

One-on-one with Mayor Tim Keller ahead of Albuquerque Mayoral Election

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Faith Egbunu



Reporter

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — [Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller officially announced his run for reelection](#) on Thursday, March 13, 2025. On Tuesday, March 18, 2025, KOAT's Faith Egbunu spoke with Mayor Keller in a one-on-one sit down interview on why he believes there is still work to do regarding a third term, New Mexicans' top concerns, mayoral candidates, his doubters and more.

"What do you say to voters that supported you in the past but now have doubts? Some expressed you've had 8 years to tackle issues at top of mind for New Mexicans, but yet nothing has been done?"

Faith Egbuonu: Why a third term?

Mayor Tim Keller: There's really two reasons. The first reason is because we've been working hard on some decades-old challenges that we've had, whether it's crime or homelessness, even some major projects for our families, and we're finally breaking through, we're seeing traction on our crime technology efforts, on the gateway system actually taking thousands of people off the street, and we've got to see these through.

So, the primary reason is to make sure that we keep doing these ideas that are working, and that's really important because we did the real work and the hard work for years to actually fix some of these long-standing challenges. Now, we've got to use those fixes and actually make sure they lift up our city every day. Second reason is really because of what's happening with respect to the turmoil in D.C. and its effect on our city.

I woke up after the election with renewed resolve. I've seen the first round of Trump when I was mayor before, and you've got to have strong, steady leadership to push back on all the funding cuts, all the division that's gonna be put upon our city, and that's already happening. And so I'm resolved to see that through, and that's why I need another term.

Egbuonu: What do you plan to accomplish if you're reelected again?

Keller: I have two real goals for another term. And the first one is we've got to follow through on some of the things that are finally gaining traction in our city. This has to do with like crime technology, which is finally making a difference when it comes to crime fighting, the one-stop shop gateway system, which has taken a thousand people off the streets.

We need it to be two. And it's also about finishing some incredible projects like the rail trail, the CNM rail yards academy, bringing UNM downtown. These are all things that we're gaining traction on. but we need a little more time to actually get the job done.

Crime

Egbuonu: As of today, where do we stand with crime? That's one of the biggest issues at top of mind for New Mexicans right now.

Keller: I'll give you an example which I think speaks to the general situation for crime in Albuquerque. For almost a decade we were number one in auto theft, we were the worst in the nation. And now we're like number eighth, the eighth worst. This is a good example because it says the truth, which is that we've turned the corner on a lot of these issues, but we're coming down from all-time highs.

So, we have to keep doing what's working, and we know we're going the right direction. That's what's changed about two years ago. We saw this across homicide, we saw it across assaults, and a couple of other categories of violent crime. But we've got to keep using the crime technology that we're doing and the techniques that we're doing around warrant arrests to make sure that that trend continues. But absolutely, a long way to go. I mean, that's clear. That's also why I need some more time.

Egbuonu: You've talked about crime reduction while you've been in office. Elaborate a bit more of what's been done while you've been in office for eight years.

Keller: When I came in, what we saw was a department that was literally falling off a cliff. It was in terrible shape. We had officers leaving in droves. The consent decree was bogged down and going nowhere. And also crime numbers continued to go up. This had been happening for a decade. And it took us a while to really get on the right track, especially with COVID in the middle.

So, I mean, we lost several years in general in the city on what we were doing there. But about two years ago, we started to see progress. and it's really because of two factors. the crime-fighting technology that we've invested, the fact that we're rebuilding the ranks, and actually the other piece is civilians.

We use civilians now more than we ever have so that we free up officers to fight violent crime. So that's our community safety departments taking 80,000 calls that police didn't have to. That's why you see public service aides taking traffic accident reports. It's so we're freed up to fight crime, and that's what's

enabled us to bring some of these numbers finally down. So we literally had to rebuild the department. That's what we've been doing, and now it's actually in a much, much better position.

Egbuonu: Would you agree there's still more work to be done?

Keller: Absolutely and that's why I'm actually interested in a few more years because we know what to do now. We've done the hard work to actually fix the broken department but now we actually have to use it fully to fight crime each and every day.

Doubters

Egbuonu: What do you say to voters that supported you in the past but now have doubts? Some expressed you've had 8 years to tackle issues at top of mind for New Mexicans, but yet nothing has been done?"

Keller: First off, I see what you see, right? I have, whether it's being in the community with my kids or whether it's walking to work, I literally understand as well like how challenged these times are. But now is not the time to change.

