

NMAG Annual Member Meeting
A Rubel Speech, November 17, 2016

I hope we've all gotten yelling at our Facebook feeds out of the system. I'm not here to tell you everything is going to be alright. People ask me how's it going, and I'll say I'm OK, but I'm not alright. And we shouldn't pretend that things are all right. Then again, things really haven't been alright, even before the election.

We are facing challenges bigger than any administration

Like many of you, I thought Clinton would win and we'd have, at least, a superficial bubble to subvert our imploding national direction by growing and strengthening our communities, creating alternative pathways to bankrupt ideologies, including neoliberalism. I thought we'd still have space to slowly develop our capacity to listen – to each other, to our people, to the land on which we live.

Instead, we find ourselves with what Robison Meyer of the Atlantic termed the “First Demagogue of the Anthropocene.” We are emerging, hopefully out of but perhaps more deeply into, the “post-truth” era (Oxford’s word of the year), categorized by echo chambers, online shouting matches, fake news, and most importantly, an impaired capacity for deep listening and discernment. Our society seems to be becoming simultaneously both too tolerant and intolerant: intolerant of the diverse tapestry of people, cultures and ideologies that shape this nation and too tolerant of hateful dialogue, fabricated news and the extractive policies and economies that impoverish our communities and degrade our ecology while concentrating financial benefits for a few. The insecurity and constant fear felt by some members of our society long before this election has now spread more broadly, leading many to experience a consistent triggering of their sympathetic nervous system.

Before election results began pouring in last week, I started work on a paper entitled “The Inevitable Consequences at the End of a Colonizing Civilization and Lessons Forward.” Our capacity to sweep problems under the rug is diminishing and we must now simultaneously deal with the consequences of how we have lived on this earth while forging a new path forward. We must all look in the mirrors to reconcile the ways in which we are both oppressor and oppressed, that we are not separate from our communities nor the ecological systems that sustain us, and from that point lead the change to improve the conditions in which we find ourselves. We must continue to develop our capacity to listen deeply, to the needs, possibilities, hopes and fears of those we purport to serve or we will inevitably perpetuate our systemic failures and repeat our mistakes.

While we have witnessed that ignorance travels at a speed faster than wisdom, it is in bringing forth and developing wisdom that we begin to see hope revealed. This is a moment when leaders are made. It is a time when we must rise up to quickly become the best versions of ourselves and for the organizations and institutions we work for and represent to make a similar leap. It is not that we suddenly need this, it is that we are suddenly out of time to be anything else.

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Fighting, opposing is a relatively straight line compared to the winding path of creating a new, viable way forward. This pathway was never going to come from Washington, it was always going to be led, is being led, in our communities across this nation. We must now step up and play our part in leading, stepping forward to utilize the challenges before us to become stronger, to connect. This is no time to be silent, to passively drift with the ebbing tide or to be satisfied with marginal impacts from our funded interventions.

We must be bold, willing to take risks. We must challenge notions of perpetuity and ask ourselves if this is the rainy day we've been waiting for and seek to go beyond our 5% funding allocations. We must look to bring to bear our full resources, including where we are investing our assets and how we are leveraging relationships to strengthen our communities. How are we coming together to raise a collective philanthropic voice to oppose legislative initiatives that threaten not only our sector but the communities we are here to serve?

For years, we have been talking about, and working towards, the breakdown of silos and the value in coming together. While we each have a unique role to play, we must now play that role more effectively in relationship with all those working to subvert our failing systems by strengthening and empowering our local communities, economies and ecosystems. Together, we must grow our sense of justice while empowering our communities to stand for it. We must deepen our understanding of the intersectionality of the issues we care about, and seek new ways to address their root causes. We must look to support the infrastructure, like NMAG, that has an important role to play in launching and sustaining collaborative efforts, organizing across philanthropic-public-and private sectors, advocating and in listening, learning and educating.

If we found 2016 to be an upsetting year in many ways, let us prepare for 2017 to be a fierce one, in which we have a role to play, individually and together, in overcoming challenges, realizing potential and carrying New Mexico forward on a path of true greatness.