

Governor Susana Martinez Delivers State of the State Address

Santa Fe, NM – The following is the prepared text of the State of the State Address delivered by Governor Susana Martinez from the chamber of the New Mexico House of Representatives on January 19, 2016.

Governor Susana Martinez: 2016 State of the State Address

Lieutenant Governor; Senate President Pro Tempore; Mr. Speaker; Democrat and Republican leaders; esteemed members of the New Mexico Legislature; Congresswoman Michelle Lujan-Grisham; Congressman Steve Pearce; honorable members of the judiciary; former New Mexico governors; tribal governors; Archbishop John Wester; distinguished guests; the State's first gentleman, my husband, Chuck Franco; the State's first newlyweds – Carlo and Tara; my sister, Lettie; and, my fellow New Mexicans.

It is an honor to join you for the State of the State Address and open this legislative session, where our call and purpose will be to confront violent crime, demand more than mediocrity in education, and compete for jobs with the resolve that is expected of us.

These challenges – these realities – are not specifically of our making. In some cases, they have been decades in the making. But they are what is in front of us, and for the sake of future generations, it is our responsibility to address them.

Two of my guests today are here because, for them, and for their families and for the community around them, 2015 brought unthinkable personal pain and horrific tragedy.

I grew up the daughter of a police officer, and as you know, Chuck was a police officer. I remember, at times, not being able to reach him by phone, wondering if he was okay – always knowing there was a chance he might not come home.

I cannot imagine and will not pretend to understand the pain and sadness that engulfed Julie Benner and Michelle Webster when that nightmare – something the spouse of every officer fears – became a reality.

Officers Nigel Benner and Dan Webster served with distinction in our armed forces, volunteered in their communities, and raised families among us. They chose service to each of us, and to sacrifice their safety for each of us – they were heroes to strangers.

Where most would run away from trouble out of fear, they would run toward it – out of duty, with courage.

We will never understand why the tragic deaths – the senseless murders – of these two heroes occurred, and maybe we aren't supposed to understand it. But, I do know this: we are supposed to

recognize men and women like Officers Benner and Webster. We are supposed to hold them up, to honor them, to encourage their exceptionalism in others, and to tell our kids to be like them and serve like them.

Julie and Michelle – your husbands showed each of us the highest and purest form of love. There is no greater expression of love for your neighbor than to be willing to lay down your life for them. And I know that their sacrifice was, and remains, your sacrifice, as well.

As a state, we pray for you and your families, and we recognize you for the courage and poise you have shown through unthinkable tragedy. May your husbands rest in God's true peace. Thank you for being with us today.

As we start this session, this is not the backdrop we asked for, but it's the reality we face.

Call them boomerang thugs, turnstile thugs, whatever. We have vicious, heinous criminals among us who are willing to take the lives of our greatest heroes, and who have no business being out on our streets.

We see teens terrorizing neighborhoods late at night.

We still see drunk driving tragedies on our roadways – innocent New Mexicans like Roberto Mendez, Sergio Mendez-Aguirre, Grace Sinfield, and 19 year-old Jacob Salazar – all taken too soon, often by repeat offenders who are still driving their deadly weapons on our roads.

Communities, parents, and families ask: how are these criminals still out there?

The public's frustration is not misplaced. Our laws are too lax, our justice system too weak – particularly when it comes to violent, dangerous offenders. It's our job to fix it, and there's a lot we can do.

Every judge should have real-time access to the criminal background and history of defendants who appear in their courtrooms – so that sentencing and bail decisions can be made with that information. And we need to amend our Constitution to allow judges to keep the most dangerous criminals in jail – without bail.

Because stories like Joseph Jaramillo's are too familiar. Jailed for aggravated battery and assault, child abuse, and being a felon in possession of a firearm, he was granted bail and sent back into Albuquerque's neighborhoods. Nine days later, he was ramming a deputy's car with a stolen truck, putting more lives in jeopardy.

With what we've seen this past year, there should be no more excuses for light sentences and automatic bail for violent offenders. And we need laws that are tough in substance, not just in sound bites. Look at our three strikes law. It sounds tough, but it was worded so that it didn't mean anything. No one has ever been incarcerated under that law. Let's put real teeth into it, so we can keep those who commit repeated violent felonies – who repeatedly prey on innocent families – behind bars for life.

In addition, skipping out on parole should be a 4th degree felony, and I fully support the bipartisan effort to allow local communities to adopt curfews if it's necessary to keep us safe.

