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# SOWING SEEDS OF LEADERSHIP:



New Mexico Agricultural Leadership Program Updates

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**Class 17 State Political Process May 2025**



Our mission is to develop knowledgeable, multicultural leaders for New Mexico's agricultural, food, and natural resource industries.

# PEOPLE ARE WHAT MAKES THE ROUNDHOUSE GO 'ROUND

## BY ANTHONY COLIN

Throughout the state, I hear the term “Santa Fe” used to signify everything from insult to icon. The town represents a million different things to a million different people. And frankly, how could it not? It would be impossible for a city like Santa Fe, founded a decade before the Mayflower set sail, to have avoided picking up a reputation or two. Those reputations often compel visitors to arrive in Santa Fe with specific goals and plans for achieving them. However, when visiting such a strong center of cultural gravity, it's sometimes best to surrender to the gravitational forces of the place and draw insights from what you observe as you're guided along. Despite Seminar Two's tight itinerary, my aim was to adopt this passive approach to experiencing Santa Fe.

The biggest takeaway from my journey through the Roundhouse was the not-so-profound realization that state government is shaped by fundamental human behaviors and relationships. I already knew that my small part of state government was made up of people—that all the grants, agreements, forms, and functions I had helped implement began with someone, somewhere, saying, “Nice to meet you.” Even then, our class trip to Santa Fe really highlighted that this applies to the entirety of state government. Sitting in various committees, it was hard to miss that people were presenting the bills. These were individuals who, in their everyday lives, had taken the time to observe a problem in their community that required human attention. It was impossible not to think about how someone had to sit down and translate an abstract, real-world solution into a series of words designed to guide the behavior of those who would read them in the future. It was also hard to forget that the language of the bill was largely influenced by human perception of how “law-like” it sounded, according to recent research. Finally, it was difficult to envision how state government would operate without the human dedication to public service evident in every corner of state government.

Nearly every leader I've spoken with has emphasized the importance of people in accomplishing tasks. Our group's meeting with Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard was no exception. Beyond being a friendly, people-oriented individual, Commissioner Garcia Richard consistently linked her responses to the significance of people. How can one be confident in the impactful decisions they make? By hiring and empowering skilled employees and advisors. How can an agency like hers navigate the competing demands of public land users and stakeholders? By building genuine relationships with users and stakeholders while actively listening to their expressed needs. How does the State Land Office safeguard Indigenous interests? They depend on individual tribal liaisons to forge agreements that ensure the agency maintains communication with tribes, nations, and pueblos. During our hour-long visit, Commissioner Garcia Richard highlighted the vital role that people and human behaviors play in state government. Each visit during our four-day seminar reinforced this essential insight.

# LEGISLATIVE INSIGHTS

## BY YESENIA PALMA

The highlight of Seminar 2 in Santa Fe was the opportunity to observe the legislative process directly at the New Mexico State Capitol. Watching lawmakers debate policy during committee meetings and legislative sessions deepened my understanding of state decisions. The visit to the State Land Office was particularly enlightening because Commissioner Garcia Richard explained how state land management impacts agriculture and other sectors.

I am interested in understanding how budgetary and financial choices are made in the legislative process. Participating in Senate Finance and House Appropriations & Finance Committee sessions has demonstrated the complex nature of state program funding. Learning about the relationship between financial decisions and their impacts on agricultural policy and economic development will aid my career growth.

This experience underscored the significance of fostering relationships between government officials and agricultural stakeholders. My professional goals include advocating for financial aid and policy reforms that support university agricultural programs, establishing partnerships with government and industry leaders, and creating opportunities for faculty and students to engage with legislators. This experience has reinforced my personal commitment to civic engagement and policy advocacy.

My main message to others will emphasize the importance of actively participating in politics. Legislative discussions affect agricultural policies, natural resource management, and economic growth. My goals include organizing educational sessions, encouraging faculty and students to engage in policy advocacy efforts, and strengthening connections between the NM Ag Leadership Program and university members.

The experience demonstrated that future agricultural outcomes depend on leadership skills, an understanding of policy, and networking abilities. I am excited to apply what I have learned to enhance relationships between New Mexico's agricultural education and industry sectors.



