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For Immediate Release
January 27, 2017

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State Auditor Tim Keller Announces Legislative Agenda

Focuses on State's Deficit Spending with "Hot Checks" and Accountability in Government

SANTA FE, NM – Today, State Auditor Tim Keller announced the Office of the State Auditor's (OSA) agenda for the 2017 Legislative Session. The four-part plan is aimed at fixing loopholes that allow deficit spending by the state and increasing accountability in state government.

"Our office is engaged throughout the legislative process to support initiatives that protect taxpayer dollars, crackdown on corruption and prevent deficit spending," stated State Auditor Tim Keller. "With thoughtful legislation to make the most of our tax dollars, we can make a difference in our communities even when budgets are tight."

Key components of the legislative agenda are:

- 1) *Address the state's writing of "hot checks."* SB 133 and others sponsored by Senator George Munoz and Representative Nathan Small aim to address the problem of the state spending money it does not have, such as when revenue is unexpectedly low. Recent audits noted that the state is unable to identify deficits when there is a shortfall in a specific fund or agency. During the current fiscal year, there was likely deficit spending before the legislature's solvency measures took effect.
- 2) *Reform capital outlay.* HB 140 sponsored by Representative Daymon Ely calls for special audits at the completion of capital outlay projects of \$1 million or more. Auditing large projects helps ensure transparency and accountability and can ultimately result in savings for taxpayers.
- 3) *Accountability for state contracting.* SB 107 sponsored by Senator Sander Rue calls for audits at the completion of state agency contracts of \$10 million or more. Audits of large state contracts will help deter wrongdoing and ensure that taxpayers are getting what they pay for.
- 4) *Fight fraud, waste and abuse.* HB 149 sponsored by Representative Elizabeth Thomson creates a criminal offense for obstructing a governmental audit. Some agency officials have wasted tax dollars and concealed wrongdoing by obstructing audits. The bill enhances accountability by providing consequences for such tactics.

The OSA will also support important transparency and accountability measures such as funding for testing the backlog of Sexual Assault Evidence Kits (SB 7, McSorley), auditing the Governor's Contingency Fund (SB 27, Rue), reducing Cabinet Secretaries' conflicts of interest (HB 93, Baldonado), and supporting local business through state procurement (HB 25 and SB 18 Padilla/Maestas Barnes).

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