With respect to ending DWI, I recently announced several major initiatives: saturation patrols on our deadliest highways targeting repeat offenders and the establishments that over-serve them; a court monitoring program that will place citizens inside courtrooms in five counties, to shed light on the criminal justice process and outcomes in DWI cases; and an ongoing round-up of those with outstanding bench warrants for DWI crimes or repeat DWI offenders who have absconded from parole – because their unwillingness to take responsibility for driving drunk means they're likely to do it again.

This includes people like Danny Velarde, who was just recently captured, and who tried to evade justice after committing six DWIs and being convicted of voluntary manslaughter.

Whether it's a citizen monitoring a courtroom, someone reporting that they saw one of our Top 10 DWI absconders, or the college kid who risks being disliked by refusing to let his friend drive drunk, ending DWI in New Mexico involves each and every one of us. It is cynical and factually wrong to suggest that our drunk driving laws are tough, or anything like surrounding states. They're not. Those who repeatedly drive drunk need to face stiffer penalties, and so should those who knowingly toss them the keys.

Of course, protecting our communities also involves protecting our children, so that if they are exploited in child pornography, those who possess their images or videos should face the full weight and serious force of the law.

But that's not happening in New Mexico because our Supreme Court ruled that prosecutors no longer have the option to charge someone in possession of child pornography with multiple counts based on the number of images they have. They said our laws aren't clear enough to allow that, and rather than clarify it, some in the Legislature have refused to act.

Consequently, criminals like former APS Kindergarten teacher Joshua Weitz, who allegedly possessed 40 child pornography files, was charged with only one count in November. And Juan Santos Torres, who possessed several videos, was sentenced to just 14 months in jail – a fraction of the time he should have served – because of this loophole. That's not right.

I agree with the Attorney General; we must close the child pornography loophole in New Mexico.

We must also make protecting our families a key priority in the budget. I recognize that revenues are uncertain due to persistently low energy prices, and that most agency budgets will have to be held flat. This means that, with the limited new revenue we will have, we have to prioritize more – and better. Public safety should be at the top of that priority list.

Expand the use of family support workers who work with at-risk families who have a history of CYFD referrals – in order to prevent child abuse. Clear the backlog of rape kits in New Mexico. Provide more officers with immediate access to child abuse case history before being dispatched to a child abuse call.

And, let's invest in expanding the ranks of our public safety workers and do more to retain them. That means hiring new State Police officers, expanding the Correctional unit that tracks down violent absconders, hiring more child abuse caseworkers to reduce their caseloads, and providing targeted pay raises for public safety workers who are on the frontlines each day.

If we do all of these things to make New Mexico safer, we not only honor our public safety workers, showing that we understand and respect the danger and sacrifice they face, we also honor the victims of the senseless violent crimes we've seen, and their families – who live with the pain of loss every day.

This should motivate us to overcome any special interests or politics that stand in the way, to do what's right, and to stand against those who thrive on creating fear and chaos. It's time to say, "Not here, not in New Mexico."

Of course, combating crime also means working to prevent people from becoming criminals. This is a longer-term challenge, and a lot goes into it.

Behavioral health can be one of many factors. Over the last two years, we've seen an 84 percent increase in behavioral health services provided in our state – to the highest level in state history. And under my budget, we will use additional behavioral health dollars for new crisis triage centers, mobile crisis response teams, and community behavioral health clinics.

Education obviously plays an important role too – because it's an education that provides someone with hope that tomorrow can be better than today.

I was a prosecutor for 25 years. I saw so many 15, 16, even 20 year-olds who could not read, had little hope that they would ever find work, faced more challenges than opportunities in life, dropped out of school at some point, and turned to crime.

You see, if we don't get this part right – if our kids don't learn to read, if we cannot graduate our students with basic knowledge and life skills – the ripple effects in their lives, in their children's lives, and in society are potentially enormous.

No child is un-teachable. I will never give up on any kid. Every child can learn.

Our reform agenda is clear. First, every child needs to read at an early age, so they can learn every year thereafter. Under my plan, to give our kids the best start possible, we'll expand pre-K – which has tripled so far on my watch – and build \$5 million worth of new pre-K classrooms throughout the State. And we'll add \$10 million in new reading interventions, specifically for students in chronically struggling schools.

Second, we need a quality teacher in every classroom. Teachers matter. When they succeed, we should honor them. And when they struggle, we should help them. To build a stronger recruitment pipeline, I ask the Legislature to raise the minimum starting teacher salary to \$36,000 per year, which would total a 20 percent increase over the last four years. Expand the loan repayment program for teachers. And,

let's offer dozens of scholarships each year to our brightest college students – \$15,000 apiece – if they enter a college of education in their junior year and commit to teaching in New Mexico.

