

**"Beyond Border 2012: Improving Environmental Quality"**

**Senator Udall Senate Hearing**

**April 11, 2012**

**Las Cruces, New Mexico**

**by**

**Dolores Saldana-Caviness, Dona Ana County**

Doña Ana County is the second largest county in the State of New Mexico. It is approximately 3,800 sq. miles large and has a population of approximately 210,000 people. It borders Texas and Mexico. Doña Ana County has 33 "*colonias*," four of which are on the border, collectively encompassing approximately 41,000 people in County Commission District 2. The issues facing the border are many, but I have concentrated on water, waste water, and solid waste particularly illegal dumping and air quality. I hope this gives a minute glimpse of the border in Dona Ana County in New Mexico by its representative on the county commission, Dolores Saldana-Caviness.

**Water/wastewater issue in Chaparral:**

The majority of Doña Ana County does have drinking water and wastewater systems in place, with the exception of one colonia, Chaparral (population +/- 20,000) that does not have a wastewater system in place. The residents are on septic tanks, which is of huge concern to Doña Ana County. We have built a treatment plant that is only servicing approximately 300 residents, two elementary schools, and a high school. The impediment is lack of funds to finish this \$30 million project. We have only completed the first phase. We are aggressively seeking funds to complete this project.

**Water/wastewater issues in the Sunland Park/Santa Teresa area:**

This part of Doña Ana County has a population of approximately 20,000 and does have systems in place for water/wastewater. The Camino Real Regional Utility Authority (CRRUA) was created in February of 2005 by Doña Ana County and the City of Sunland Park to manage the water and wastewater systems for Sunland Park and the Santa Teresa area, the industrial park and the Santa Teresa Port of Entry. By regionalizing, the economies of scale result in a less expensive product for the residents. When the EPA's Drinking Water Standards changed, both systems, Sunland Park and Doña Ana County's Treatment Facilities were in non-compliance in their arsenic levels. They are under administrative or stipulated orders to correct these levels. There are substantial costs associated with building arsenic treatment plants. The arsenic treatment plant in Sunland Park is complete and in compliance. However, CRRUA still needs well over \$7 million to abate the arsenic for the balance of the service area. Sunland Park's infrastructure is very old and one treatment plant is out of service. To meet the need, a new

treatment plant is needed resulting in CRRUA needing another approximately \$15 million for design and construction.

### Solid Waste:

The South Central Solid Waste Authority (SCSWA) was formally established in 1992 and continues to be the governing authority for Doña Ana County. Its mission is to manage solid waste in a manner that is environmentally sound, socially responsible and cost effective.

We have implemented programs that are reducing the negative impact of solid waste on our environment. However the impact of illegal dumping continues to plague our county. It is rampant and hazardous. Our border receives trash along our highways not only from our residents but trash from Texas residents and vice-versa. We hosted an illegal dumping summit last fall and had attendance in excess of 100 participants from the entire region: Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. From this, an illegal dumping task force was formed. Our goal is to bring awareness through education. We received a \$75,000 grant from the federal Bureau of Land Management to help eradicate illegal dumping. On top of the \$125,000 we received in 2011, we implemented community clean-ups, one of which resulted in 100 tons of trash picked up in the community of La Union, New Mexico. This continues to be a huge environmental issue for Doña Ana County and the region.

### Hazardous Materials designated routes:

New Mexico does not have designated hazardous-material routes like Texas and Arizona. Once the new rail hub, Union Pacific facility in Santa Teresa is completed, there will be increased Hazardous Material presence through the railroad, warehousing and manufacturing facilities. In addition, it is anticipated that there will also be increased traffic coming in from Mexico at the Santa Teresa Port of Entry with Hazardous Material cargo. We understand this may be more of a state issue but nonetheless, help from the federal government is always welcomed.

### Air Quality:

The air quality in southern Dona Ana County, Sunland Park, Santa Teresa and Anthony is considered at a non-attainment standard by the Environment Protection Agency. The statutes as they are today do not address an international zone. The Border Industrial Association in Santa Teresa comprised of the industrial tenants, some 70 members, employing 2000 employees, and hundreds of millions in investment in southern New Mexico are hurt by this "ruling" and consider it unfair. The winds blow and carry these pollutants from Mexico causing for the monitoring to qualify as non-attainment. They ask for the EPA to give Santa Teresa some leeway.

The issues facing our border are many and different than those issues facing the rest of the State of New Mexico. The federal government in its infinite wisdom can help and is helping by conducting this senate hearing today.