

Governor Bill Richardson To Become Chairman of Western Governors' Association

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DENVER -- Governor Bill Richardson will take over as the new chairman of the Western Governors' Association (WGA) at the conclusion of its Annual Meeting in Big Sky, Montana Monday, September 15, 2003. His term will run through June 2004.

“I’m honored my colleagues have elected me to be their chairman, and I’m ready to get to work,” said Governor Richardson. “New Mexico and other western states are faced with a number of critical issues, including energy, passage of a national drought policy, and expanding WGA’s relationships with Native American Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes, and Mexican border states.”

Governor Richardson said he will host a North American energy summit in New Mexico next spring. It is expected to bring together several hundred state, tribal, federal and non-governmental stakeholders from the U.S., Canada and Mexico. “I want to place a new emphasis on the development of renewable energy, wind, solar, geothermal-to lessen our overall dependence on coal, oil, gas and nuclear,” said Governor Richardson.

“We need to develop an energy action plan that will allow our inter-dependent economies to grow without sacrificing the quality of our shared environment,” Governor Richardson said. “The WGA has already established a good working relationship with our neighbors to the North and the South. Now we need to capitalize on these partnerships to ensure we can supply our consumers and businesses with the energy they need, at a reasonable price.”

Richardson, the Governor of New Mexico, who currently serves as WGA’s Vice Chairman and was Energy Secretary for the Clinton Administration, will help lead discussions at the Annual Meeting Sept. 14 - 16 on energy policy. Key members of the Bush Administration will offer their perspective on the region’s near term energy needs and policy options at the opening session on Sunday. Also to be addressed in that session is the region’s growing reliance on natural gas and options for reducing risks of power outages and blackouts.

Other issues important to New Mexico and the west include maintaining the safety of radioactive waste shipments and protecting air quality.

WGA formulates policy-governing shipments in Western states and supports the training of state and local safety and emergency personnel to ensure the waste is transported safely. Much of this waste travels to the WIPP facility in Carlsbad. The Association also manages the Western Regional Air Partnership, a collaborative effort of states, tribes and federal agencies that is currently implementing programs to protect air quality and visibility at Western National Parks and other important public monuments.

Information on the WGA Annual Meeting, including an agenda and briefing materials can be found on WGA's Web site at www.westgov.org <<http://www.westgov.org>>.

The Western Governors' Association is an independent, nonprofit organization representing the governors of 18 states and three U.S.-flag islands in the Pacific. Through their Association, the governors identify and address key policy and governance issues in natural resources, the environment, human services, economic development, international relations and public management.