

Our view: Glad to see governor veto food tax

Sun-News report

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We commend Gov. Bill Richardson for his veto of the bill that would have reinstated the food tax.

While we understand that the Legislature needed to increase revenue to close a deficit in the budget, we believe there were much better options than a regressive tax on food. A food tax is especially hard on those least able to afford it - young working families with hungry children to feed. Richardson had said clearly in his State of the State Address that he would not support a food tax. And, he re-stated that position this week.

"I am not willing to put this burden on working families in the form of an unfair tax on food. I agree with those who call this a cruel tax," Richardson said in announcing the veto. "It is especially cruel during the worst financial crisis New Mexico has ever experienced."

We continue to believe that the long-term solution to the state's budget problems is to reduce spending and shrink the size of state government. In a press release announcing his final action on budget bills this year, Richardson claims there were \$7 in cuts for every \$2 in revenue increases. That proportion sounds about right, but clearly much more must be done to streamline government.

We're concerned that the state continues to rely on federal stimulus money to balance the books. That is a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

In a response to the governor's veto, Senate Majority Leader Michael Sanchez, D-Belen, claimed to be surprised, and questioned whether the governor had overstepped his authority.

"Had he indicated three weeks ago that he would not support the legislation we would have taken a different approach," Sanchez said. "He was involved every step of the way. At no time during the special session did he raise any objections."

There is, of course, a simple solution - but one we suspect both Sanchez and Richardson would oppose. Instead of holding negotiations behind closed doors, and then complaining about what somebody did or didn't say in the private meeting, simply bring the debate out into the open. Then there would be no question where all involved stand.