And the reason is because we're finally gaining traction. We're breaking through after years of investment in the really hard things, whether it's rebuilding a homelessness system or it's salvaging a police department from falling apart, we've done that hard work.

And so now, I didn't want a few more years, I didn't want another term, but I need another term because I know that we can't change direction. That is going to be especially dangerous with what's going on in D.C. right now. We need strong, steady leadership, and I'm here for that duration and for those reasons, and that's why I think folks should give us a chance, I think, to finish the job.

Homeless Crisis

Egbuonu: Where do we stand right now with homelessness?

Keller: When we came in, for decades, this is the same situation as crime in a sense that our city had never faced homelessness head-on. We'd never done

the actual work to say, how do you get someone off the street into services, and where does that all happen? And we took the time to actually fix those issues.

We built the community safety department to do transportation. Then we created the Gateway, a one-stop shop, which is finally open. It just opened in September with its 24-7 drop-off and medical sobering. So now we have a one place for folks to go that's 24-7. And now we're building out the other places like a youth shelter and recovery where people can finally get addiction and treatment.

Those are all online to be open and helping people either this year or next year. And so now we're seeing the fruits of all that hard work but we've got to see it through. And if we do that, we're going to move from when I started to taking zero people, every night in Albuquerque to a place where they can get help. That's what we used to do.

And now we're actually taking care of a thousand people every night. And if we finish what we've planned, we're going to be able to take care of two thousand every night. Two thousand people off our street. That's what people want, and that's what we can deliver on.

Egbuonu: There are five candidates now. All of them have shared the same sentiments in making Albuquerque safer, right? And some are challenging your eight years in office. What's your take?

Keller: I expect a lot of challengers. I would actually expect much more. I think we're going to have probably a dozen candidates at the end of the day. And we should because these are tough times. And all I'm saying is look at the answers that they can actually deliver on. And I don't see them saying anything different besides talking about the problem. We're saying we actually know the answers.

We just need some more time to make sure that we see them through. And we have these proof points to look at. Whether it's a thousand people, we're taking care of every night, whether it's crime numbers finally going down. Or it's things like the C&M Film Academy finally coming into the rail yards. I think that's in sharp contrast to everyone who's continuing to talk about the problem and someone who's actually offering solutions. That's what we offer. That's why I'm running again.

Regrets

Egbuonu: Do you have any regrets in your eight years of office?

Keller: Almost every week, I have things I would have done differently.

Egbuonu: Really?

Keller: Oh yeah, because this job— It's like, I used to play football, and there was a drill that we do called Bull in the Ring, which is like you stand in the center and everyone's around you, and they just call your name, and they just hit you from the side and that's the drill. And that's what being mayor, that's what it's like because every day there's another challenge.

It could be a particular homicide. It could be windstorms that knock out everyone's power. And I'm battle-tested. I've been through those. And now, especially with what's happening in D.C. and the turmoil, I think we need somebody who's ready for that on day one. We do not have the luxury because these are tough times to try someone new or to change directions.

And so, for me, there's mistakes every day that you learn from. And of course, as everyone says, that's the key, is how you learn from that. But there are a lot of things I would have done sooner, that's for sure, including things like our technology and crime fighting. And then a lot of things around, even the consent decree, we're 99% done with that. But if I had to go back, you know, first time around, of course, there's all sorts of things you learn. And that's really important during tough times.

What's next?

Egbuonu: You've had a pretty extensive career. Former member of the New Mexico State Senate, you served as New Mexico State Auditor, you served as Mayor for eight years. If you lose, what's next for you?

Keller: I'm raising my family here, and I dedicated essentially my professional career to government and public service way back when I was 27 years old and I was first elected. And so I first ran, I should say. And so that's not going to change. I'm going to keep trying to find a way to help our community.

For me, it's a vocational calling. It's something that even my friends will tell you as early as like fifth grade. I was talking about working in government in one form or another. So, I'll look at that, but I think for right now, it's not necessarily by choice for me. I wish I could have gotten everything done in two years, but we need more time to finish the job. And so for me, that's the calling, and that's what I'm here for now.

Police Chief

Egbuonu: Is there still possibility of a new police chief still? You've answered this in so many ways, but I also feel like the idea is still being toyed with. Is it official that if you are re-elected, you are getting a new police chief?

Keller: I know that with another term, you always get a wonderful gift, and the gift is you have your team that got you there and that you've had before, and then you have time to actually bring in fresh folks and also to build for the longer term, and we're positioned for that right now at the police department.

