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Governor Bill Richardson Announces Formation of Poverty Reduction Task Force

*Governor Met Today with Community Leaders to Discuss Poverty, Income
Inequality, and Challenges Facing New Mexican Families*

SANTA FE – Governor Bill Richardson today announced he is forming a task force focused on reducing poverty in New Mexico. The Governor made the announcement after a round table discussion with poverty experts and community leaders.

“While our state’s economy is expanding, figures show the income gap is widening,” Governor Bill Richardson. “We can not allow our neighbors to fall behind. We must be bold in our solutions to help struggling families make ends meet.”

According to recent government figures, 37 million Americans and 350,000 New Mexicans are living below the official poverty threshold. The gap between rich and poor is at historic levels and many full time jobs do not pay enough to raise employees out of poverty. Strikingly, nearly a third of working women in full-time jobs do not earn enough to raise themselves and their children out of poverty.

The Task Force will be charged with developing specific recommendations for legislative, regulatory and infrastructure initiatives to reduce poverty and income inequality in New Mexico. The Task Force will submit a report on its recommendations to the Governor in September.

The Governor suggested a range of issues to be researched and considered by the Task Force, including:

- Strategic initiatives to address hunger, housing and child care needs
- Adequate compensation and a fair minimum wage
- Changes in the working family and child care tax credits
- More equity in the unemployment compensation system
- Easing access to higher education
- Making it easier for people to move to areas with better employment opportunities

- Assisting former prisoners in finding employment

“At this point, nothing is off the table,” Governor Richardson said. “We must attack the problem from every angle if we’re going to see significant changes.”

Today’s meeting included experts and community leaders who deal with all aspects of the poverty issue including: affordable housing, child care, hunger, wages, employment, tax policy, and community services. Participants included: Mary Garcia of the Albuquerque Indian Center, Ruth Hoffman of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry, Susan Tiano, Professor of Sociology at the University of New Mexico, Sharron Welsh from the Santa Fe Community Housing Trust, Reverend Charles Becknell from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Melody Wattenberger of the Roadrunner Food Bank, Allen Sanchez from the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops, Mike Loftin of Homewise, Greg Ortiz from the All Indian Pueblo Council, and Richard Santos, Professor of Economics at the University of New Mexico.