To better support our teachers, we should provide our most effective with additional pay, provide debit cards to help teachers cover the cost of classroom school supplies, and expand our new teacher mentoring program to give teachers who struggle help from their peers.

Third, students should never be trapped in failing schools, and because we have a meaningful school grading system, we know where those schools are. The teacher mentorship program I just mentioned is modeled after a similar principal mentoring effort called "Principals Pursuing Excellence." It's helping turn around struggling schools. In fact, after just one year, 53 percent of schools with participating principals saw their school grade increase by at least one letter grade. The next year, 60 percent saw grades improve in their first year.

Associate Superintendent Arsenio Romero of Roswell and Principal Robyn Cook of Cloudcroft are here today. This mentorship program – an educator helping an educator – has helped Cloudcroft Middle School quickly improve its school grade from a C to an A. What a difference that makes for students. When we choose to reform, and commit to reform, we see results. Thank you, Arsenio and Robyn.

Principals need additional tools, like the ability to use adjunct teachers in our classrooms. Why not make it easier for a retired scientist from Sandia to teach math at a high school? And we must also continue offering stipends to teachers who agree to teach difficult subjects – like math, science, or special education – in areas where recruiting these teachers is so challenging.

Fourth, we must increase parental involvement, by making it easier for parents to be engaged in their child's education. In state government, we are now granting leave so employees can attend parent-teacher conferences, and I hope local governments and the private sector follow suit.

And finally, we need to graduate more of our kids from high school, ready for the workforce or college.

Truancy is a key impediment to this. But now, we have an early warning dropout prevention system that identifies at-risk students. That lets us put more social workers in middle schools to help these kids, and dropout prevention coaches in high schools. But we need to get their attention, with consequences they care about. If a kid stops going to school, they shouldn't get a license to drive a car.

Contrary to what the status quo might say, improving education isn't about money alone. We're spending more on education than ever before, and we've also reduced time spent on state-mandated testing – and it will go down further this year.

What matters is whether our kids are learning. We have to measure success, and if they're struggling, we need to get them help early. What could possibly be more important? If they can learn in school, opportunities will follow in life.

Reading skills are formed early on. As a result, if children are passed along in early grades when they cannot read, the likelihood of them being able to learn in later grades plummets. And people wonder why a large number of students in New Mexico don't graduate?

If we accept failure early – if we implicitly tell a child they can't learn – why would we expect otherwise? And why would we allow ourselves to be shocked if these discouraged, frustrated students chose to drop out, or turn to crime? It's not an excuse by any means, but they weren't required to have the most important tool in life – the ability to read.

This is reality. Some want to ignore it, sacrificing the future opportunities of these kids, pretending that we're building their self-esteem.

But let's be honest. It does nothing to help them feel better when they're called on to read in front of class, when they take the SAT and can't read the questions, or when they can't fill out a job application. What do you think their self-esteem is like then?

This is one of those moments: confront reality or punt. We must end the practice of passing our students from grade to grade when they cannot read.

Simply opposing this education agenda is not, in and of itself, an agenda. Saying we should stop grading schools, stop evaluating teachers, stop raising standards at colleges of education, and stop targeting education dollars on reading coaches and school turnaround efforts... that's not an agenda. It's an endorsement of the status quo, and it props up mediocrity.

If our children aren't learning, we are compelled to change, to be better, and to set a higher bar. Why? So that our kids can succeed in life.

Of course, it's also our responsibility to ensure there are jobs for our kids when they graduate – because we want them to work in New Mexico and raise their families here. This means attracting new jobs and businesses from elsewhere, while creating conditions that encourage New Mexico companies to expand.

We must never be so arrogant or naïve to forget that businesses can locate anywhere in the world. Whether we like it or not, whether it makes us comfortable or not, we are in a high-stakes daily competition with other states and other countries. It's our job to make New Mexico more welcoming, more predictable for job creators, and we've come a long way in doing so – largely by focusing on the fundamentals to better compete.

Working together, we have put state government on firm fiscal ground, balancing our budget each year without raising taxes. We've restrained government growth and built up a strong savings account.

It hasn't been easy. We had to overcome the largest structural deficit in state history, federal budget cuts, a federal government shutdown, and the steepest oil and gas price crash in decades. Energy prices continue to pose very real and concerning challenges.

But our bipartisan work has sent a loud message to any business owner looking at New Mexico that we will not bail out government on the backs of hard-working families and job creators.

We've also changed our regulatory attitude, said it's possible to grow our economy and protect our environment and public health. We have assessed and collected more in fines against polluters than any other administration in state history.

