

December 2011

2012 Legislative Session Just Around the Corner

A new year is dawning, and for the first time in three years, there's some good news to report on the legislative front. The New Mexico economy is inching toward recovery, buoyed by increased activity in the oil patch. This means that our revenue is up and we will have over \$250 million more to budget in the upcoming session. In the past three years we've cut almost \$1 billion in services, starving education and health care, and requiring state workers to take home less.

Now the question will be whether to restore some of those cuts, to continue the austerity plan, or even, as the Governor has suggested, use the new revenue to reduce taxes. Our underlying purpose, of course, is to create more jobs, but there is lots of division on how to do it.

That's why I need your help in filling out the survey you can access here. You can fill it out on line at <http://bit.ly/rzT1GJ>, or **download it here** and then send it back to me at 1821 Meadow View Drive NW, Albuquerque, NM 87104, before the session begins January 17th. You can also drop it by my office (Room 300) at the capitol in Santa Fe once the session begins

This year's interim has been a time of adjustment to a new administration and its plans to implement changes in two areas with which I am involved: Medicaid and the implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Both will have a dramatic effect on our state. The federal health care act has already brought in over \$100 million to the state, creating jobs in local clinics, training programs and allowing people with dire conditions to receive health care. The state recently received \$34 million to plan for an insurance exchange, or marketplace. Although the Governor vetoed the exchange bill I sponsored last session, the administration is proceeding with reform—on its own terms—and the Department of Insurance is beginning to give premium increases more scrutiny.

Medicaid reform has been a hot topic before the Health and Human Services Committee. Although we're short on specifics, the administration plans to increase co-pays, combine programs under fewer insurance contractors and move toward paying providers based on outcomes, not services provided. In spite of a special session, redistricting still hangs in the balance, since the Governor vetoed legislative maps. Court action is to be completed in January, just a few months shy of upcoming elections.

The worst fire in the state's history this summer has renewed my interest in curbing fireworks during periods of extreme drought. I'll be working with the Governor on a version of the bill I sponsored after the bosque fire here eight years ago allowing the Governor and local officials to ban the sale and use of fireworks in times of drought.

Stay tuned for legislative action on all of these issues through my blog at <http://senatorfeldman.typepad.com> and my e-newsletter. Give me your e-mail address on the survey and I will update you on important developments. E-mail me at dede.feldman@nmlegis.gov or call me in Santa Fe at 1-505- 986-4300. Go to www.nmlegis.gov/lcs for agendas and copies of bills.

Here's hoping that 2012 will bring economic recovery, and an end to the uncertainty and political gridlock that characterized much of last year.

With gratitude for your input and trust,
Dede Feldman