## SANTA FE SEMINAR BY MARISSA DILES

While in Santa Fe at the Round House, I aimed to deepen my understanding of New Mexico's legislative process and how bills are crafted and passed through the legislature.

My favorite visit in Santa Fe was to the State Land Office with Commissioner Stephanie Garcia-Richard. She not only provided us with an overview of her role and department but also allowed our group to steer the conversation, enabling us to learn what we wanted. I appreciated our open discussion with her on various topics, including the oil industry in New Mexico, the history of how and why New Mexico acquired its state land, renewable energy development, and several other subjects.

The main takeaway I learned about how state government functions is the process of passing bills through the legislature. There are nine key steps to passing a bill in the New Mexico state legislature. First, a bill is introduced in either chamber, assigned a number, read twice, and sent to the appropriate committees. From there, the bill is assigned to the relevant committees, where it can be passed, killed, amended, or tabled. All committees are open to the public, allowing individuals to speak in favor of or against the bills being presented. Once a bill passes through the committee, it must be adopted by either the House or the Senate before being scheduled for a third reading. During the third reading, the bill is put to a vote. After a bill passes in one chamber, it is sent to the other chamber to undergo the same process. Once both houses approve the bill, it is signed by the presiding officers of each house and sent to the governor. When the bill reaches the governor, they can either sign it, veto it, or apply a partial veto. Learning about this entire process and witnessing it in action made me realize how much effort it takes to pass a bill.

The overall experience in Santa Fe was incredibly informative, and I am thankful for the opportunities we had while there. Touring the roundhouse, sitting on the Senate floor, attending committee meetings, and meeting with several elected officials all deepened my respect for the work our legislators do for our state.





## NEW MEXICO LEGISLATIVE SESSION BY MICHAEL PURDY

The New Mexico Agricultural Leadership group convened for their second seminar in Santa Fe to learn about the New Mexico Legislative Session. On the first morning, class members enjoyed breakfast with Candie Sweetser, the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Government Affairs Manager, who provided an in-depth overview of her role in the state's political process. The group then toured the Round House, exploring the gallery of the House Chambers and admiring many beautiful pieces of locally sourced art throughout the building. Numerous artworks depicted New Mexico's historical diversity, reflecting themes from Native American and Hispanic cultures. That afternoon, the group participated in various committee meetings and engaged in lively discussions regarding proposed bills. Finally, the group met with Commissioner Garcia-Richard to discuss her responsibilities in managing the state's public land. She outlined the crucial duties of the State Land Office, including overseeing the management of natural resources and their diverse industrial uses such as energy, timber, agriculture, and recreation.

On the second day of the seminar, the group was once again able to attend more committee meetings where they discussed proposed bills related to energy, environmental, agricultural, and natural resource issues. After the committee meetings, the NMAL group had the honor of accompanying Senator Soules onto the Senate floor to observe the process of reading proposed bills. The group then had the opportunity to meet with Kendal Chavez, the Food and Hunger Advisor for the Office of the Governor. Ms. Chavez described her responsibilities in assisting the Governor with food security issues and collaborating with state agencies to provide affordable food to rural and low-income communities.

On the final day of the seminar, we gathered in the morning to discuss what we had learned throughout the sessions and to present the bills we had researched. This allowed the group to engage in open discussions about the pros and cons of specific agriculture-related bills and their potential impact if passed. In the evening, the class attended AgFest, which provided a fantastic opportunity to network with several of our state's political leaders and professionals in the agricultural industry. In conclusion, Seminar Two offered Class 17 valuable insights into our state's political process. By observing numerous exceptional leaders working to enact change in our state, the NMAL class members were able to learn and develop their professional skills, empowering them to become leaders in their respective fields.

# UNDERSTANDING NEW MEXICO'S LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

By Aaron Romero

One of my primary goals in joining the NMAL program was to enhance my understanding of the overall legislative process, particularly in relation to the agricultural industry. Attending the 2025 legislative session in Santa Fe, NM, early in the 60-day session presented a valuable opportunity to deepen my comprehension of this process.

