



Capitol Counsel & Consulting

SUMMARY OF FIRST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE

The Governor issued a [Proclamation](#) calling for the Special Session the day it was slated to begin Thursday, June 18, 2020. In addition to calling on the Legislature to address the \$2.4 billion budget deficits for fiscal years 2020 and 2021, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham listed eight other measures for consideration. The New Mexico Constitution gives the Governor the power to set the agenda for special sessions, so although almost 40 bills were introduced, only those identified in the proclamation were referred to and heard by committees.

In all, [seven bills](#) were sent to the Governor for her signature by the end of the five-day session. The Senate adjourned on Saturday after, among other things, passing legislation addressing the budget deficits in two different bills. The House of Representatives returned on Monday, after taking Sunday off, to pass two additional bills on the Governor's proclamation – one addressing the use of [body worn cameras](#) by law enforcement and the other authorizing the state to make [small business recovery](#) and local government emergency loans.

This session was especially unique in that it took place behind locked doors. The Legislative Council Service voted to close the Capitol Building in Santa Fe to the public amid safety concerns brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. The decision was upheld by the New Mexico Supreme Court ahead of the start of the session but was a frequent point of contention made during debate in committee and floor sessions. Although the building was closed, the New Mexico Constitution requires that all Legislative sessions be public so webcasting efforts were revamped. The House used Zoom to meet and take public comment during committee hearings and the Senate solicited committee comments to designated e-mail addresses.

The House and Senate chambers used the opening day to pass temporary rules for their respective bodies to conduct legislative business with additional safety precautions. The House allowed its members to appear by simultaneous, electronic means from anywhere, but the Senate required physical presence. Special accommodations were made for a senator who was self-quarantining in her legislative office after being informed by the Department of Health of potential exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.

Although it is common practice of the 42-member Senate to take floor votes by roll call, the 70-member House had previously relied on an electronic board to display votes, and such a change led to lengthy vote-tallying. Likewise, voice votes were curtailed in both chambers to avoid shouting, and mask-wearing and social distancing was required, but only moderately practiced. Like any other event that was quickly moved to an all-digital platform due to the pandemic, the first two days saw several technical issues bringing meetings to a halt. On Thursday night, webcasting went down and both chambers stood in recess until the next morning as technology was reset.

The Governor has until July 12 to sign the legislation that was passed during the Special Session. However, Fiscal Year 2021 begins on July 1, so it is likely that action will be taken on at least some of the measures before the end of June.