



# State of New Mexico

## *Office of the Governor*

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### **Governor Richardson Takes Action to Aid New Mexico Veterans**

*2007 Legislation and Capital Outlay Will Boost Veterans Benefits & Services*

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO – Governor Bill Richardson signed numerous bills this legislative session, that will benefit New Mexico’s 180,000 veterans. This includes more than \$8.4 million dollars in capital outlay projects that were approved for memorials, monuments, museums, and homeless veteran’s services.

“New Mexicans have always served with honor and gone into harms way to help protect our freedom,” said Governor Bill Richardson. “We are doing everything we can to support our men and women in uniform and our veterans after they return home.”

Governor Richardson has made Veteran’s Affairs a priority during his administration starting with the elevation of the New Mexico Veterans Commission to a cabinet level agency in 2003. Since 2003, veteran’s capital outlay has grown incrementally from \$500,000 annually to the \$8.4 million appropriated this year with a total of \$17.7 million being infused toward capital projects collectively.

This year’s capital outlay projects will include funding to train therapists on effective treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; facility upgrades at the state-operated Veterans Home in Truth of Consequences; increased access to tele-health and tele-psychiatry programs; and five new Veteran Service Officer positions.

Other initiatives signed will exempt New Mexicans in the armed forces from paying state income tax. The Governor also supported and signed a provision granting severely disabled veterans free admission to New Mexico State Parks, Museums, and Monuments.

Governor Richardson also signed the Funeral Protection Act. This new law makes it illegal to disrupt funeral services or funeral processions. The need for this law became

apparent in 2006 when the Rio Rancho funeral of Alexander Jordan, a soldier killed in Iraq, was disrupted by protesters from the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas.

Other important measures included SB 687 providing certain military dependents with eligibility for New Mexico Lottery Scholarships, HB 719 to exempt congressionally chartered Veteran Service Organizations from property taxes, HB 907 which provides for a free license plate for National Guard members, and HB 365 providing women veterans with a special license plate.

“On behalf of New Mexico’s 180,000 veterans, I’d like to thank Governor Bill Richardson and all State Representatives and Senators who supported veterans’ legislation” said New Mexico Veteran’s Affairs Secretary John Garcia.

Governor Richardson also recently created a unique collaboration – his Behavioral Health Czar brought together health and clinical providers, UNM Department of Psychiatry and Telemedicine, Intel, the NM Department of Veterans Affairs, the federal Veteran Affairs and a representative from his office to develop a model to treat returning soldiers in their own communities. This action followed the widely reported problems at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC.