Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 04 December 2020 06:04



**State relief for business, unemployed, more**

SANTA FE — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced her plan to call the New Mexico Legislature into special session Nov. 24, to take up a relief package for New Mexicans who have been affected by the economic devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The governor's priorities for the session – sometimes referred to as the governor's "call" – include direct unemployment assistance, supplementing the payments to New Mexicans whose employment has been impacted by the economic fallout of the pandemic; grants to New Mexico businesses, making meaningful funding assistance as accessible as possible for business-owners whose operations have been impacted by the public health emergency**;** emer gency housing assistance; and emergency food bank services.

The governor's proposed legislation will ask lawmakers to take up and approve:

$194 million in direct unemployment assistance, providing for a one-time supplemental benefit of $1,200 to each state unemployment claimant who is eligible for state or federal pandemic unemployment programs or was eligible but has exhausted their benefits under those programs since Sept. 12;

$100 million for a grant program for New Mexico-owned small businesses;

$15 million to provide for emergency housing assistance;

$5 million for emergency food bank services;

$5 million for direct economic assistance to low-income residents, in the form of a one-time $750 disbursement per household, who did not receive an “economic impact payment” from the federal government; and

Other funding necessary to support the administrative organization and execution of these programs.

Funding for these programs will be made available through a transfer of previously received federal funds to the appropriation account of the state general fund.

During the first special legislative session of 2020, state lawmakers and the administration worked to ensure the state’s financial reserves remained more than sufficient to achieve solvency and maintain key state programs amid the potential for continuing or worsening economic conditions.

In the intervening months, updated state revenue forecasts signal that state reserves will remain at a healthy level – 30 percent of general fund expenditures – even after allocating these additional federal funds for the above purposes. The Lujan Grisham Administration has prudently aimed for – and maintained – at least 20 percent of general fund expenditures in reserves as a fiscally prudent target.

The proposed legislation would also appropriate $10 million from the state general fund to the Department of Health to provide for COVID-19 testing, contact tracing and vaccine implementation support.

“I am grateful for the Legislature’s willingness to take up this urgently needed relief package on behalf of all New Mexicans,” Gov. Lujan Grisham said. “And I am optimistic lawmakers will come together in a bipartisan fashion to expeditiously approve these assistance programs.

“The simple fact is New Mexicans need the absolute maximum support that government can provide right now. We can do a lot of good when we work together and when our priorities align. In this moment of crisis, we will and we must forge ahead together for the good of the people of our great state,” she said.

“We have countless critical issues facing the state right now,” Senate President Pro Tem Mary Kay Papen said. “The actions we take in this special session will help us address the most immediate of them, and, most importantly, get the money to where it will have the greatest positive impact on those families and small businesses who need it most.”

“New Mexicans are hurting, and without more federal economic relief in sight we have to take action now,” Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth said. “Assisting our small businesses, shoring up unemployment funds to help displaced workers, and providing some relief for people struggling with food and housing are all priorities the legislature strongly supports.”

Speaker of the House of Representatives Brian Egolf  said, “New Mexicans have remained incredibly resilient throughout this pandemic, yet their future is uncertain if we do not deliver the relief they desperately need to defeat this virus.”

“The relief we pass this special session will go directly to hardworking families struggling to keep their children fed, a roof over their heads, and the heat and bills paid,” Egolf continued. “Unlike Washington, our state government knows New Mexico’s future is dependent on keeping families whole through this pandemic and beyond.”

It will be the second special session the governor has called amid the pandemic to address issues stemming from the health and economic crises.

The first, in June, encompassed an emergency agenda set by the governor to ensure state

solvency after the pandemic cratered the oil market; establish emergency small business support programs; require all law enforcement officers to wear body cameras; and authorize a bipartisan state Civil Rights Commission to analyze and make recommendations to the legislature and governor.