



Office of the Governor

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

Governor's 2021 State of the State address

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021 delivered a virtual State of the State address from the Governor's Office in Santa Fe. The speech may be viewed [here](#).

The governor's remarks as prepared are provided below in full.

For the thousands we have lost to the virus in our state, for their grieving families, their friends and loved ones; for any New Mexican who suffered this past year, for any New Mexican who experienced loss, or loneliness, or despair; I would ask you to join me in a moment of silent reflection or prayer.

My fellow New Mexicans:

Grief is a teacher. And the process of grieving changes us. I can speak from experience. When you have lost a sister, or a husband – you might get angry, you might feel helpless, you might ask any power that may be listening to change it, undo it, deal a new set of cards.

But in grieving we learn to accept that pain and loss are parts of life, for each of us. A difficult but important lesson. We learn to be patient, to nurture our faith and our relationships, to love more deeply. We learn and re-learn who we are, how strong we are, how precious and temporary everything is. We see ourselves as we are – as one of many; as an essential part of a world that is constantly healing, and growing, and moving forward. We emerge, on the other side, with a new and valuable perspective.

As a state and as a country, we have felt more than our fair share of grief this past year. The lives lost; the families and livelihoods and careers upended; the illnesses, the goodbyes we never got to give; the exhaustion, the fear and apprehension ... and here we are, still standing, wondering: How will we heal? Where do we go from here? How will we go on?

But we have already shown how. If we are strong enough to see ourselves through this year of crisis, and we are; if we are still fighting after the hits we took in 2020, and we are; then there is nothing that can beat us. Nothing. We may get knocked down. But we will never be knocked out.

New Mexico has never been stronger, tougher and more resilient than right now. New Mexicans are many things – angry at the injustice of the pandemic; worn-down but



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resolute after a year of full-time working and parenting; fed up with systematic inequality; ready to build something better and new after this year of upheaval and sorrow. But more than anything New Mexicans are strong. New Mexico has shown incredible, unyielding strength. And that strength will help our state bounce back with speed, beginning right now.

Although the pandemic has been emotionally draining for all of us, and has required our full attention and energy, the work of building a better New Mexico has gone on. We have continued to restore and strengthen the responsive and responsible state government New Mexicans expect and deserve. And together we have saved New Mexican lives. In doing that work, in protecting New Mexicans and our state as a whole, we have made ourselves ready to rebound.

The leadership our state has shown in fighting COVID-19 is the exact same leadership that will get us back on track. New Mexico was the first state in the country to establish a drive-thru testing site. We have remained steadily in the top 10 nationally for COVID testing per-capita. We mobilized a tribal response and assistance plan that was a model for other states; we're using cutting-edge science to test wastewater samples to prevent outbreaks at correctional and juvenile justice facilities; and we will continue to rapidly, safely and equitably distribute vaccines to every corner of our state. We told the truth about the pandemic, even when it wasn't what some of us wanted to hear. We protected our hospitals and health care resources, and we got more than 26 million meals to schoolkids all across New Mexico. Doctors, nurses, caregivers, first responders, daycare workers, grocery store workers, correctional officers and so many more have all shown up for their state with courage, dedication and grace. We stepped up, all of us, as New Mexicans who love our state and look out for our neighbors.

Already, we have delivered hundreds of millions in emergency resources to thousands of New Mexico small businesses, the out-of-work, disadvantaged New Mexico families, and more. And we have more to do. But we can do it because throughout this crisis we maintained our financial footing. We planned ahead; we invested in record financial reserves; and we always thought creatively and responsibly about what we can afford – and what we can't afford to lose.

Under the budget I have proposed, we will avoid harmful cuts to life-saving state resources and programs that New Mexicans rely on every day. We will deliver almost half a billion dollars to New Mexicans for pandemic relief. And we will, in fact, increase our investments in support for public schools, in health care and in our economy. With this approach, we will not have another decade of forced austerity. New Mexico's economic recovery will not lag behind the nation's, as it did under the previous Republican administration. Because we will choose to keep investing in job-creation programs that work, programs like LEDA and JTIP that created thousands of jobs last



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year and have retrained thousands of workers, even amid the pandemic. And because we will choose to have the courage to break ground in new industries, to expand opportunities for New Mexicans, and reimagine what our state economy and workforce can be.