At the same time, we are increasing predictability and encouraging commerce. Drilling permits are issued in eight days or less, nurses who come to New Mexico are licensed in five days or less. We extended the overweight cargo zone at our border so that trucks can make fewer trips, and we now have independent hearing officers outside of the tax department to handle tax disputes, so people can be confident they are getting a fair shake.

With respect to building a stronger workforce, we are making important changes in higher education, in order to graduate more students – on time – in the workforce areas our economy needs. A 14 percent four-year graduation rate is unacceptable. So is a 47 percent six-year graduation rate, especially when the national average is 69 percent.

As experts have told us, our kids are taking too much time, taking too many credits, spending too much money, and ultimately not graduating. Consequently, entry into the workforce is delayed, student debt is high, and we have too few college graduates.

That's why universities are adopting tuition incentives for any student who graduates in four years and working to limit all degree programs to 120 credit hours; after all, if we expect students to graduate in four years, it has to be possible to do so.

We're improving how credits transfer among institutions, providing better counseling, and changing how majors are selected – so that students waste less money and time on unnecessary credits.

Where these reforms have been adopted, we find incredible success – a 17-point jump in the four-year graduation rate at Florida State University, and a 20-point jump at Georgia State.

And as we graduate students more quickly, we have to ensure we are producing the degrees our businesses need, so we don't end up exporting our college graduates or having to import workers from elsewhere.

That's why I'm calling on the Legislature to support the "Students Work" internship portal, which would allow any New Mexico business to post internships online through a shared website that our colleges and universities would use to connect students to these positions. So that our students learn how to be good employees and explore career paths, and so they stay right here, in New Mexico, when they graduate.

Together, we've also worked to develop key sectors of New Mexico's economy, like tourism, which benefits every corner of our state. Our New Mexico True advertising campaign is achieving tremendous results; we're seeing record numbers of visitors and increased tourism spending.

Or our high-tech sector, where we've passed legislation to encourage research and development of cutting-edge products, and expanded access to capital that so many start-ups need.

For example, just last week we launched a new effort to deploy up to \$40 million in new early-stage investment capital in partnership with the State Investment Council to help New Mexico companies get off the ground and grow.

We put forth the State's first energy plan since 1991, calling for the increased development of every kind of energy we can produce in New Mexico. And, we continue to make New Mexico a key corridor for international trade by building up our port at Santa Teresa and maintaining our place as a growing leader in exports and export-related jobs.

Take all of this together: a stable state budget; workforce development reforms; a welcoming regulatory attitude; and the development of key economic sectors... We're making great progress in these areas, while also fundamentally changing our tax and incentive environment.

Five years ago, we had a poorly managed closing fund to recruit new companies, with hardly any money in it. We now require clawbacks to protect this money, and have increased the size of our closing fund to \$50 million.

Our job training program helps businesses large and small, urban and rural, expand and hire new workers. We've increased funding for this program and expanded the types of businesses that can access it.

We cut our business tax rate by 22 percent, and made it easier for exporting manufacturers to produce their goods in our state. We curbed the double and triple taxation of goods and services in construction and manufacturing. Our tax rate on manufacturing has been cut by 60 percent – to the lowest in the region!

And our taxpayer friendliness score has soared from a "D" to a "B" – and we're nearing an "A."

My friends, the fundamentals are changing. Companies are taking note. Our recruitment pipeline is filling up as these reforms begin to take hold. New Mexico makes the final cut for larger and more projects than ever before.

Take a company like Skorpios, a tech firm that is using photonics to revolutionize the way information is communicated and stored. They didn't have to choose to manufacture their technology in New Mexico, to hire 300 workers over the next five years into good, well-paying jobs. We had to compete for that; it's just a reality. In fact, Skorpios' founder, Stephen Krasulick, said we beat out Pennsylvania and Texas.

Stephen, we couldn't be happier that you chose New Mexico. We pray that your company will be a success and make a greater impact on the world than you could ever imagine.

And then there's RiskSense, which has also committed to growing in New Mexico. They are on the cutting edge of cybersecurity services, a global problem. They didn't have to choose New Mexico either.

But thanks to the work we've done to improve our tax and incentive climate, both of these companies are here to stay. Srinivas Mukkamala, RiskSense CEO, and Mark Fidel, RiskSense President, are with us today. Thank you for putting your faith in our state.

Of course, there's always more we can and should do – like maintaining our \$50 million closing fund, or adopting tax reforms to encourage small business growth and attract veterans who want to open new companies or build second careers.

