

# 'FED UP'

## ABQ Chamber calls for movement on crime issues

BY MEGAN GLEASON  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

**B**usinesses and families are fed up. So is the governor.

That's what Terri Cole, president and CEO of the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, said about the crime and public safety issues that plague New Mexico.

She said it's difficult to even know where to start with what happened during the special session meant to focus on public safety held earlier this month.

"It ended up only being five hours with absolutely no debate on any bill at all," Cole said.

The Chamber supported all of Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's crime bills going into the special session, none of which even made it to committee. Only one bill passed that included money for disaster relief and pilot programs related to assisted outpatient treatment and competency diversion pilot programs.

Cole said she doesn't understand why the Legislature couldn't debate and narrow even just a few crime bills, especially when it comes to keeping violent criminals off the streets.

House Minority Leader Rod Montoya, R-Farmington, said the Legislature did nothing about the state's crime problem.

"The governor — I don't agree with her often. But I agree that New Mexico, Albuquerque in particular, is just suffering from out-of-control crime," he said.

Democratic leadership told the governor before the session they need more time to consider

the complex issues she's trying to solve.

Rep. Marian Matthews, D-Albuquerque, said these are really critical issues, but the Legislature needs to ensure there's the capacity and infrastructure in place for new laws before passing legislation.

She said she anticipates continued work with the state's business chambers for the upcoming 60-day session and said public safety passages will "absolutely" happen in 2025.

"Their concern about reducing crime, having a better level of public safety is absolutely critical," she said. "I agree with them on economic development and economic vitality."

Matthews added that she asked the governor's office to add bills focused on human trafficking and violent juvenile crime on the special session agenda, but it didn't happen.

"I think what caused some concern — and I can only speak for myself — was I was sort of just making some suggestions ... but it was sort of like we weren't being encouraged to do that. (The governor) had an agenda," Matthews said. "And I think most of us expect that we try to work more in partnership than as individual branches of government as we develop laws."

Cole said the Chamber worked on two dozen public safety-related bills in the 2023 session, and all the legislation either died in first committee or wasn't debated at all. The package included pretrial detention changes and increased penalties for



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**House Minority Leader Rod Montoya, R-Farmington, listens in on a news conference by House and Senate Democrats following a five hour special session on July 23.**

fenfentanyl trafficking or felons in possession of a firearm, all of which the Legislature failed again to pass in either the 2024 regular session and special session.

"So for the Legislature to say, 'This is all too complicated, and we need more time,' doesn't ring true when, for example, last year — and in sessions prior, for that matter — they've had either 30 days or 60 days to debate these," Cole said.

Montoya said Democrats approached the special session very politically, listening to progressive organizations that donate to their campaigns. The week of the special session, about 40 left-leaning advocacy groups asked Lujan Grisham to hold off on the session.

"(Democrats) do not care about the citizens — the law-abiding citizens — and they don't care about the law-abiding, tax-paying businesses," Montoya said. "They worry about those special interest groups."

Cole said the Legislature can't debate these issues with a partisan lens.

"Any time you introduce

politics in that way, you don't get to the solutions very easily," she said.

Another special session still wasn't off the table, as of Friday. Cole said the Chamber would support the governor if she calls an additional special session.

Meanwhile, the governor has been hosting town halls to discuss public safety around the state. Lujan Grisham was in Las Cruces on Thursday and has two more town halls scheduled: one on Monday in Albuquerque and another on Tuesday in Española.

"I think it's a good strategy on her part to take the issue to the public, and ask them what they think. She's going to try to get input from what residents and businesses believe," Cole said.

Cole said she must remain hopeful for the 2025 Legislature in order to represent the Chamber's board of directors and businesses on public safety issues.

"I'm hopeful that we can reset and look at these bills differently, especially bills that will give us some relief on the

violent offenders that roam our streets in every city in the state of New Mexico," she said.

Otherwise, she said, the 60-day session will be a repeat of the last six years.

"And I can understand the governor's position here. She'll be the first one to say that patience isn't her greatest virtue, but she has been very patient with this Legislature for the last several years on public safety issues," Cole said. "And I think the governor has just gotten fed up ... and a lot of New Mexicans and businesses, for that matter, have gotten fed up, too."

Matthews agreed that criminal law needs to be updated to improve public safety and, subsequently, create a more vibrant economy.

"This is a big problem in New Mexico, and we need to be joining hands and working together in the 60-day session," she said.

Megan Gleason is an assistant editor on the business desk for the Albuquerque Journal. She covers energy, utilities and government.