In short, we will recover faster because we have made sustainable investments, we have a roadmap to a rebuilt and diversified economy, and we have the resources to both take care of our own right now and keep building toward New Mexico's future.

At the same time, we will learn from the last year, what was taken from us and what was exposed. The pandemic has reminded us that New Mexico cannot wait any longer to invest in reliable high-speed internet for all in our state. I call on the Legislature to commit at least half of their capital outlay allocations to new broadband investments, some 200 million dollars. This is the most urgently needed infrastructure investment we can make as a state. And we must make it. Together we must put in place this essential building block and avow our unequivocal faith in New Mexico's economic future.

The pandemic has underscored that our behavioral health system – undone by the vandalism of the prior state administration – demands robust reform. CYFD this year created the nation's first text-only abuse and neglect hotline for New Mexico children, providing them an outlet that research has shown they may be more comfortable using. With more resources, we are restoring humanity to these services – and expanding them. My budget calls for a 800% increase in funding for suicide prevention services and programs, for both youth and adults. Mental health care is health care, and New Mexico must and will meet those needs, no matter the circumstances.

And we will keep working to expand coverage. This year, when we launch the new Health Care Affordability Fund, we will get health coverage to 23,000 uninsured New Mexicans in just one year, and we will slash premiums for tens of thousands more. These are the compassionate investments in people and families – in their opportunity and ability to lead healthy and happy lives – that will help us create a better New Mexico for everyone.

I have all the confidence in our state because I have seen that in two years, even while facing the greatest public health emergency in a century, we can change the narrative. There's progress all around us, even if the pandemic has made it a bit harder to see – economic progress, environmental progress, quality of life progress. Companies large and small are still choosing to move to New Mexico and expand in New Mexico. Ascent Aviation – an aircraft maintenance, storage and support business in Roswell – is moving forward with construction of a new hangar and plans to hire 360 workers and provide scholarships for students in rural New Mexico. Big Tuna, a high-density pipe manufacturer, chose Las Cruces over Texas, Arizona and Colorado and will double its workforce next year. A host of manufacturing companies is taking root and expanding in



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the Borderplex area, including three new companies from Asia, who are using New Mexico as their launchpad into the North American market.

The Department of Transportation is at work on more than 200 infrastructure projects statewide, including priority roadway improvements in the southeast. New Mexico is creating new jobs in the outdoor recreation industry 10 times faster than the national average, with more than a billion now in total annual income for New Mexicans. We issued 42,000 construction permits last year; we completed 120 miles of stream protection along the Rio Costilla, safeguarding the Rio Grande cutthroat trout; and in two years we have issued almost 700 brand-new hemp licenses, covering 15 million square feet of indoor growing space and almost 10,000 outdoor acres.

It's simple: An aggressive, responsive, forward-thinking government can make a big difference. Last year, we gave 75,000 dollars to the state Office of Natural Resources Trustee, which was underfunded and indeed forgotten about for many, many years. In return, that small state office has already recovered more than a million dollars from corporations responsible for harming New Mexico communities and our environment, a 15-fold return on investment. And, with the help of tribal partners, those dollars will be going straight into communities that have suffered from contamination and pollution. Indeed, 2020 was not a lost year in our essential efforts to protect our natural environment and diversify our energy economy. In two years, we've doubled our new renewable resources over the two years before that. New Mexico will be home to the largest single wind complex in the nation, and I expect we will soon rank in the top 5 in the country for per-capita wind energy production. We're driving down energy costs for you and reducing emissions. Property values are rising and, for the second straight year, more people are moving to New Mexico than moving out.

The investments we've made in our state have already begun to make a difference. This is still the place to be. The greatest state in the union. As dark as some days have been, amid the grief and fear and injustice, we have remained true to ourselves. We are, still, bound for greatness, driven by empathy and compassion, by an ambition to create justice and equal opportunity in our state – we are and must be, as the inaugural poet Amanda Gorman wrote, “bruised but whole, / benevolent but bold, / fierce and free.” And as she said, “We will not be turned around / or interrupted by intimidation, / because we know our inaction and inertia, / will be the inheritance of the next generation.”

