



Governor Bill Richardson's 2008 State of the State Address

Governor Bill Richardson delivered the 2008 State of the State address on January 15, 2008 to a joint-session of the Legislature. The address kicked off the 30-day session.

Governor Richardson's prepared remarks:

Lt. Governor Denish, Speaker Ben Lujan, Senate President Pro Tem Tim Jennings, Chief Justice Ed Chavez and members of the state Supreme Court

Democratic and Republican leaders, members of our state House of Representatives and Senate;

former Governors, distinguished guests, dedicated public servants of the House and Senate, including Ms. Ruth Ortiz who's participating in her 50th session—and my wonderful partner First Lady Barbara Richardson.

Thank you all for being here.

It's good to be back.

Thank you New Mexico for your unprecedented support in my run for President.

We worked harder than anyone.

We changed the debate.

And I believe we made a difference.

Two more names should also be recognized— Representative Manuel Herrera and Senator Ben Altamirano from Silver City

Both brought dignity, honesty, and...chivalry to these halls.

Both will be deeply missed.

Senator Altamirano dedicated more than three decades to the work of this legislature.

In his home of Silver City, a new long-term care facility is under construction.

Let the first bill sent to my desk rename this facility the Ben Altamirano Medical Center.

And congratulations to the new Senate Pro Tem Tim Jennings

I'd like to recognize US Air Force Staff Sergeant Scott Lilley and his parents from Roswell New Mexico.

Sergeant Lilley is a decorated veteran, having served in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He has earned the Combat Action Medal and the Purple Heart for his injuries in Iraq.

Sergeant Lilley, we are deeply grateful for your service and wish you a speedy recovery.

Let's recognize this American hero.

I'm proud to report to you that the state of our state continues to be strong.

New Mexico is vibrant, proud, and moving forward--fast.

While other states are struggling with severe budget shortfalls, our state has the opportunity to wisely invest a healthy surplus.

In the last five years, we have created nearly 80,000 new jobs and unemployment is the lowest in New Mexico history.

We have returned extra money back into the hands of taxpayers – more than 1-billion dollars in tax cuts since I took office.

Job growth is strong in every industry and companies are looking to hire new workers.

Just this week, we are announcing two more companies that could bring as many as twenty-five hundred jobs to New Mexico.

It's no wonder our state's personal income growth is now ranked seventh best in the nation.

Our sound financial management of our Permanent Funds has allowed us to invest more than \$3 billion into New Mexico schools and taxpayers

And I'd like to assure those who opposed the investment into our schools---our Permanent Funds have grown from 9 billion to 15 billion dollars and our schools are benefiting from that investment.

And because we had the foresight to work together to pass the Home Lenders Protection Act five years ago, New Mexico has the lowest foreclosure rates in the west.

Last year, working together we had our most productive session—

We gave a tax cut to every middle-income family.

We ended predatory lending.

We passed dramatic clean energy initiatives.

And we raised the minimum wage.

In this budget session, my agenda is focused and bold.

In the last 30-day session the House and the Senate proposed more than 16 hundred bills.

This 30-day session my agenda is limited to less than 60.

My budget will meet our responsibilities on education, transportation, and economic development.

I'm asking us to focus on the biggest challenges we face—to dramatically cut our energy usage through efficiency, to make serious ethics reforms, to give legal rights to domestic partners, to further the fight against domestic violence, and to ensure that every New Mexican will have health coverage.

Like many other states, we struggle with the skyrocketing price of health care and health insurance premiums.

Twenty percent of New Mexicans go without health insurance coverage.

We're talking about our neighbors, our colleagues, our friends and our relatives – real people who are choosing between paying the mortgage or paying for health care.

Even worse, too many New Mexicans don't even have the option of health insurance

This burdens our hospitals and providers with the cost of uncompensated care.

We've worked hard to cover more people— helping insure children under the age of 12, doubling the number of school-based health clinics, as well as the number of trauma centers, and offering more affordable options to small employers.

But the cost of health care continues to increase and becomes further and further out of reach of average New Mexicans.

Doing nothing means more uninsured, more expensive health care, more of the state budget dedicated to health costs and less for everything else.

It also means that those with insurance will pay more to keep it.

Some may say we cannot afford to take on this task in a 30-day session.

I ask—how can we afford not to?

The time for universal health care coverage is now.

My "Health Solutions New Mexico Plan" lays out a common-sense and pragmatic approach to address our health care challenges.

