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# Health and environment pioneer is chief of national association

By Betsy Carr

As most UNM alumni would agree, New Mexico rates as one of the most environmentally beautiful states in the union, which is one of the reasons migrants flock from the frost belt and elsewhere to settle in the land of enchantment. Yet growth and development pose a threat to New Mexico's environment. Larry J. Gordon, '49, New Mexico's deputy secretary of health and environment, is closely involved with mapping the route our state will take environmentally.

Gordon's list of accomplishments is endless. The most recent is the presidency of the American Public Health Association.

With a degree in biology from UNM, Gordon started out teaching high school science. After working with a county health department, he joined the New Mexico Department of Public Health. In 1955 he initiated and became director of the nation's first comprehensive local environmental health department in Albuquerque. Gordon was also instrumental in the creation of the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency and served as its director in the early 1970s. He planned and directed the nation's only state-run scientific laboratory system which offers services to all tax-

supported agencies in New Mexico.

Gordon's creations are now encompassed in the Department of Health and Environment, the most comprehensive state agency of its kind in the country. Its seven divisions are: environmental improvement, health services, behavioral health services, scientific laboratories, residential treatment, state health planning division and administrative services.

New Mexico is currently faced with serious environmental issues, Gordon notes. The so-called "Sagebrush Rebellion," if successful, would place more weight on the state's role in controlling the environment, reducing the role of the federal government. The San Juan Basin in northwestern New Mexico is projected to become one of the most extensively developed regions in the country in the pursuit of coal. A conflict exists between archeological and environmental interests on the one hand and the need for energy resources on the other.

Public Service Co. of New Mexico (PNM) and Arizona Public Service Co. are involved in this development. Gordon says PNM has a better environmental record. "The Public Service

Company of New Mexico has been progressive and responsible," he says.

The state can benefit economically from the development in the San Juan Basin. Gordon feels that a balance can be reached: development can proceed while keeping environmental damage to a minimum.

Gordon is as concerned with public health as he is with the environment. An avid jogger, he feels that people should improve their personal health and work actively to control pollutants and contaminants in the environment. These goals must be emphasized through education. "Improvement will come," he believes.

Gordon describes the philosophy of the 52,000-member American Public Health Association as "equating public health and prevention." The agency, based in Washington, D.C., is involved in influencing national health and environmental policy with the president as the primary spokesperson. He expects to testify before Congress on proposed amendments to the Clean Air Act and on a hazardous waste disposal program.

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*Larry Gordon*

Gordon's health and environmental concerns extend beyond his governmental duties; his noticeable affinity for his state, his country and its inhabitants seems genuine. His fear that the Reagan administration may "turn back the clock environmentally" will serve as an added incentive. A resident of Albuquerque, Gordon feels strongly about the city's environmental problems and their solutions. "The city's increasing pollution and its residents' dependence on private vehicles for city-wide transportation is a serious problem," he says.

Gordon is not an armchair environmentalist; he is a doer.

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