

NEW MEXICO SENATE DEMOCRATS

For immediate release

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Proposed Constitutional Amendment Would Let Voters Decide State Auditor Budget Increase

A joint resolution was introduced in the New Mexico State Senate on Monday that would amend the constitution to provide for a minimum funding level for the State Auditor's Office, which handles financial audits and investigations of financial transactions of state agencies that handle public money.

Senate Joint Resolution 9, introduced by Senator Carlos R. Cisneros (Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, Taos, District 6) and Senator Richard C. Martinez (Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, Santa Fe, District 5) would let voters decide at the next general or special election whether to increase funding to the State Auditor's office.

According to the bill, the funding measure would amend Article 5 of the constitution and allow the office to independently perform the duties of the office without undue influence. The amount of the funding would be based on at least "two-tenths of one percent of the annual appropriations in the general appropriation act."

In other action on the floor today:

*A bill requesting that the federal government begin negotiating in earnest with the displaced heirs and representatives of lost land grants for the return of their lands. Senate Joint Memorial 38, introduced by Senator Linda M. Lopez (Bernalillo, District 11) was sent to the Senate Rules Committee.

According to the resolution, the Bureau of Land Management met with land grant heirs in June 2010 after a request was submitted to President Barak Obama a year before. The request to the President, which called on the federal government to return lands to the heirs, was based on a state Attorney General finding that there were inequities in the legal conclusions and reasoning of a 2004 U.S. General Accounting Office report on land grants.

*The Senate Judiciary Committee passed Senate Bill 27, sponsored by Senator George Munoz (Cibola, McKinley, San Juan, District 4), which adopted changes to the Public Employees Retirement Association. Among some of the highlights, the bill would drop the present cost of living increases (COLA) for all current and future state retirees from 3 percent down to 2 percent. Current general employees retiring before June 30, 2014, would have to wait two full calendar years before receiving the 2 percent COLA; those retiring before June 30, 2015 would have to wait three years; four years COLA wait time for retirees before June 30, 2016; a seven-year wait time would start for all retirees after July 1, 2016.

Employees hired after June 2010 would have their final retirement benefit averaged out over five years of their highest salary instead of the current three. There would also be a tiered increase of employee- and state-funded contribution increases.

Tomorrow, look for:

*Senate Bill 19 first up in the Conservation Committee (2 p.m., Room 311) to develop and promote farmers markets; other bill up for review in the committee include SB 309, lease of water rights for stream flow; SB 389, horse rescue programs; SB 234, NM child advertising act violations.

*In the Public Affairs Committee (2 p.m., Room 321), SB 375, Albuquerque youth digital media training; SB 207, criminal restitution requirements; SB 252, children's code abuse & neglect changes.