

The Vital Work Neither the Public or Private Sectors Do

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It was just a stray comment, tucked into discussion at the end of a recent gathering of people from various nonprofit organizations.

But it stopped everyone there cold.

The anecdote came from Audubon New Mexico Executive Director Karyn Stockdale, who said a volunteer recently told her he could no longer donate his free time to the wildlife conservation group. The reason? His employer felt his volunteer work with the organization “interfered with his job.”

It was a stark reminder that some people still don’t get the importance of the work nonprofits do to protect people, animals and issues that tend to get crushed and ignored by big business and big government.

You know, things like food banks, health services and legal representation for the poor.

And it’s just odd to me, and sad, because as the misery peaks all around, the gap between those who help and those who need help is terrifyingly thin.

As budget shortfalls and layoffs proliferate and the abilities of government and other safety nets fail or fall short, nonprofits serve as the connective tissue for society, the part that fills in and provides the services.

I’m talking about nonprofit groups like New Mexico Legal Aid, whose volunteers battle for the rights of the poor every day,

Enlace Comunitario, which fights for victims of domestic violence and advocates for immigrants, and the American Cancer Society, which advocates for health issues like clear indoor air.

And, yes, I’m talking about groups like the Audubon Society, and the Sierra Club and the New Mexico Wilderness Society, who work to protect the earth we’ll be handing off to our children someday.

Stockdale’s Audubon anecdote was a reminder that advocacy is not always easy; not always accepted. Those who head up nonprofits remind me that sometimes protecting your people or issue means looking up the chain of command and waging battle for policy changes or legislation. Oftentime, the measures they fight for are labeled too expensive, too political,

anti-business, unrealistic, unpopular or, my favorite, too extreme, far-left environmentalist.

But now, more than ever, these groups need help from people who care.

That's why I'm eagerly awaiting a report that will be released today in Santa Fe by The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and the New Mexico Association of Grantmakers. The report will detail how New Mexico's overall economy has benefited from policy changes advocated by local nonprofits from 2003-2007.

The report highlights a range of successful efforts by 14 New Mexico nonprofits on issues such as economic security, environmental justice, civil and human rights and health and education. It also examines the benefits of engaging communities through leadership development, youth engagement and enhanced civic participation.

You can read a press release on today's event and download a copy of the report [here](#) .

If you are wondering how you can get involved in a local advocacy group, New Mexico Voices for Children has a guide to citizen involvement at their Web site.

And the Alliance for Justice provides an introduction to worthy issues and involvement in national groups at their Web site.

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