

Feb. 10, 2008

Dear Friends, Neighbors and Constituents,

With only four days to go, the short session of the 2008 legislature is getting shorter by the minute. We've accomplished our main task, which is coming up with a budget for state services and capital improvements around the state. The budget weighs in at \$6 billion -- a 6.5% increase in spending. This year we had far less money to work with, and although budget makers did their best, I am disappointed with the plan that we sent to the governor the other day.

Salary increases for public school teachers, college faculty, and state employees averaged only 2%, with a small bump for educational assistants to 3%-- some of the most underpaid personnel in our schools. Medicaid, the federal/state program which provides health insurance for low-income people got far less (\$10 million) than expected in this year of health care reform. This means that we'll lose the anticipated federal funds to provide nearly 10,000 more children with medical services.

As Chairperson of the Senate Public Affairs Committee, I have been very busy with all the different health care proposals, as well as some controversial issues like domestic partners and stem cell research, which have drawn overflow crowds. While the measure to allow stem cell research is still alive in the House, it appears that the bill giving domestic partners equal civil rights as married couples has failed.

The verdict is still out on the Governor's proposal to set up a hybrid public-private system to take us to universal health care. As the clock ticks, the Health Solutions bill is still bogged down in the House. In case it doesn't make it through the session, I have sponsored a measure to create a Health Care Authority (Senate Bill

225) composed of businesses, doctors, and health policy experts to come back to the legislature next year with a comprehensive plan for accessible, affordable health care. I'm not giving up on universal health care. I'll be fighting for it as long as I'm here.

Meanwhile, one insurance reform measure I sponsored (SB 226), which will give consumers a little more leverage vis a vis insurance companies, seems poised to pass the House today. But it is small potatoes compared to the kind of health insurance reform you said you wanted-- to curb discrimination against pre-existing conditions, and address rising premiums.

I am happy to report that my bill to create a task force to mobilize New Mexico against chronic diseases like diabetes, obesity, asthma, and others has fared well. I have been able to include \$50,000 to get this off the ground next year in one of the budget bills, and I am hopeful that it will not be vetoed. Wellness, prevention and disease management is a MUST if we are to cut costs (and heartbreaks) in the medical area. This was one of your priorities on the questionnaire; so, if you still feel that way, encourage the Governor to not veto Senator Feldman's funds for this purpose.

Unfortunately, ethics and campaign finance reform has taken a back seat this session. The voluntary public financing bill has died in the House for lack of funds. The ethics commission is stalled there as well, and a bill to limit campaign contributions is making slow progress through the Senate.

Back on the home front, I have been successful in inserting funds for local schools, libraries, open space, sidewalks and other neighborhood improvements in the capital outlay budget, and I am optimistic that the Governor will sign the bill, since we got it up to him in time to override any vetoes.

Thanks again to those of you who wrote, called, visited or e-mailed me during the session. Most of all thanks to those who completed my survey and sent additional comments. I'm listening. I hope some of you get a chance to check out my blog at <http://senatorfeldman.typepad.com> where I'll be posting additional

comments at the end of the session. Check out my website, too at www.dedefeldman.com where you can sign up for my electronic newsletter, if you have a connection.

Thanks again for the opportunity to serve you. I appreciate your continued confidence and promise to continue to work hard for you.

Respectfully,

State Senator, District 13