

A Community, Not Just a Destination

Dear Editor,

I am running for County Commissioner because of one question I keep returning to: Will San Miguel County remain a place where the people who work here can afford to live here, and have a real voice in the decisions that shape our future?

I have spent more than twenty-five years here, raising five children who went through Telluride schools, running two Main Street businesses, working in rural healthcare, and chairing both the school board and the hospital board. It taught me one thing: This community solves hard problems when it decides to. In 2018, we voted to tax ourselves to fund mental health care because enough of us decided the need was real. We can decide again.

Housing is where the strain shows first. When people who work here cannot afford to live here, the losses spread quietly: fewer children in our schools, businesses that cannot hold onto staff, longtime neighbors who do the math and move away. Christine and I know that our own grown children are finding it harder than it should be to come home and build a life here. This is not only a housing problem. It is the community itself, thinning one household at a time.

A steadier economy matters too. A county that leans on a single season and a single industry leaves the people who live here exposed. And growth is coming whether we plan for it or not. The real questions are how we grow, where we grow, and who pays. When a project creates new demand for roads, water, and workforce housing, it should help meet that demand, not pass the cost to everyone else. A commissioner cannot manufacture a year-round economy. What a commissioner can do is hold every land use and budget decision to those standards and invest in the basics that let other kinds of work take root here. These are not programs. They are the standards you apply to the decisions you actually control.

And none of it holds without trust in how decisions get made. People can accept decisions they disagree with; what they cannot accept is feeling the decision was already made before they ever walked into the room. Good government means county goals are applied to every vote, not set aside for the project with the loudest backers. It means bringing affected communities to the table before a decision is shaped, not after. And it means a county that works as hard for the people who cannot make a midweek afternoon meeting as for those who can.

We have not lost our way. We have lost ground, and those are different things. Ground can be regained, one decision at a time. San Miguel County still has great schools and libraries, ranches and main streets, volunteers and neighbors who show up. The question is whether we make the choices that keep them while the window is still open.

This is not about getting the old days back. It is about who gets a future here. That choice is still ours to make on November 3.

Paul Reich

Democratic Candidate, San Miguel County Commissioner, District 2