We are brave enough to see the light. And brave enough to be the light. In 2021 we will continue this essential work of transforming our state – day in, day out – with a renewed energy and focus, with a sense of urgency and purpose that will honor the strength and sacrifice of those who gave so much this year.



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That includes educators. Teachers and school support staff all across New Mexico went the extra mile this year – and the extra mile after that, too. I’m in awe of your commitment and your integrity. And I will say clearly: None of you – no educator, no school worker – should ever have to choose between your health and the students you serve. And that’s why my administration has been methodical and tireless in working with superintendents, charter leaders, the Department of Health, the Medical Advisory Team and both NEA and AFT to enhance the safety of school buildings and expand surveillance testing. There’s no substitute for in-person learning. And there’s no negotiating about the health and safety of students, families and educators. I believe the planning and hard work has paid off, and our state has developed a solid, epidemiologically-sound plan for a safe expansion of in-person learning for all age groups, supported by union leadership. We will get this right, and we will move forward, and every school district in the state will be able to welcome all ages of students safely back to the classroom on February 8.

And that’s not all. Yes, COVID has disrupted classrooms in New Mexico and indeed across our whole country. But dealing with the virus must not – and will not – derail our focus on improving outcomes in public education, on necessary long-term investments in family well-being and the health of school communities across the state.

We will enact an equity-first budget for public education, ensuring money reaches students and schools in proportion to the socioeconomic needs of families in the community, laying the path to a public education system that truly delivers for students now and a hundred years from now, no matter their zip code, their family circumstances or the color of their skin. With the collaborative leadership of the Legislature, we will tackle reforms in special education, beginning with a new ombudsman’s office focused squarely on the needs of differently abled New Mexico students and their families. And we will, this year, finally, move forward with a constitutional amendment to invest a portion of our state’s great wealth in early childhood education and well-being. Together we will deliver to New Mexico voters the opportunity to make a generational investment in New Mexico children.

And we will deploy funding to realize free higher education for all New Mexicans, helping more students like Ramon, at the UNM branch campus in Los Alamos, who was able to continue his education this year through the Opportunity Scholarship despite having to leave his job when he became a father. With seed money from the Legislature this year, we were able to reach almost 5,000 New Mexico students with the Opportunity Scholarship in the fall 2020 semester alone, fully covering their tuition and fees at two-year institutions. If the Legislature will commit the full \$22 million in funding I’ve requested for this program this year, 30,000 more New Mexicans will have access to the two-year higher education they need without worrying about tuition and fees. We have a long way to go to realize the potential of this program, but it deserves an



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investment of our attention as policymakers. New Mexico institutions of higher learning had the nation's largest decrease in returning students last year. We can all agree New Mexico should once again lead the nation in college opportunity – and we must do the work to get there. This funding is a vote of confidence in New Mexicans, a proclamation of faith in their potential, in colleges all across New Mexico. We must enact any and every strategy to improve educational outcomes for New Mexicans – particularly those that connect young learners and adults directly to the workforce. And we will.

Because our workforce is our lifeblood. And our small businesses, who have shouldered the hideous burden of a once-in-a-century pandemic, are the heartbeat of New Mexico communities. Our state will continue to step up for them.

We didn't wait for the federal government to get its act together – we got grants and stimulus checks out the door. We will always take care of our own. And as I said: There's more to be done. But I believe we have the opportunity this year to do more than sustain our workers and our businesses; we can make the forward-thinking investments that will create the diversified and thriving economy we've always needed, transforming how New Mexico does business and how New Mexicans make a meaningful living for decades to come.

