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Mayor defends ‘sanctuary’ status as city gets EPA grant

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Posted: Thursday, January 5, 2017 11:12 pm | Updated: 12:45 am, Fri Jan 6, 2017.

By Daniel J. Chacón
The New Mexican

The city of Santa Fe will continue to seek federal grants despite President-elect Donald Trump’s threat to cut off federal funding to “sanctuary” cities that don’t use local resources to help enforce federal immigration laws, Mayor Javier Gonzales said Thursday.

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Santa Fe's mayor became a de facto spokesman for sanctuary cities last year when he defended their policies in widely circulated interviews with Fox News, CNN and other media outlets. Gonzales made his Thursday comments during a news conference at which city officials announced a \$150,000 grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

"We fully are prepared to go forward and not only defend our status but to continue to seek more federal funds to invest in our community because we have positioned ourselves to be able to be good models for what can happen with those federal funds to improve the lives of its citizens," Gonzales said.

Santa Fe is one of five cities in the nation that received one of the EPA grants under the Obama administration. The money will be used for "long-term stormwater management and planning," said Melissa McDonald, the city's river and watershed coordinator.

"It's going to be a 12- to 18-month project," she said. "We are going to receive \$150,000 in technical assistance to write or rewrite our own stormwater management plan."

Gonzales said the city could work on a variety of initiatives, from capturing storm runoff for irrigation to expanding a program of releasing reservoir water into the mostly dry bed of the Santa Fe River.

When asked whether sticking to Santa Fe's sanctuary city policy gave him any pause, given Trump's promise to try to withhold federal funds from such cities,



Gonzales said: "Not at all."

"Santa Fe fully intends to apply for every federal grant opportunity that exists out there," he said. "I believe that we have fully earned the right to be able to apply for federal grants and receive them."

The EPA grant announcement comes as the City Council prepares to consider a resolution "reaffirming, with pride, the status of the city of Santa Fe as a sanctuary for immigrants and calling for the strengthening of policies that will reinforce this status."

"This is doubling down," Councilor Joseph Maestas, who is co-sponsoring the resolution with Councilor Renee Villarreal, told the *Albuquerque Journal*. "We're thumbing our nose at this incoming administration."

Gonzales, who is actively involved with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, said that "there is a belief among other mayors nationally" that only law enforcement grants could be in jeopardy if Trump follows through on his threat. Santa Fe last year received about \$20,000 from the federal government for body cameras for police officers.

"Most likely, if the federal government pursues penalizing sanctuary cities because of that status, the belief among many who have looked at this is that those funds would be limited to the law enforcement side of the house," the mayor said. "Having said all that, it's very early. We don't know what the president-elect is going to do. We don't know if the statements that he made during the campaign will in fact be translated into direction to begin these deportation raids or to penalize cities that have the sanctuary status."

An EPA regional administrator, Ron Curry, a former Santa Fe city manager and one-time Cabinet secretary under former Gov. Bill Richardson, said he didn't know whether the \$150,000 grant is in any jeopardy.

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"How the new administration will interpret anything like this, I cannot tell you how that will be done," said Curry, who plans to leave the federal agency in two weeks when Trump is sworn into office.

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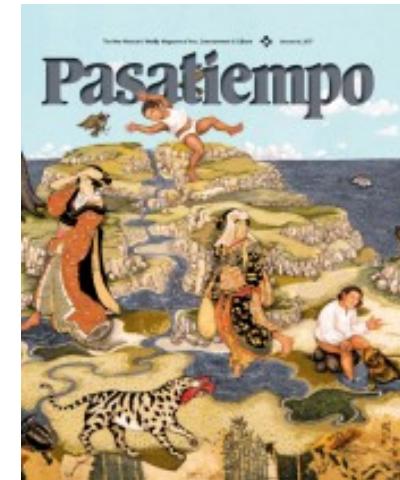
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