



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## **District Attorney, Donald Gallegos Incumbent**

*Taos News: What is your education background?*

Donald Gallegos: I graduated from Questa High School in 1980. I received my bachelor's degree from UNM in 1988 in American studies. Then I got my law degree from the University of Wyoming in 1991.

*TN: Where are you originally from?*

Gallegos: Questa, New Mexico.

*TN: How long have you been in Taos?*

Gallegos: I still live in Questa. I have lived here all my life.

*TN: Have you ever been convicted of a crime?*

Gallegos: No, not of a felony or high misdemeanor.

*TN: What is your idea of the job of a district attorney? What do you think is the most important function?*

Gallegos: My predecessors have made that clear. My main job is to do justice, not seek convictions. That's something that's just part of our standards. If you're talking about a more practical definition of my job, that is to prosecute the felony, misdemeanor and other cases assigned to me by statute.

*TN: Do you feel your experience as a prosecutor would help or hinder you if re-elected to the district attorney's office?*

Gallegos: Extremely. I believe it is, because I started at the bottom. I started out as a grant position DWI prosecutor. After that, I went to Clayton and ran an office, where I learned a lot about how to deal with personnel and budget issues. After that, I came to Taos and worked as a domestic violence prosecutor. That was more focused and I started working with CAV, implementing regular staffings with them and building networks. When I became a deputy D.A. I had a felony case load and represented my boss at functions. When I became chief deputy D.A., that's when I pretty much began running the office. So by the time I became D.A., I had experience in all functions of the office.

*TN: What are the biggest challenges you face over the next year if elected?*

Gallegos: The ones that continue to plague all district attorney's offices all over the country, and that is recruiting and retaining attorney, and that's a pay issue. Most attorneys graduating from law school come out \$40-\$100,000 in debt. I'm hoping that with the change of administration that more focus is put on recognizing and rewarding people within public service, as they do with doctors and dentists. Within that, I also need to make sure that my staff is adequately paid.

*TN: What would you specifically bring to the office of district attorney through your experience and education?*

Gallegos: Experience is a plus. I don't think there's any argument that I am the most experienced prosecutor in the county. I have a unique perspective, being born and raised here. I've been in this office since 1993, so I have a level of communication and experience with all levels of the office and with law enforcement that none of my competitors have. I'm also raising a family of three children here and I am involved in this community whether it is coaching little league or being on boards like the Taos County Gang Task Force or the Juvenile Justice Board. It's an overwhelming amount of experience and perspective that my competitors can't match. I fired Carlos because he was doing a bad job. With Jeff, I really believe he cares for his clients, but I think he should focus more on policy issues.

*TN: What makes you the best candidate for district attorney?*

Gallegos: That I have proven it. I've taken on the hardest cases and rejected cases that have resulted in political shots and personal attacks against me. I've been threatened, my family has been threatened. I believe that my job here is to do justice and I have been disowned by friends and family. I have been through it, I have done it. I have taken credit for success and responsibility for failure.

*TN: As district attorney, how would you improve coordination or expediency within the grand jury system?*

Gallegos: We started using the grand jury system because victims and law enforcement prefer it. But I would continue to work with law enforcement agencies to get as much of a complete investigation in cases as possible. We have not had any problems with scheduling with grand jury. I would keep an open mind to those cases that go to preliminary hearings either in magistrate or district courts so that we don't wind up doing double the hearings, which is what winds up happening. We are guided by the ethics and the legal principles to get the cases there that need to be there.



**Donald Gallegos**