



# State of New Mexico

## *Office of the Governor*

**Bill Richardson**  
Governor

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### **New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson Testifies on Education Funding**

SANTA FE- New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson is scheduled to deliver the following prepared remarks at 4 p.m. (MDT) during testimony before the Democratic National Committee's Platform-Drafting Committee:

**New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson's Prepared Remarks**  
***DNC Platform Drafting Committee***  
***Education Funding***  
***Friday, June 18, 2004 - 4:00 p.m. (MDT)***

First, I want to thank Chairman Antonio Villaraigosa for allowing Governors to address this committee.

As state leaders, I think its important for us to provide our perspectives on issues we face every day - like access to school spending, access to health care and governing in a global economy.

Last fall, I asked New Mexico voters to join with me and invest more than 600-million dollars in new funding to improve New Mexico's public schools - by paying our teachers professional salaries and increasing accountability for results in the classroom.

New Mexicans agreed, and changed the state constitution, because they wanted that bold investment to benefit students in the classroom. As I traveled around the state to

campaign for the amendments, voters told me they were willing to pay for better schools, as long as they knew the money would be spent on kids. They wanted results. And they wanted accountability. That's what we're giving them.

The investment is historic, not only because it represents a major commitment to education, but also because it comes at a time when most states are struggling to keep pace with education spending. In many cases, states are actually cutting education budgets, and teacher salaries, in order to make ends meet.

In New Mexico, we have been blessed with a healthy budget, which has helped us avoid budget cuts. But like every other state, we are feeling the effects of less funding from the federal government. And like other states, we're facing the reality of rising health-care costs. We're all making tough decisions about reining in the exploding costs of Medicaid.

But as tough as it gets, I strongly believe that we should do everything possible to avoid cutting school budgets. And wherever possible, we should make every effort to continue to invest in our schools - because our collective state economies depend on it.

The National Education Association recently published a series of studies that make a compelling case for increased state spending on education, especially during times of flat and declining state revenues.

The bottom line is: A state's income level is directly linked to the education levels of its residents. And we must support our schools - with real, tangible resources.

There's no way of getting around that fact. And if you cut school spending during tough times, your state is going to suffer. Poverty rates will increase. Property crime will increase.

On the other hand, there is a positive "spillover" effect on states that increase spending on education, even during times of economic downturn.

For example, a study out of East Stroudsburg University found that states that spent more on education from 1970 through 1995 experienced increases in all levels of income by 2000.

Another study from California State University in Sacramento found that improved public education leads indirectly to increases in housing values, higher personal income production, and economic development that benefits from trained workers.

In New Mexico, we were once ranked 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation in teacher salaries. We've now boosted teacher pay by 8 percent over the past two years, and we're starting to implement a new professional salary structure. We think we will be as high as 29<sup>th</sup> in the nation soon.

The other change voters made to the New Mexico Constitution last year was to create a Secretary of Education who is accountable to me - the Governor - for improving our schools. I appointed Veronica Garcia as the state's first-ever Education Secretary, and one of her first responsibilities is to help me close the achievement gap - a gap that continues to widen.

Here's what we're doing to address that gap:

- First, we're paying our teachers more, so that we have quality teachers in all of our schools, including those that have struggled in the past.
- Second, we're cognizant of the achievement gap as we debate what is "reform" in the classroom. And we're wisely targeting money and resources to pay for those reforms.
- Third, we're addressing the pervasive poverty in our state, which contributes to many children not being prepared to start school. Beginning this year, every school in the state will finally be able to offer full-day kindergarten programs to any five-year-old, regardless of income.
- Fourth, we're addressing the language barriers that keep many New Mexico students from moving forward.
- Fifth, we're meeting the needs of our Native American students, who too often haven't had a voice in their own education. We created an Indian Education Act, which I signed in to law, which recognizes specific needs of Native American students.
- Sixth, I hired an Assistant Secretary for Rural Education to deal with problems that are unique to rural schools - which make up about two-thirds of all New Mexico schools.
- Finally, we are raising the bar for all students in New Mexico, and I will not rest until all students are excelling in the classroom.

As the Governor of a state that is making progressive changes, a state that is digging itself out of poverty, I strongly urge that the Democratic Party, through its platform, embrace this idea that spending on public schools is the most powerful lever we have to improve the health of our states.

The Democratic Party should consider the following policy initiatives as it adopts a platform:

- Higher teacher salaries tied to performance standards
- Strict percentages of budgets to be spent in the classroom, not administration
- Universal access to Full-Day Kindergarten

- Early childhood programs for our poorest families
- Tough truancy program to help lower dropout rates
- Successful approaches to closing the achievement gap
- More flexibility for states to help low-performing schools meet mandates included in the No Child Left Behind Act.

Thank you again for allowing me the time to testify today.

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