We should also create a rapid workforce development fund, which would help us close recruitment deals that require a significant number of highly specialized trained workers, invest in MainStreet projects and encourage new development in key economic corridors of our cities and towns.

And finally, we should end the practice of requiring New Mexicans to join a union or give money to one just to have a job.

These are all important, and they can help us maintain the momentum we've established as we fight for jobs and new investment. We shouldn't fear competition with other states. We should embrace it. I'm committed to winning that fight, and I hope you will stand with me to help create more New Mexico jobs.

Though this is a short session, there are other important realities we face, other vital problems we should choose to address and not avoid. We need to fix the way we spend infrastructure money, because the way projects are funded now leads to unmet regional and state needs, and a string of projects that haven't been vetted and can't be completed.

We should improve campaign finance reporting processes, close the revolving door between legislators and lobbyists, and require the disclosure of capital outlay allocations and any private clients served by public officials in New Mexico.

And, the Legislature should finally listen to the people of New Mexico: Let's end the dangerous practice of giving driver's licenses to illegal immigrants from all over the world.

New Mexicans have been concerned about this issue for years, long before contractors and workers faced extra hurdles trying to get into our federal facilities. New Mexico has been a target for human traffickers and smugglers seeking to take advantage of our laws. And now, the federal government has confirmed its plan to stop accepting New Mexico driver's licenses to board airplanes.

These are realities. Our license is not secure, and New Mexicans have repeatedly demanded a change to this law.

Some have advocated just kicking the can down the road; that's getting much harder to do. Others want to continue giving preferential treatment to illegal immigrants at the expense of U.S. citizens. That's not common sense, it's not acceptable, and it ignores the will of the people who elected us.

Our compromise is the same as surrounding states, it stops giving licenses to illegal immigrants from around the world, and it ensures our ID is secure.

We've talked about it year after year. The discussion has been had. It's time to solve this problem and vote.

Before I close, I'd like to recognize a few extraordinary New Mexicans who embody what it means to serve and sacrifice for one another.

Just a few weeks ago, we endured a massive statewide snowstorm, with snowdrifts that reached twelve feet high, shutting down movement throughout much of New Mexico. It was dangerous, and conditions were life-threatening.

Ty Gonser and Bill Kshir live and work in Clovis. Ty grew up being taught that when snowdrifts cover large objects, the drift can turn a bluer color. Imagine white snow as far as the eye can see, no movement, no sound, and just happening to notice what looks like slightly darker snow and wondering if something – or someone – might be underneath.

That's what Ty did... He and Bill used heavy equipment to attack their hunch, and a twelve foot snow drift, to uncover a car that had a couple in it who had been trapped for 20 hours. Ty says, "We saw their faces after we pushed the snow away and it's something I'll never forget." Ty and Bill, I promise – they won't forget how they felt when they saw your faces either.

Helping one another, that's what New Mexico is about. Thank you for your instincts, courage, and sacrifice.

And State Police Sergeant Jason Knapp... He rescued Francene Hoffman, a grandmother and college tutor whose car ran off the road and was trapped in the snow. She was exhausted, had been traveling from Washington, D.C.

Francene called AAA, but they told her it would be hours before they would be able to help. She was hungry and scared. You can imagine her sense of relief when Sergeant Knapp arrived. He spent a long time with Francene, even enlisting the help of volunteers as he personally drove her vehicle back to a safe place. Francene said that it was only by "God's grace" and Sergeant Knapp's "gracious strength and encouragement" that she made it.

Sergeant Knapp – you volunteered to be a police officer, and part of that job is running toward the situations none of us want to be a part of. Thank you for the kindness and help you provided to Francene. Well done.

These individuals exemplify the fighting spirit in our state, and the desire to help people overcome and succeed. I think of the thousands of New Mexicans who have attended vigils this year, in mourning, following senseless tragedies, and those who have given of their time or money to help kids learn, to help victims make their way through suffering, or to otherwise help those in need.

We see the challenges around us. Our neighborhoods, our families, our communities – we want to solve the problems and realities that face us.

I believe we are capable of pulling together to prevent horrific loss at the hands of heinous criminals.

We are capable of pulling together to ensure that every child gets a quality education, and none are left without opportunities and hope.

We are capable of pulling together to compete for jobs and new investment in every corner of our diverse state.

Because we have to do these things, or the brighter tomorrow we all want for our kids is at risk of growing dimmer instead.

I'm confident we can confront and overcome these realities, together, if we choose not to put them off a moment more. New Mexico's future depends on it, and depends on us.

Thank you very much, God bless you all, and God bless New Mexico.

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