There's a wonderful bench strength there, and we know that we're going to need new leadership, and that's something that I've been through before, and I think that's something that we can make smooth, and also we're not starting from ground zero. We know folks who know the job and know what to do and they'll be good candidates and so it's something that I expect to actually be really beneficial for everyone.

If you look at the deputy chiefs, that's an obvious place to look, and we have some excellent deputy chiefs, and so that's the first place I'd look at. Certainly, you want to look outside the department. I think you owe it to the community to do that. But particularly because of the positive changes because APD has been rebuilt and reinvigorated by this leadership team, you've got to look to that team in the first place, and so that's the first place I'd look at.

Egbuonu: What do you believe is a major issue plaguing New Mexico that needs immediate attention or continuous attention as of now?

Keller: In general, of course, it's crime and homelessness. But unfortunately, during these times, I think there are two flavors of that that have even become more urgent. One is defending our city from being destroyed by some of these things that are happening in Washington. I mean, if they actually cut certain

programs, like we won't have a bus system, we won't have a police department because they'll have no crime lab, which is federally funded.

Juvenile Crime

So, all of a sudden, those are becoming more urgent. I think that's also why we need strong and experienced leadership. The second thing is our juvenile criminal justice system. This is something that no one, frankly, wanted to ever have to admit or deal with because these are young kids. Like what happened this morning, what folks are hearing about is the combination of guns and social media and then a youth system that is incapable of dealing with an 11-year-old who commits murder.

That's where we're at. And that's the country, but it's also us. And so we've got to look at every step in that system and see what we can do to, unfortunately, adjust to these times when you have middle schoolers with weapons. That's a dangerous combination.

Egbuonu: Juvenile crime that's a serious issue in our state right now. It's been talked among lawmakers at the session. There's some bills that have not made it— the Children's Code, nothing went down with that. But what do you feel? I believe there's many underlying factors, but just hearing from you, what do you feel it's going to take for us to get back on track with juvenile crime? Because it just keeps growing and growing and growing. Juveniles specifically, when you check the youth detention center, some of them get checked in and then they're checked right back out because there's not enough space, then they're sent back to their guardians or whomever and then they're turned back out to the streets to do the same thing over and over again.

Keller: When we think about this, my only analogy is what we've done actually with 9-1-1 response. So for example, we had all these challenges with response times and how we respond and we had the consent decree because we're using too much force. And my team turned around and we created an entirely different department, the community safety department. And that department has taken 80,000 calls and there's social workers who are doing that through the 9-1-1 system 24-7.

So that was a brand new idea that no one else in America had done, and we've delivered on it, and I think we've seen how helpful it is. We have to have a similar type of innovation on the juvenile justice side. The combination of

everyone involved, and that's from schools to families to CYFD to APD and everything in between, it's just not adequate to deal with the problem with social media, guns, and drugs in middle schools.

So, to me, it's something that's more, whether it's a governor something like that would really put it together but if you're asking me the question we have to have an innovative response that is different like the current model is totally ill-equipped to deal with what's happening to our kids and I have a middle schooler in public school so I get it to a certain extent.

I think the system is ill-equipped to deal with what our kids are going through with right now and so we have to look at it starting from that place there's investment in everything. There's changes that need to be made. But there's also a different way to deal with this. And there's different things we can look at, like case workers in middle schools that are actually more sort of family aides. Violence intervention is the biggest one.

I started this program in West Mesa and we've seen recidivism completely drop. We've seen grades go up for everyone who's involved in that. We should have that in every high school. We should probably also have it in every middle school, which is terrible to say. But that's a third way, that's a different way. So the very long answer to your question is, we should have violence intervention programs at every school in New Mexico.

Public Financing

Egbuonu: Any words you want to part with?

Keller: I'm going to be doing public financing again, that's this process where you have to get all these five-dollar contributions, but it allows you to really be independent, and it allows you, as I have been, whether you like me or not, I think it's clear that at least I'm my own person and you kind of know what you're getting and that is in a huge way because we're publicly financed.

So, I'm doing that process again and it's something to see what the other candidates do, who gets through that process, who's privately financed. That's going to be a dynamic that's also uniquely Albuquerque. And so we'll see how that all plays out, but I know the route I'm taking there and it's going to be public financing again.

Egbuonu: Thank you.

In 2025, Mayor and City Council Districts 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are up for election on Nov. 4.

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