I wanted to gain a better understanding of the composition and roles of the State Senate and House of Representatives, along with current election trends and their impacts, as well as the relationship to existing and proposed legislation. It was exciting to see new members, with 38% being new to the State Senate and 19% new to the House of Representatives. Early on, it became evident that the main issues during the session focused on public safety, healthcare access, environmental concerns, and infrastructure. It was an incredibly busy session, as navigating the existing \$10.9 billion budget seems no easy task. Coupling this with an increase in the spending bill highlights where certain lawmakers excel in advocating for funding priorities, whether in early childhood education, clean energy, infrastructure, or the Food Initiative.

A significant portion of the proposed budget was allocated to continue the existing 50-year water plan, which is essential for agriculture. Agency representatives were occupied managing interactions between the Office of the State Engineer and the Environment Department as they proposed legislative funding requests exceeding \$200 million.

For me, it has become increasingly important, particularly regarding agricultural legislation, to create a reliable framework with appropriate regulations aimed at addressing various aspects and impacts on our land use, trade, financial matters, and certain environmental protections. It is encouraging to see that our State Representatives recognize the ongoing water issues, especially in New Mexico's rural communities, and it is essential for citizens to be informed about the available programs.

The overall trip was a fantastic experience filled with valuable time spent conversing and learning from classmates, legislative officials, and government personnel. My favorite part of the trip was visiting the State Capitol Building. An early morning, jam-packed agenda kicked off with an excellent overview of the legislative session by former state representative Candie Sweetster, who currently serves as the Government Affairs Manager for the NMDA. Candie briefed us on the intricacies of everything that occurred during the session. After the informative overview, we were welcomed to the Capitol Building, where we took a tour and had an engaging history lesson. We had the opportunity to attend committee meetings to see how bills were discussed and debated before they proceeded to the House or Senate floor. Senator Bill Soules graciously invited our group onto the Senate floor, where we were introduced to the chamber.

It was a great reminder that our state operates with a three-branch structure: executive, legislative, and judicial, and how these distinct roles and responsibilities are carried out. It was fascinating to witness part of this structure in action, especially while listening to members of the governor-appointed cabinet and certain agency leaders. The New Mexico Legislature consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate, with the judiciary composed of the NM Supreme Court and lower courts. Observing certain legislation in process and the dynamics and divisions within the chamber among all the members was intriguing.



Santa Fe, New Mexico-Members of Class 17 and NMAL Coordinator in the  
New Mexico Senate Chamber

# A WORD FROM COLLEGE DRIVE

## BY TINA WILSON

Where has the year gone? I can't believe it is May already. Time sure flies by at the speed of light when you are older, or should I say mature?

At the beginning of February, I traveled to Santa Fe with the fellows from class 16. The New Mexico state legislative body accomplishes a great deal of work for the state's citizens in a short amount of time. This year featured a 30-day session, which means that the budget for the upcoming fiscal year and the governor's legislative priorities are the only items on the agenda for the Senate and House of Representatives.

We were fortunate to meet with the state land commissioner, Stephanie Garcia Richard. During our meeting, she shared a bit about her background. She was a teacher for 19 years before joining the state land office. This was the first time I gained a clear understanding of the state land office's functions. Without any prompting, she also offered leadership advice to Class 17. She says, "the buck stops here." You must have the confidence to make tough decisions after considering both sides. She also advised, paraphrased here, to be brave and bold and to lean on data and science.

During my time in Santa Fe, I attended a House Judiciary Committee meeting. During the meeting, two New Mexico State Police officers and Representative Chapfield advocated for funding for additional license plate readers. License plate readers scan the plates of cars and help identify individuals who may have outstanding warrants or may be involved in child abduction. I had heard of this technology before, but I did not fully understand its usefulness in aiding law enforcement. In addition to helping recover stolen vehicles, plate readers assisted in apprehending a driver who hit and killed a bicyclist. The suspect attempted to cross into Mexico at the Columbus border crossing and was arrested after their license plate was scanned. The bill passed out of committee, but no further action was taken to advance the legislation.



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