We will fix and improve on the Small Business Recovery Act created by the Legislature in the special session last summer, unlocking more than 200 million dollars in direct relief for New Mexico small businesses, and 200 million more specifically for business rent relief. We will remake our state procurement code to boost minority- and Native- and women-owned businesses, and to ensure more New Mexico dollars are spent with New Mexican-owned companies. We will continue to invest in the state job-creation programs that work. I've already mentioned LEDA – it is a powerful driver of economic growth and opportunity, creating 25% more jobs last year than the year before, helping small businesses get off the ground and helping larger companies expand. We celebrate the success of big-ticket companies like Netflix, which has already spent hundreds of millions in our state and committed to a billion more – and we should celebrate those big companies and big industries, with the film and television business in our state now employing more than 9,000 people. But I don't want to forget about homegrown success stories like Bueno Foods, which, with the help of a state partnership, is adding 25,000 square feet of frozen warehouse space, hiring dozens more employees and boosting sales. And like Los Poblanos, which, with the help of a state partnership, is expanding year-round manufacturing, processing and food storage – which means they're using more products from more New Mexico farmers and ranchers, a win-win for state agriculture and producers.

We can and will regain the momentum of 2019, when we created more jobs in our state than in any year in more than a decade, when we drove down our unemployment rate



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and saw thousands of people move to New Mexico specifically for jobs. We can be aggressive in recruiting new workers and creating new jobs all across our state – in tourism and hospitality, in construction and agriculture, in energy and aerospace and outdoor recreation.

But we will avoid an extended period of economic stagnation only if we are forward-thinking about the future, if we keep our eyes on what new companies and industries and workers we can bring into the fold. A crisis like the one we experienced last year can be viewed as a loss – or as an invitation to re-think the status quo, to be ambitious and creative and bold. That kind of thinking includes, of course, recreational cannabis, and the tens of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions in new revenue it will bring to our state. I have no interest in another year of thousands of New Mexicans eager to get to work and make their future in this industry being told “no,” just because that’s easier than doing the hard work to get to “yes.” When we emerge from this pandemic, we can have the same-old economy with the same-old boom-and-bust future, or we can roar back to life, breaking new ground and fearlessly investing in ourselves, in the limitless potential of New Mexicans. I know which future I prefer. And we can begin building it this year.

Just as we’re building on our commitment to a clean, sustainable future. Implementation of the landmark Energy Transition Act is moving ahead speedily with more renewables coming on board. We’re adopting new building codes, saving New Mexico homeowners up to \$400 a year on energy costs while reducing emissions. We’re making solar energy more affordable for New Mexicans; we’re installing electric charging stations along popular highways spanning the state; and we’re creating hundreds of new clean energy jobs while investing in emissions-monitoring companies that will help us reach our climate goals. And this year we will enact the country’s toughest methane and air pollutant rules in the oil and gas industry, finally cracking down on waste and pollution in a way that is not punitive but innovative, capturing harmful emissions and, in the process, creating more revenue for our state and for our schools. The sanctity of our natural environment – our clean air, our water, our beautiful mesas and forests and mountains – is non-negotiable. We know that protecting our environment can also mean giving ourselves a leg up economically, and that’s what we will continue to do. By taking swift action, New Mexico will once again be a model for the country.

In closing I will tell you my fondest hope: That the crisis that began in 2020 will end in 2021. That the darkness we’ve experienced together will pass – and soon.

What we begin after that, that’s our choice.



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Our lives have been upended, all of us. Our way of life, our basic day-to-day habits and our sense of “normal” – all of it was torn away from us. But New Mexico will heal – indeed we are already healing. And a new day will come.

What we’ve been through – the immense challenges we’ve faced, that we still face – should inspire us to think about who we are, what we want to achieve and how we can get there. We are free to think differently, dream bigger and be bolder.

We share, as New Mexicans, the collective trauma and loss of the pandemic. But one thing we’ve gained, all together, is the freedom to choose our own brand-new future. I hope we move forward – as we have all throughout this difficult year, in our own individual ways – with compassion for our neighbors, with generosity of spirit, with a clear understanding of the challenges we face and an open mind about how we can overcome them.

Beyond getting back to normal, beyond restoring what we had – the next year, the next five years, the next hundred years, it’s ours to dream up and build, together.

We can choose cooperation over conflict. We can choose innovation over inertia. We can choose to remember 2020 as a low point or a turning point.

I know our best days are ahead of us. As we defeat this virus, once and for all, we will also do the work of setting up our state for sustained success – and we will stand up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the climb toward a thriving New Mexico, a healthy and happy New Mexico, better than ever before.

Thank you. Let’s get to work, and may God bless you and keep your family healthy and safe.

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