

State of the State

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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‘Can’t New Mexico be a state – can’t we be the state – where everything is possible?’

With a new year comes a new legislative session, and in preparation for that, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham addressed the state in her fourth State of the State on Jan. 18. In her speech, she talked about education, tax credits for New Mexicans, job growth, and public safety.

“I believe we can fulfill, once and for all, after 110 years of statehood, the destiny of New Mexico as a genuine homestead of the American Dream, a place where people can grow and thrive and live in peace and prosperity, where people have the resources they need to support themselves and their families,” Lujan Grisham said. “What we do here now, what we do in the coming weeks, will set the stage.”

Beginning with education, Lujan Grisham proposed a seven percent raise for all educators. The increase would put New Mexico in first place in the region for average educator pay.

“They deserve it, and we can afford it, and it’s the right thing to do,” Lujan Grisham said.

She also suggested an increase in the starting salaries for every tier of educators. New Mexico has a three-tier teacher license advancement plan, and it’s based on how long a teacher has

been teaching and how much education they have.

Dr. Kurt Steinhaus, the New Mexico Secretary of Education, has recently shown support for a \$50,000 starting minimum for Level 1 teachers, a \$60,000 starting minimum for Level 2, and \$70,000 for Level 3. In total, that would come out to a \$200.5 million increase to the public education support budget.

Lujan Grisham explained that some teachers could see as much as a 20 percent raise this year with this increase in place.

After discussing education, the governor turned to taxes. She began by sharing that the New Mexico sales tax hasn't been cut in 40 years.

"It's only gone up and up and up, for decades, burdening New Mexico households and making it harder for our small businesses to be competitive," Lujan Grisham said.

She said her tax cut proposal would save New Mexicans more than \$170 million each year. She also supports cutting the taxes that are taken out of Social Security benefits. New Mexico is one of only 12 states that tax Social Security.

"This is good government, serving the people who have asked us to serve them," Lujan Grisham said. "... I believe we have an obligation to find ways to make life easier for the people of New Mexico, and I will keep looking for ways to do exactly that."

When it comes to jobs, Lujan Grisham noted that over 10,000 jobs had been created in the past three years and that those jobs have an average salary of more than \$90,000. She made it clear that she doesn't plan to let the pandemic slow the state down.

"Unlike in the aftermath of the Great Recession, we're not going to let the pandemic stall us and take away years of growth; we will not have another lost decade – in fact, despite the

challenges of the last two years, we've hardly lost a step," Lujan Grisham said.

She pointed out that New Mexico has seen unemployment go down every month for the past 10 months. The number of unemployed New Mexicans dropped by five percent in November alone.

The governor credits that achievement to the fact that the state is expanding its "economic footprint" into different industries, and she gave the legalization of cannabis as an example.

"Legal cannabis is going to create thousands of jobs and serious tax revenue for local governments to support local services in every corner of our state," Lujan-Grisham said.

In an effort to stop crime and promote public safety, Lujan Grisham is supporting a 19 percent increase to public safety department budgets and a 19 percent raise for state police officers.

She also wants to crack down on people who repeatedly break the law.

"So we need tougher penalties for the worst of the worst, the repeat offenders and those who have proven themselves to be a danger to our communities; I support rehabilitation and this administration has done a lot of innovative good work in that area, but at the end of the day I stand with the families and communities who have been victimized unnecessarily by the violent criminals that this system needs to secure," Lujan Grisham said. "The worst offenders, the most serious and dangerous criminals in our state, need to be behind bars, simple as that."

She briefly mentioned a law that would give courts more guidance when it comes to keeping people who were charged with violent crimes behind bars.

"We will put a wedge in the revolving door of violent crime in New Mexico," Lujan Grisham said. "The safety of our communities cannot be up for debate."

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The second session of the 55th New Mexico Legislature began on Jan. 18, and continues until Feb. 17.

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