



Gabe Vasquez in ABQ Journal

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On Jan. 7, Renee Nicole Good dropped her 6-year-old son off at school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Minutes later, a masked federal agent shot her three times — killing an American citizen, a mother of three young children. And on Saturday, another tragic incident unfolded, with federal agents violently ending a 37-year-old man's life after pummeling him to the ground and shooting him in the chest. He, too, was an American citizen.

Over the past year, Secretary Kristi Noem has run the Department of Homeland Security as a rogue agency, marshalling masked agents into our cities with little to no regard for the law, plunging entire communities into chaos. They're detaining American citizens and legal residents with impunity and taking zero accountability for their unlawful actions. We would not tolerate this behavior from any other law enforcement agency.

This chaos has been enabled by a \$150 billion slush fund granted to DHS as part of a reconciliation bill crafted by the administration for the purpose of evading congressional oversight, the one "Big Beautiful Bill."

Last week, Congress had the chance to rein in Noem's rogue agency with a spending bill that would give Immigration and Customs Enforcement an additional \$10 billion in taxpayer dollars without any substantive reform — nothing to ensure that ICE would operate with accountability and within the standards of all law enforcement. No assurances that American citizens would not be detained, no mandate for agents to remove their masks, no assurance that they'd be targeting violent criminals, and no assurance that the agency would follow existing orders already handed down from federal courts.

I represent 180 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border and a majority Hispanic district, and the story of immigration and reaching the American Dream is the story of my family. I know where we can strengthen border security, how to target cartel operations, and many of the issues we've faced with mass migration and the asylum crisis. This funding bill instead targets Americans and does little to stop crime, human trafficking and the flow of drugs into our communities. That's why I could not in good conscience vote to increase the agency's already bloated budget, especially as New Mexicans struggle to afford their basic needs.

I've walked the border with ranchers and Border Patrol agents countless times, talked strategy and technology with directors at our ports of entry, ridden horseback

through New Mexico's border on the Bootheel and convened border stakeholder meetings to gather input from local residents in Las Cruces, Columbus, Deming and Lordsburg. These experiences are why I've promoted solutions and introduced legislation to more efficiently and effectively target cartel threats.

I've also secured federal funding for public safety technology and supported a \$4.4 billion package for state and local law enforcement. And I've led border Democrats in demanding transparency on how DHS spends taxpayer dollars and fought for investments in smart technology, demanding answers directly from Secretary of War Pete Hegseth.

I know what smart investments in border security, immigration enforcement and public safety look like — and what we are seeing from ICE is not it.

A fish rots from the head down, and that's why I also recently led the call for Noem's removal. We need competent and responsible leadership.

Noem's failure of leadership is responsible for the chaos we see unfolding across American neighborhoods, and it goes beyond ICE. She has violated Americans' trust, failed communities affected by natural disasters by delaying disaster response after flooding in Texas and in Ruidoso, and put her own self-interest ahead of what benefits taxpayers.

When I served on the Las Cruces City Council in 2019, thousands of families arrived at our border, seeking refuge from violence and economic insecurity, putting a strain on local resources in the communities that took them in. We took care of them because that's who we are. But I knew then what I know now: The system is broken, and both parties have failed to fix it.

Today, as a member of Congress, I want every American to know that they don't have to choose between open borders or the horrific violence from ICE on our streets. We can secure our borders and keep our streets safe, grow the U.S. economy and expand legal pathways in a humane, cost-effective way — all while living up to our American values. And that's just what the New American Immigration Plan does.

Effective immigration policy requires four elements: smart security, economic growth, fair enforcement and new legal pathways.

First, smart border technology: autonomous surveillance towers in rugged areas, aerostats for surveillance, counter-drone capabilities to secure our skies from cartels and X-ray cargo scanning for our ports. These are investments that work better than billion-dollar walls that can be beaten with \$4 work gloves.

Second, economic alignment: This can be done with well-regulated pathways for workers in agriculture, construction, health care, home care, and emerging technologies that lower costs and maintain American competitiveness with China and Russia.

Third, accountable enforcement with transparency and oversight, such as my Humane Accountability Act, which would require transparency in detentions and deportations. We can prioritize removing violent criminals while respecting due process

and constitutional rights. When enforcement is transparent and humane, it's stronger — not weaker.

Finally, clear legal pathways: processes for people who work, pay taxes and pass background checks to earn legal status. Right now, our system traps people who contribute to our communities and forces them to live in fear, which leaves everyone less safe and worse off.

In New Mexico, we know the important role that immigrants play in our state. Anyone who's tried to build a home, harvest crops or staff a hospital knows immigrants get the job done. Border security and economic prosperity aren't in conflict — they're connected. As Americans, we value law and order. But the lawlessness and disregard for American rights we have seen from ICE directly goes against our American values. Good didn't deserve a death sentence. Her family deserves a real investigation, and taxpayers deserve agencies that follow the law.

What I voted on last week was in opposition to expansion without reform, and a demand for real oversight — I will not rubber-stamp failed policy. I'm choosing accountability first.

That's what border communities need. That's what keeps Americans safe. And that's what our constitutional values require.

U.S. Rep. Gabe Vasquez, D-N.M., represents District 2 in the U.S. House of Representatives.