

## **Governor Bill Richardson Authorizes \$1 million for Project to Bring Water to Rural Western New Mexico & Navajo Reservation; \$100K to Boost Failing Native American Schools**

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SANTA FE- Governor Bill Richardson today announced he has allocated \$1,000,000 in urgent funding for the Navajo/Gallup Water Supply Project (NGWSP), which will for the first time bring water service to outlying areas of Gallup and neighboring communities on the Navajo Nation.

“This project is critical for the welfare of the citizens and the economic health of the area,” said Governor Bill Richardson. “Improving the quality of life for residents and providing a solid foundation for growth, particularly in rural New Mexico, is a priority for my administration.”

Construction on the estimated \$442 million NGWSP is expected to begin in 2004. The funding authorized by Governor Richardson will be used to lay the groundwork to eventually connect the NGWSP to the existing city of Gallup water system. The NGWSP will eventually provide San Juan River water rural parts of the Navajo Nation, the southwestern portion of the Jicarilla Apache Nation, and the city of Gallup. Residents of the area currently get the majority of their water from diminishing groundwater supplies, which are expected to hit crisis levels in 10-15 years.

Governor Richardson today also announced he has authorized \$100,000 for the Gallup/McKinley County Public Schools-UNM Gallup Branch Project to assist schools in need of corrective action.

In the 2003-2004 school year it is projected that 25 schools serving primarily Native American children will be in the formal Department of Education corrective action process.

“That’s unacceptable,” said Governor Richardson. “We will bring these schools, and every New Mexico public school, up to standards. These children deserve a quality education to give them the best shot at success in life. We can’t let them down.”

The funding will go to provide a technical assistance program designed to help the corrective action schools in critical areas such as:

- Elementary school literacy programs,
- Professional development for teachers and educational assistants,
- Curriculum development, and
- Mechanisms to involve Tribal authorities in the process of improving the quality of education of the affected schools, and all schools in general.

Specific attention will also be given to create programs so school districts can “grow their own” Native American teachers and teaching assistance to work in these schools.

Funds for these initiatives is part of the federal Tax Relief legislation that provided \$62 million in direct aid for immediate and pressing New Mexico projects.