



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Governor Bill Richardson Calls Legislative Session A Major Victory For All New Mexicans

For Immediate Release
February 19, 2004

Contact: Billy Sparks
505.476.2299

SANTA FE- Governor Bill Richardson today called the just-ended Legislative Session a “major victory for all New Mexicans”. Governor Richardson noted that the 30-day session, that ended at noon today, produced dozens of bills that strengthen criminal penalties, improve health care, protect the environment, continue economic growth, and generally will improve the quality of life for all New Mexicans.

The Governor made these remarks at an afternoon news conference at the Capitol:

“I said in my State of the State Address that this would be the Year of the Legislature. No doubt, I pushed hard. I expected a lot. I set the bar high. But I knew legislators – under the leadership of Speaker Ben Lujan, Senators Romero and Aragon -- would come through in the end.

They didn’t come through for me. They came through for the people of New Mexico.

They came through and finally eliminated the regressive tax on food, saving working families hundreds of dollars a year.

This is the right thing to do. It’s a net tax decrease, and it’s fairer for working families.

New Mexicans will no longer have to pay taxes on food, and doctors and nurses will no longer flee the state. We’ve sent a clear message to our doctors, nurses and all health care practitioners – we respect you and we’ll do what we can to keep you in New Mexico.

This is a middle class tax cut that is long overdue. This tax cut is good for our families; it's good for businesses; and makes New Mexico more competitive.

This bill has been endorsed by a broad coalition of New Mexican organizations including AARP, the New Mexico Medical Society, Citizens for Physician Retention, Common Cause and tens of thousands who signed petitions to keep our doctors in the state.

The arguments against the bill ring hollow, which is why two-thirds of the public support this tax cut. People wanted this tax cut. Cities and counties wanted us to protect their critical services, like police and fire protection. We were fiscally responsible with this legislation, keeping the budget balanced and protecting essential funding for schools and health care.

We built on the success of last year by passing tax credits meant to spur economic development, including:

- High-wage Tax Credit
- Military Base/Compensating Tax Incentive
- Alternative Fuels Credit

We made more progress on DWI in two sessions than New Mexicans saw during decades of futile gridlock on this issue. We have tougher sentences for people who drive drunk and kill. We're punishing people who drive drunk with children in their vehicles. And we've created a real deterrent for anyone who even thinks about providing alcohol to kids.

Working with legislators, we made serious progress on health care. We're creating the state's first immunization registry, and we passed three of the four prongs of my health care reform agenda:

1. We paved the way for a comprehensive plan for tackling New Mexico's health care crisis. We will focus first on increasing access, workforce development and financing of health care.
2. For the first time, we're treating mental health and substance abuse like all other diseases. We're consolidating programs to deliver better services.
3. And... we're creating state oversight over health care facilities to ensure that patients aren't left hanging when hospitals decide to close.

We followed through with our pledge to voters to create a strong Secretary of Education with clear financial, regulatory and policy-making authority to implement real change in our public schools. We also passed a tough truancy bill that holds both parents and students accountable.

Finally, I am proud of the state budget we crafted. We made the tough decisions that were necessary to balance the budget while keeping healthy, 9-percent reserves, fully fund education and ensure that full-day kindergarten is available in every New Mexico school.

We also made the tough decisions to rein in the growth of Medicaid, while protecting our state's most vulnerable children and disabled adults who rely on Medicaid for health care.

Some may say this session was a victory – and it was...for the people of New Mexico.

We disagreed at times, but the bottom line is we came together when it mattered most. Together, we're moving our great state forward by creating better schools, better jobs and putting more money in the pockets of New Mexicans.

This really was the Year of the Legislature.”

Governor Supported Bills Passed by Legislature

Tax Relief

HB 625	Repeal Tax on Food/Medical Svcs.	Lujan
--------	----------------------------------	-------

DWI/Crime Bills

HB 487	Penalties for providing alcohol to minors	Taylor
SB 144	DWI reconciliation, increased penalties	Romero
HB 111	Addition of substances to drug precursor	Swisstack
HB 112	Drug Manufacturing as Child Abuse	Swisstack

Economic Development

SB 333	Military Base Retention	Romero
SB 28	High Wage Tax Credit	Maes
HB 231	Regional Transit District Local Option	Beam

Health Care

HB 451	State Employee Health Insurance	Varela
HB 271	Behavioral Health Planning Council	Sandoval
HB 88	Drug Pricing Program	Picraux
HB 254	Immunization Act	Beam
SB 34	Develop Comprehensive Health Plan	Lopez
SB 436	Health Care Facility Tax Credits	Jennings
SB 315	Sec. Health Hospital Oversight	Smith

Education

HB 96	Public Education Department	Stewart
HB 106	Enforcement of Habitual Truancy	Swisstack

Environment/Parks

HB 19	Corrective Action Fund Expenditures	Lundstrom
HB 251	Clean Energy Fund	Salazar
SB 86	Alternative Fuel Vehicle Tax Abatement	Cisneros
SB 326	Cottonwood-Walnut Creek Property	Kidd
SJR 5	Eddy County Cottonwood Creek	Kidd
SB 43	Renewable Energy Portfolio	Maes

Misc.

HB 277	Clarify Sexual Discrimination	Beam
HB 39	Indian Affairs Department	Madalena
SB 164	Veterans Services Department	Martinez
HB 34	Aging and Long Term Serv. Department	Salazar
HB 92	Office of Cultural Affairs	JP Taylor

##30##