

Dear Friends, Neighbors and Constituents,

New session. Big new financial challenges. Same Governor. Same Senate leadership. That about sums up the first few days of the 2009 legislative session for me. It's a long session and a steep **uphill climb**. But I have confidence that, with your survey results to guide me, we can make it. I've already introduced nine bills, with more to come. The Governor and the Legislature are now hashing out a **solvency plan** for the current fiscal year, where we have come up \$450 million short. This must be accomplished before we can go on to tackle ethics reform, health care, the education funding formula, next year's budget or any of the other issues that you've been seeing in the media.

Results are still coming in from the survey I sent out to 6,000 of my constituents in late December. So far, I've gotten about 530 returns—a great response. Many of you took the time to write detailed messages as well as filling out the form. Thank you so much. I am humbled by your participation and ideas.

When it came to **balancing the budget** in this time of shortfall, your first choice was using money from unspent capital projects. The second choice was raising income taxes on the highest brackets, and the third choice was tapping into the tobacco tax permanent fund. You are not averse to raising taxes, with 53% of you saying you were **not the "No New Taxes" type**. In fact, 92% want to increase cigarette taxes, 90% favor increased local option alcohol taxes, and a slim majority (52%) favor a 1% increase in gross receipts taxes for a boost to the public school funding formula.

If it comes to temporarily cutting programs (*and it will*) you identified cultural affairs as the first choice, roads and buildings second, and water projects third. **Last choice for cuts** was public education, and programs for poor people.

My first priority-- when it comes to the budget-- will be protecting funding and access to quality health care and public education. It will be a tall order. I am glad to hear that you would give up a little of the capital outlay money that I've been able to bring back. That will probably be necessary.

Once again, I am heartened to see you enthusiastically support **ethics and campaign finance reform**. 96% favor disclosure of compensation by lobbyists, 92% favor campaign contribution limits, 92% want oversight of state contracts and procurement, 87% want open conference committees, and 84% want an independent ethics commission. 67% favor expanding the voluntary public financing system that we now have in place for the PRC and state judges.

*With the help of the Attorney General, I am sponsoring a bill to **limit** campaign contributions, and one to establish **an independent Ethics Commission**. I am also trying to strengthen the one pay-to-play bill that we have on the books, which I passed in 2006, and open up legislative conference committees to the light of day. Maybe **this is the year**.*

When it comes to **health care**, 96% of you wanted to mandate that hospitals report hospital-acquired infections; 92% want insurance companies to allow patients to choose their own doctor by contracting with any qualified provider; 92% want to maintain Medicaid funding levels, 89% want pharmaceutical companies to disclose the value of gifts given to doctors and other providers, and 74% want a Medicare-style universal insurance coverage pan for all.

Last week I introduced a bill to require insurance companies to contract with qualified providers so that patients can maintain their doctors even if they have to change plans. About 12 other states have this plan. I also introduced a bill to require pharmaceutical companies report gifts over \$25 (except for free samples) made to doctors. UNM Health Sciences Center has already banned these gifts. I plan to sponsor another bill on hospital-acquired infections as well. Meanwhile, the administration this year is taking a more incremental approach to expanding health care coverage, including some important insurance reforms and consolidations that I support.

Among other survey results:

- 94% want stronger enforcement and increased penalties for Off-Highway Vehicle operators who damage public and private property. *Sen. Phil Griego and I will introduce a bill this week to address this problem.*

- 90% want the state engineer to license deep wells drilled on the West Side

- 77% **oppose** Tax Increment Development Districts on the West Side

- 64% favor replacing the **death penalty** with life without parole

- 54.5% oppose election-day registration

- 61%** feel they are receiving **inadequate services** from the **Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District**

- 77% want modest improvement of trails along ditches.**

This week I will be introducing a bill to dedicate a small portion of property tax revenues collected by the Conservancy in

Bernalillo County to a trails program on selected ditches and drains. Bernalillo County taxpayers account for 68% of the assessments paid to the District, although most do not irrigate.

Thanks again for sharing your views. Please contact me while I'm in Santa Fe at 1-505-986-4300, e-mail me at dede.feldman@nmlegis.gov. or drop by my office in Room 300. Information on various bills, schedules and committees is available at www.legis.state.nm.us. I'll be sending out periodic e-newsletters and I'll continue to post new as often as I can on my blog at <http://senatorfeldman.typepad.com>.

With hope and warmest regards,

Senator Dede Feldman