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Heather Heuermund, center, and Virginia Pulver, both of The New Mexico Coalition for Literacy, talk with Gov. Bill Richardson Tuesday in the state Capitol over possible budget cuts. Richardson opened his office to a first-come, first-served basis to hear concerns and suggestions.



Meetings aim to soften the budget blow

Governor appears sympathetic as he hears pleas to avoid recommended cuts

Steve Terrell | The New Mexican
Posted: Tuesday, October 27, 2009 - 10/28/09

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Educators and state employees. People representing youth shelters, behavioral health organizations and literacy programs. Law-enforcement officers dealing with border crime. Emergency 911 operators.

These were just some of the New Mexicans who showed up at the Capitol on Tuesday to tell Gov. Bill Richardson that they want to be spared from looming state budget cuts.

More than 100 individuals had five-minute sessions with the governor, who, along with a handful of staff members, listened to their concerns and suggestions. About 40 groups were represented Tuesday, a spokeswoman for the governor said.

Richardson invited members of the public to meet with him while he considers budget cuts recommended in a bill sent to him by the state Legislature. House Bill 17, which would slice state spending by about \$153 million, kept education cuts below 2 percent but calls for axing more than 7 percent from some state agencies under the governor's control.

Richardson has the power to veto the bill or "line-item veto" parts of it. He has until Nov. 12 to act on the bill.

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While Richardson was meeting with the citizens, his office released a statement from the Human Services Department that said proposed budget cuts would be "devastating." Among programs that would be slashed are children's health care, behavioral health care, health care for developmentally disabled individuals, medically fragile and those with HIV/AIDS and nutrition assistance for seniors.

"These services are critical for New Mexico's low-income residents," said Katie Falls, Human Services Department acting secretary. "Cuts to these programs can result in devastating consequences for New Mexico's most vulnerable population."

Arcie Baca, local leader of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, was part of a union delegation that met with Richardson on Tuesday. He said AFSCME asked him to veto the entire 7.6 percent budget cut. If signed into law that proposal would translate to a day of unpaid furlough for each state employee every two weeks, Baca said.

During several meetings attended by a reporter, Richardson appeared sympathetic to those pleading their cases.

"We'll see if we can isolate this program in the Department of Cultural Affairs," he told a delegation from the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy, who provide literacy programs and train literacy tutors for the state.

Richardson noted his wife, Barbara Richardson, is an advocate for literacy programs. But he warned the group that they probably face some kind of budget cut.

To Luna County Sheriff Raymond Cobos, who was speaking on behalf of a five-county law-enforcement coalition called the Safe Borders Initiative, Richardson said, "You've done a good with that program." Cobos said the program — which was set up by Richardson about four years ago in response to violence around the Mexican border — is in danger of losing \$250,000 if his budget is cut.

Cobos and two deputies who accompanied him said that while they were there to ask the border program not be cut, they were interested in saving other programs as well. The sheriff said he's a volunteer with the Coalition for Literacy in Deming. Lt. Allen Carter said that in Luna County, the sheriff's department operates the local domestic violence shelter. "We're big supporters of several programs," Carter said.

A group of six 911 operators from around the state asked to be spared from a cut in a separate bill passed by the Legislature last week. House Bill 3 took unspent money from several state funds to put in the general fund. This included \$3 million from a fund that pays for 911 electronic communication equipment. Jeanne Fortenberry, who directs the 911 center in Silver City, said that money was going to be used for a state-of-the-art system to allow dispatchers to receive text messages and streaming video from callers. The 911 fund would lose a federal grant of \$888,000, Fortenberry said.

Richardson told the group there's a possibility he'll line-item veto the \$3 million transfer.

Before the governor began his series of meetings, Robert Apodaca met with representatives from several state agencies with regard to Richardson's call for a freeze on stalled capital-outlay projects, in hopes of saving \$150 million. Saving money by scrapping inactive projects would prevent state worker layoffs and drastic program cuts, Apodaca said.

Still, he said, some agencies have been reluctant to part with their inactive projects. Last week, he said, some agencies showed him fresh hand-written contracts "on projects where no money's been spent since 2005."

Contact Steve Terrell at 986-3037 or sterrell@sfnwmexican.com. Read his political blog at roundhouseroundup.com.

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Ambro A (posted on 10/28/2009)

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The plan of the international Oligarchs, read their own words, Is to level out all Global economies. Another words, Look to Argentina, look to South Africa, look to India, Poland, Belarus, Egypt, Peru. Etc etc etc. That is our future. One middle class free cesspool of poverty. This plan will also keep carbon emissions to a minimum. OK you're correct, there will be a small group of what you would call middle class, servicing, and keeping the poor away from the oligarch's footsteps. And yes! Depopulation has begun. Just read Henry Kissinger's writings, or maybe, the Builderburg's initiatives. Knowledge will set you free, yet you will die from ignorance.

Ambro A (posted on 10/28/2009)

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test

Allen White (posted on 10/28/2009)

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Why is the state spending millions of dollars on a worthless pointless Spaceport Project? Why can't old Bill furlough his staff? Cut pay for some of his higher paid Dept. Secretaries? Why can't he get rid of the double dipping old farts with so-called experience that have nothing but negative attitudes toward the departments they work in. It occurs to me that there would be millions of \$\$ saved. There are people in state govt. and in private industry that take advantage of the system. State employees chose to work towards a retirement and individual business owners who think about money right now. This is the Real World. Govt. or private industry. There are alot of hard-working state govt. employees that get screwed time and again and then there are those whom have never faced hardship due to their \$100,000+ salary.