It makes coverage more affordable, care more accessible and the system more accountable.

It begins with insurance reform.

Today there is a unified voice from business, labor and patients alike -- demanding solutions to the ever-rising cost of care and insurance premiums.

My plan requires that at least 85-percent of premiums must be spent directly on care.

Not on overhead.

Not on bureaucracy.

Not on profits.

Our public programs already require this--private insurers must do the same.

And coverage should not be permanently denied to those with pre-existing conditions.

Having conditions like cancer or diabetes should not prevent a person from getting health insurance.

Second—Everyone must pay their fair share.

My plan calls on individuals and employers alike, to obtain health coverage.

Those individuals and small businesses who need help will get it.

By getting everyone insured, we can bring the cost of insurance down.

The state of New Mexico is already leading the way.

If a company wants to do business with the state, they must offer health insurance to their employees.

Every New Mexican deserves quality healthcare and no matter who you are, whether you're a ditch digger or a bus driver---a teacher or a waitress—you will get covered.

I believe that your health and the health of your loved ones should never depend on your ability to pay.

Third--- We must improve the quality of care, control costs and reduce errors through the use of technology.

My plan calls for a shift from paper to electronic medical records and transactions.

Last—We must create accountability and cut bureaucracy.

A new Health Coverage Authority will act as a single point of accountability, making sure dollars go to health care, not administration.

There will be competing legislation this year.

From one side, we will see legislation that would place health care totally under government-control.

This is unacceptable.

From the other side, there will be voices calling for the status quo, who prefer an unchecked unregulated health care system, dominated by HMO's and health insurance companies.

A system that covers only those who can afford it, leaves the most vulnerable behind, and values profits over patients.

Let's agree that the status quo is also unacceptable.

I believe my plan offers the fairest and most pragmatic approach.

We will transform the system, not dismantle it.

My plan will allow choice.

Those who are satisfied with their current health insurance plan can keep it.

We will take innovative and fiscally responsible steps to get quality health coverage that all New Mexicans deserve.

We will cover the 400-thousand New Mexicans who currently don't have health insurance.

And control costs for those who are covered.

The most expensive choice is to do nothing.

I believe that's not a choice this legislature will make.

It's not a choice this Governor will accept.

And it's not a choice our people can afford.

I am also proposing several initiatives to strengthen our health care providers, especially in rural and border counties.

And I'm increasing funding to treat veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I want us to take our successful pilot program and make it a statewide effort.

Let's do this for our veterans.

In no area have we gone further, faster than in the area of clean energy.

We've set the bar high with mandates for utilities to use more clean energy, and hard targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect our environment.

Today, New Mexico is attracting and investing in innovative biomass, solar, biofuels, and wind-power companies.

Just yesterday, we secured a new solar manufacturing company that will bring one billion dollars in new revenue to our state and create as many as 1,500 high-wage, clean energy jobs.

And our citizens are choosing renewable energy at home, making our state the number one per capita user of wind energy in the nation.

In this session, I'm making a call for conservation.

The single most effective means of fighting global warming is not to consume the energy in the first place.

Conserving energy saves our citizens hard earned dollars, and means more taxpayer dollars go to our highest priorities

I'm proposing the following initiatives:

First--Income tax credits for families to purchase energy efficient home heating and cooling equipment

Second—Low interest loans for working families to make energy efficiency improvements to their homes.

Third—A new mandate calling on utilities to invest in energy efficiency programs. Programs that will be cheaper and cleaner than building new power plants.

Fourth— I'm once again calling on state government to lead by example and make our public buildings greener.

Any new higher education buildings will need to meet a higher standard of energy efficiency, and current buildings must lower their energy usage through efficiency improvements.

We've faced difficult challenges, but none harder than the persistent threat of drunk driving.

Together we've mandated ignition interlocks for every offender and closed loopholes to hold out-of-state offenders to the same standard.

We've run statewide super-blitzes, created a hotline to report drunk driving, cracked down on bars over serving their customers, and tightened our drunk driving laws.

And what's the result?

Over the last five years our alcohol related fatalities have decreased by almost 20% and early statistics for 2007 indicate DWI fatalities are the lowest in state history.

But we must do more—there must be penalties for those who tamper with their ignition interlock and penalties for new residents with out-of-state offenses who avoid our law.

To make our streets safer, we must also remember that the majority of DWI offenders are abusing more than just alcohol, and we should continue our commitment to rehabilitation and substance abuse treatment.

