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Our view

Keep the promise of lottery scholarships

Many state lawmakers will tell you that the Lottery Success Scholarship program has been the greatest accomplishment of the modern-day Legislature.

The program, which allows high school graduates in good academic standing to attend New Mexico colleges and universities without the burden of ever-increasing tuition fees, has helped improve the lives of young people in every county and from every school district in this state.

A college education seemed like little more than a pipe dream for many impoverished New Mexicans before the lottery scholarship program was instituted. Now, thousands of students each year take advantage of the program, many the first in their family to attend college.

But those scholarships may not be there for future students unless the Legislature acts now to ensure that the fund remains healthy. The Higher Education Department has predicted that,

if current trends continue, the fund will face an \$18 million deficit by 2011.

The fund will already have to start dipping into reserves this year, said Fred Nathan, head of the public policy group Think New Mexico.

The problem, Nathan said, is that New Mexico pays a higher percentage for administration costs than almost any other state lottery in the country. His group is proposing legislation that would mandate at least 30 percent of lottery proceeds go to the scholarship program.

That would mean a little less money for the convenience store owners who sell the lottery tickets and a little less for promotions and other special events.

But it would also mean improved solvency for the fund and continued opportunities for New Mexico students.

We urge lawmakers to act quickly and protect the lottery scholarship fund, ensuring it will be there for future generations of New Mexico students.

Thursday

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