upon by thugs and forced to pay tax on their Social Security benefits? You say that housing costs are lower than the national average and THAT is a good reason to flock to the state. Sorry. The number of properties on the market has fallen dramatically, and by the way, who wants to live in a 'sanctuary city' where immigration laws are ignored, crime is increasing and rising local property taxes are making 'normal' properties unaffordable?

The fact is that our youth see things more clearly and honestly than we do. The bright ones know that the basics of New Mexican life are not going to change anytime soon. There will still be nepotism, ethnically-based hiring practices, feather-bedding of government jobs to party loyalists and a blind eye turned towards innovation and creativity. We ought to change our state motto to reflect the new reality of our narrow-mindedness: "If it's not made here it doesn't exist here." And that goes for attitudes and normal everyday practices, too.

The truth is that the outside world doesn't need New Mexico and the unspoken truth is that (many) New Mexicans want nothing to do with the outside world anyway, so it is a win-win situation...but not for those of us who haven't been sleepwalking our way through time.

*Stephan Helgesen is a retired career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in 30 countries for 25 years during the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush Administrations. He is the author of twelve books, six of which are on American politics and has written over 1,200 articles on politics, economics and social trends. He operates a political news story aggregator website, [www.projectpushback.com](http://www.projectpushback.com). He can be reached at: [stephan@stephanhelgesen.com](mailto:stephan@stephanhelgesen.com)*