On Domestic Violence--our state has created more shelters for victims, increased the penalties and created special prosecution teams.

Teams that make sure those attackers and predators have their day in court, shortly followed by--- their time in jail.

And I'm calling for new legislation to give our courts more flexibility to send those offenders for needed treatment.

And I'm proposing increased penalties for repeat offenders—Batterers and predators must know that each offense brings more and more severe penalties.

I'd like to recognize and thank First Lady Barbara Richardson for her efforts in the fight against Domestic Violence.

This session, I'm also asking for us to complete some unfinished business.

As public officials, we know that holding the highest ethical standards is not a privilege, but our moral responsibility.

Once again, an ethics reform task force has laid out a thoughtful list of reforms to strengthen our weak laws.

I ask this body to finish the job.

The second point of unfinished business is to fully extend domestic partnership rights.

Two people who agree to spend their lives committed to each other, deserve to have the same legal protections for their families.

As a state whose diversity is its strength, we cannot accept discrimination in any form.

All families deserve our respect no matter their race, gender or sexual orientation.

My budget recommendation builds on our healthy economy and invests into our most strategic asset—the people of New Mexico.

It maintains our commitment to fiscal discipline, provides safeguards should the national economy falter, and keeps us moving forward.

The budget makes wise investments with this year's surplus.

It's balanced and protects our high bond rating, while safeguarding 10 percent in reserve.

Considering the weakness of the national economy, we must make each investment count, and maintain that 10% reserve.

My capital budget invests into statewide projects to help conserve our precious water supply, improve our state transportation network, and bolster economic development.

But our top investment remains education.

Over the last five years, we've invested more than 245-million dollars to pay our teachers better and now 94-percent of all core courses are taught by a highly qualified teacher.

Today, I'm proposing we spend an additional 60-million dollars to continue to increase teacher and educational employee salaries.

We've already seen the results of our Voluntary Pre-K program with children entering elementary school with better vocabulary, and improved early math and reading skills.

I'm proposing that we create Pre-K opportunities for an additional 2,000 children, which will help us close the achievement gap – before it starts.

And we are investing another 211 million dollars to improve and modernize our elementary, middle and high schools.

I'm asking for 152 million to build state of the art facilities for our university and college campuses.

We must continue our progress on making sure every child has a healthy breakfast, mandatory physical education, and arts education---whether they live in an urban area or the most rural setting.

Two years ago we worked together to guarantee sustained funding in the arts.

I ask that we maintain our commitment to the arts so it remains a key part of every child's education.

For those schools identified as needing improvement, we won't give a bad grade and walk away.

Instead, we are going try to help these schools

We are going to apply new academic approaches.

We are going to provide new incentives for success.

And we are going to boost hands-on training for teachers.

And these school children will graduate better prepared to face a new economic future.

In the last five years, my administration and the Legislature have worked together to shape the future these children will face.

It's been said that the future doesn't belong to the faint of heart, it belongs to the brave and it belongs to the bold.

No one can question we've taken bold initiatives.

We acquired one of the world's fastest supercomputers, and already begun receiving calls from business and federal agencies looking to use it.

We are helping workers get to the workplace, reducing traffic on our streets, and building our Rio Grande corridor economy by investing in a commuter rail system.

We should complete our mission to provide a world-class cancer research center, and provide state-of-the-art comprehensive cancer care.

At the same time, let's help our scientists, physicians and researchers at the University of New Mexico unlock the potential of stem cell research—and help find the cures for our world's most deadly diseases.

And as part of our future, I'm recommending the creation of the first dental school in New Mexico to address our state's gaps in oral health care.

Our investment into Spaceport America will open the heavens to brave adventurers, and will mean thousands of jobs for southern New Mexico.

I believe the Spaceport will also inspire many of our kids to study math and science.

My agenda is bold and focused.

It can be accomplished.

Energy efficiency, domestic violence, ethics reform, domestic partnership, and expanding health care coverage to every New Mexican are major issues facing this state and are the heart of my agenda.

Now is no time to retreat from bold action.

Our responsibility is to address these issues with bipartisanship and civility.

I'd like to conclude with the words of a great American President, Theodore Roosevelt:

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming... who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat

Once again, let the men and women in this hall alight this arena of New Mexico's democracy with our best ideas to better the lives of our citizens.

Let us tackle our state's toughest problems, and work together to create smart solutions.

Let's honor our duty to our great New Mexican people---with great service.

Que Dios Nos Bendiga. May God bless us All. Thank you.