



# State of New Mexico

## *Office of the Governor*

**Bill Richardson**  
Governor

For immediate release  
March 12, 2005

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### **Governor Bill Richardson says Higher Education will be priority under new Department**

SANTA FE - Governor Bill Richardson said he is ready to move forward with a new Department of Higher Education once he signs legislation creating the first-ever cabinet-level agency that focuses on New Mexico's colleges and universities.

"For the first time, higher education will be a top priority in New Mexico," Governor Bill Richardson said today, following final approval of Senate Bill 677 in the Legislature. "I look forward to hiring the best possible Higher Education Secretary who will be responsible for holding our colleges and universities accountable and enforce high standards throughout the education system. We must increase access to higher education, while ensuring that more New Mexicans graduate."

"We need a strong leader who will make the connection between higher education and a high-wage economy," said Governor Richardson.

The House approved Senate Bill 677, sponsored by Sen. Cynthia Nava, on Saturday. The Senate OK'd House changes to the bill on Sunday, which means the bill is on its way to the Governor's desk for his approval.

The bill replaces the Commission on Higher Education with the Higher Education Department as a cabinet-level department and headed by a cabinet secretary. The secretary will be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

The bill also preserves the right of local Boards of Regents to continue to make local policy decisions about their universities.

A similar bill, sponsored by House Speaker Ben Lujan, is being considered in the Senate.

“I want to thank Senator Nava and Speaker Lujan for carrying these bills and working with me to line up bipartisan support, as well as support from business leaders, educators and university leaders,” said Governor Richardson.

The change elevates the importance and visibility of higher education in the state and allows the secretary to have a more direct impact on policy and set the public agenda for higher education.

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