

Tracking Richardson's record on the issues

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By THE NEW MEXICAN

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Health Care: Richardson talks about the state's immunization ranking improving dramatically. The United Health Foundation's 2005 America's Health Rankings Report showed that 83.5 percent of New Mexico children between the ages of 19 and 35 months have all of the required immunizations. However, the same report ranked New Mexico 38th in terms of general health care and last place for prenatal health care. Less than 60 percent of pregnant women in New Mexico have access to adequate care, the report said, compared to the national average of 75 percent.

There are other troubling statistics about health care in New Mexico. The American College of Emergency Physicians rated New Mexico 43rd in the nation for emergency health care. Morgan Quitno Press, a Kansas-based research company, ranked New Mexico 49th in its 2006 list of "Most Healthy States."

Education: Richardson pushed for the constitutional amendment to provide more money to schools by increasing the yearly payout from a state permanent fund. The state's national ranking for average teacher salaries has improved, according to the National Education Association, a teachers' union. Education Week magazine earlier this year gave New Mexico an A for its standards-based education policies and accountability and a B overall on its education report card. The Public Education Department reported that more of New Mexico's schools failed to meet student academic performance standards and participation requirements this year than in 2005 under a federal system for rating schools. Richardson says much more is needed for the state's education system.

Jobs: Richardson says state Labor Department statistics and projections by The University of New Mexico show there have been 72,000 new jobs created in his administration. However, a 2005 report by New Mexico Voices for Children notes that "New Mexico's economy is producing a disproportionate number of low-wage jobs." More than half of the new jobs projected to be created in New Mexico in the next few years are in the low-wage category, the report says. New Mexico has a larger proportion of its work force earning the \$5.15 per hour minimum wage than any state in the nation.

Taxes: One of Richardson's most prominent boasts is that he has been able to reduce personal income tax rates. However, taxes and fees in several other areas have gone up under Richardson. Among taxes and fees to go up are motor vehicle registrations, hunting and fishing licenses, cigarette taxes, truck fees and tire-recycling fees. Richardson pushed legislation to eliminate gross-receipts tax on unprepared food and some medical services. However, in doing so, gross-receipts taxes within municipalities on other goods and services increased.

Drunken driving: Richardson successfully has pushed several bills aimed at fighting drunken driving. In 2005, the number of alcohol-related fatalities in New Mexico was 10 per 100,000 residents -- down from 11.7 in 2002 and 13.8 in 1996. However, the state's statistics are still bad compared with the rest of the country. In recent years, the number of U.S. alcohol-related fatalities has stayed at around six per 100,000.