MINUTES
of the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
ECONOMIC AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY COMMITTEE

September 8-9, 2026
Villanueva Victory Club
Stan Fulton Athletics Center
New Mexico State University
1815 Wells Street
Las Cruces

The fourth meeting of the Economic and Rural Development and Policy Committee was called to order by Representative Doreen Y. Gallegos, chair, on September 8, 2026 at 9:27 a.m. at New Mexico State University (NMSU) in Las Cruces.

Present
Rep. Doreen Y. Gallegos, Chair
Rep. Janelle Anyanonu
Sen. Jay C. Block (9/9)
Sen. Crystal Brantley (9/9)
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Martha Garcia
Rep. Joshua N. Hernandez
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Marian Matthews
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Linda Serrato

Absent
Sen. Angel M. Charley, Vice Chair
Rep. Gail Armstrong
Sen. Pat Boone
Sen. Antonio Maestas
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Rep. Sarah Silva
Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Advisory
Sen. Natalie Figueroa
Sen. David M. Gallegos
Rep. Anita Gonzales (9/8)
Rep. Jenifer Jones (9/8)
Sen. Steve D. Lanier (9/9)
Rep. Tara L. Lujan
Rep. Rod Montoya
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez
Sen. William E. Sharer
Sen. Heather Berghmans
Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Raymundo Lara
Rep. Charlotte Little
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Patricia A. Lundstrom
Rep. Jimmy G. Mason
Rep. Mark B. Murphy
Sen. Nicole Tobiassen
Sen. James G. Townsend

(Attendance dates are noted for those members not present for the entire meeting.)

Staff
Lisa Rivera Morrison, Staff Attorney, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Sara Wiedmaier, Researcher, LCS
Marisa Garcia-Hart, Records Officer, LCS

Guests
The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts
Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast
The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Tuesday, September 8

Welcome and Introductions (9:27 a.m.)
Representative Gallegos welcomed everyone to the meeting, and members introduced themselves.

Welcome and Highlights on Projects and Needs (9:32 a.m.)
Valerio Ferme, Ph.D., president, NMSU, discussed the university's programs, services and partnerships. Mónica Torres, chancellor, Doña Ana Community College, spoke about changes in current student interest in short-term credentials and industry certifications.

Sustainable Agriculture Training and Business Incubation for At-Risk Youth in Rural Areas (10:17 a.m.)
Monique Hernandez, program manager, Anthony Youth Farm; Diego Arroyo, trainer, Anthony Youth Farm; and Axel Saenz, trainer, Anthony Youth Farm, presented on the farm's education and community outreach initiatives. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=2.

How to Streamline Housing Development in New Mexico (10:43 a.m.)

Johanna Gilligan, president, Homewise Inc.; Veronica Toledo, senior director of policy and advocacy, Homewise Inc.; and Natalie Green, housing and neighborhood revitalization administrator, City of Las Cruces, provided policy recommendations to improve housing development and availability in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=3.

El Paso Electric: Updates and Highlights (1:22 p.m.)

Rico Gonzales, regional vice president, El Paso Electric; David Hawkins, vice president of system planning and operations support, El Paso Electric; and Jessica Christianson, vice president of customer experience, El Paso Electric, gave an update on El Paso Electric's activities and proposed plans. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=4.

Approval of Minutes (2:11 p.m.)

On a motion made and passed unanimously, the committee adopted the minutes from the June 30-July 1, 2026 and August 3-4, 2026 meetings.

Converting Wildfire Risk to Economic Opportunity (2:12 p.m.)

Laura McCarthy, state forester and director, Forestry Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD); Ward Hendon, general partner, Dangerous Ventures; James Pittman, ecological economist, Real Value Group; and William Foster, forest markets coordinator, Forestry Division, EMNRD, presented on several proposed bills to reduce wildfire risk in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=5.

Homeland Security and Emergency Management Issues (3:05 p.m.)

Ali Rye, deputy secretary, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department, gave an overview of disaster response and recovery in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=6.

Impact of Athletics on the Local Economy (3:29 p.m.)

Joe Fields, director of athletics, NMSU, presented on the university's athletic programs. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=7.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 4:11 p.m.

Wednesday, September 9

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:18 a.m.

Updates and Highlights on Projects and Needs (9:20 a.m.)

John L. Hummer, M.H.A., president and co-founder, Burrell College of Health Sciences, gave an overview of Burrell College of Health Sciences' programs and priorities. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=8.

The Business of Child Care (9:59 a.m.)

Ray Jaramillo, director and owner, Alpha School for Young Children; Angela Garcia, chief executive officer and owner, The Toy Box Early Learning and Child Care Centers; and Daisy Lira, founder, The Hive Education, discussed the funding of child care in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=9.

Update from the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) (12:05 p.m.)

Hailey Heinz, director, Policy, Research and Quality Initiatives, ECECD, provided an update on recent developments at the ECECD.

Horse Racing Industry in New Mexico: Updates and Challenges (12:35 p.m.)

John Buffington, vice chair, New Mexico Racing Commission (NMRC); Amber Trujillo, chief financial officer, NMRC; and Fred Heinrich, president and general counsel, Sunland Park Racetrack and Casino, presented on the horse racing industry in the state.

Recruiting Businesses to Southern New Mexico, Port of Entry Challenges and Benefits and Santa Teresa Update (1:55 p.m.)

Jerry Pacheco, president and chief executive officer, Border Industrial Association, and executive director, International Business Accelerator, and Eric Montgomery, director of economic development, El Paso Electric, and chair, board of directors, Mesilla Valley Economic Development Alliance, discussed trade and economic development in the border region. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=11.

Spaceport America Update (2:53 p.m.)

Scott McLaughlin, executive director, Spaceport Authority, gave an update on the status and operations of Spaceport America. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=ERDPC&Date=9/8/2026&ItemNumber=12.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:17 p.m.