Bill In Santa Flush (posted on 10/28/2009)

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Ambro A, I agree 1000%

oh please (posted on 10/28/2009)

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Hey Virginia Pulver - How dare you say such an out right lie. NOT "almost half of the adult New Mexicans" are unable to read. Where do you get off saying such a thing. For to publish such a statement is very irresponsible of you. I want to know where you got this number from? the percentage of New Mexican's who cannot read is approx. 13%. Not 50%. You may teach illegals to read and maybe approx 50% of illegals may not know how to read "english" but you and your irresponsible statement must retract this out right lie.

Bill In Santa Flush (posted on 10/28/2009)

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I would not get on the teat. Have had my business for 38 years and have seen ups and downs. Have not drawn a paycheck in three years, sold my airplane, and done all I can to pay my employees, some with me for 20 years.. \$bill is not selling the state airplane, stopping the spaceout port. Firing his chefs (I understand he has two at \$90 grand each), still running the choo choo! One of the state employees married to one of my ex-employees used to spend severals hours a week out at the shop visiting with her hubby. Two county employees just delivered a paper for me to sign about my property taxes, paper must have been really heavy, took two to bring it out here. BS!

Virginia J. Pulver (posted on 10/28/2009)

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With almost half of adult New Mexicans unable to read above the 5th grade level (in their own language) the efforts of the NMCL (New Mexico Coalition for Literacy) make a huge difference in every aspect of life here in our fair state. We provide FREE, one-to-one tutoring for adults. A surprising number of these students are high school and college graduates. Yes you read that right! I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Governor on our programs. I am a VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America) serving in a capacity building role in this very worthwhile

organization. It is an honor to use my skills and passion in this cause. Thanks to the SFNM for the photo of us and the references in the article! VJP

P J (posted on 10/28/2009)

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Bill, Do I detect a hint of jealousy in your rant? If you're unhappy with your current situation, change it. Maybe you all think that state employees have cushy office jobs, most of us don't! I work with substandard equipment, practically in a closet sized cubicle, gross carpet, annoying office mates etc. I am not a "teat sucker", I'm just the average state employee toiling away and trying to get by thru the skin of my teeth for my family. SO BACK OFF!!!

felix herrera (posted on 10/28/2009)

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The Governor only signs the bills. The governing body (ie legislature) makes all the decisions. So blaming the governor is a moot point. You want action then get rid of all these lifer legislators who don't have anything else to do but collect a pension off the back of all the other government employees. Get some new blood in office so we can move this state forward!!

not a state employee (posted on 10/28/2009)

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couple of things. I didn't realize you had to be a state employee to meet the the governor. Why? My wife and i were headed to the capital to meet w/the governor to talk to him about our thoughts. Why can't we as citizens of New Mexico give the governor our thoughts. Why are state employees the only people allowed to voice their thoughts or worry's or complaints about the STATE budget. This state budges doesn't ONLY effect state employees. It effects ALL CITIZENS OF THE STATE. I have legitimate concerns as a citizen of New Mexico. I want to know specificaly as a taxpayer and as the Governor's boss (remember, hej works for us taxpayers not the other way around) why he is not sacrificing his own budget first? Why he is not leading by example? Why he is not cutting 2/3rds of his Gov-ex state employees first and THEN cut the rest of the state's departmental budgets? Can he answer me that question? Can he answer me that question on this website since i or my wife are not state employees and do not have a valid state employee i.d.?

P Orlando Baca (posted on 10/28/2009)

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I need to have a state approved photo ID to meet with the governor, but don't need any kind of ID to vote. What is wrong with this picture?

P J (posted on 10/28/2009)

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As a 15 year state employee...I don't think it is fair that we have to be threatened with furloughs/layoffs! I am in my early 30's with a new mortgage, car payments and a child on the way. If I get layed off or furloughed what am I supposed to do?!?! I dont want to hear that its my problem, state employees are this or that. I am an honest individual with good working ethics. We as state employees shouldn't be punished for something the governor can't handle....

Ed Campbell (posted on 10/28/2009)

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Some things never change. Even the positive ones. Like Governor Bill taking the time to listen to constituents. Although I hold no brief for most 2-party frontmen, I recall my first encounter decades ago when as a congressman he came to the Navajo Nation to speak - and listen - even though the meeting was stacked with John Bircher types. The sort of egregious fools who nowadays call themselves teabaggers. There are a couple in-house, already, this morning. Foolishness from one. Ignorance especially from the other. Both only concerned with their petty ego problems instead of what affects the lives of other citizens of this tawdry planet. Very sad individuals - excepting when they spend their time on threats.

ed edwards (posted on 10/28/2009)

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Our gubnor bill sure does like to meet with pretty ladies, no? Heather looks HOT!

ed edwards (posted on 10/28/2009)

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Oh hello Mr. Gubner. I was wondering if you could cut some of the programs out that you have created for undocumented or illegal residents of your mom's country that have made our state their home. You know, like the public education system, medical care (heck, get rid of La Familia and the County Clinic altogether since it only served Mexican Nationals) and stuff like that. If you cut these programs then all the savings could go toward American citizens. Thanks Mr. Gubnor, your awesome and I knew you would understand.



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