

NEW MEXICO SENATE DEMOCRATS

For immediate release
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Day One: Skandera Confirmation

Earlier this week Senate Rules Committee Chair Linda Lopez (D, Bernalillo, Dist. 11) announced a much anticipated confirmation hearing for two-year-in-waiting Public Education Department Secretary-designee Hannah Skandera.

The sole purpose of the hearing today was to hear public commentary, which led to close to two hours of participation from a diverse and polarized audience.

Supporters included several members of the Governor's cabinet as well as business leaders from around the state. They touted Skandera's policy experience and engagement with school staff. Opposition came in the form of public school teachers, union employees and representatives, and concerned parents.

"What struck me (about today) was how strongly the business community supports her and teachers oppose her," said committee member Senator Gerald Ortiz y Pino (Bernalillo, District 12). "She has been very polarizing in education reform. Instead of bringing these two sides together, they have been split."

Those who opposed her appointment cited the state constitution and the fact that the Secretary of Education must be a "qualified and experienced educator." One audience member brought up the lack of equity in appropriating school dollars to the Department rather than through the State Equalization Guarantee, otherwise known as "below the line" funding that takes dollars out of the classroom.

Committee member Senator Jacob Candelaria (Bernalillo, District 26) said, "We had an open committee hearing that brought a lot of people to Santa Fe to share their views. I am concerned that classroom teachers and people who work in our classrooms have problems with the direction the Secretary-designate has taken public education in New Mexico. I look forward to bringing my questions tomorrow."

Senator Ortiz y Pino added, "I am hoping that tomorrow we can start exploring her educational principles and values."

The Committee will meet again Saturday at 10 a.m. in room 321 for further public comment as well as questions and debate from committee members. The Saturday meeting will allow those who were working elsewhere and missed Friday's committee to come to voice their support or opposition.

Senate Bill Would Help Breathe Life Back Into State's Historic Acequias

A bill awaiting review by the Senate Finance Committee would provide nearly \$11 million to provide more than 60 acequia associations throughout the state with much-needed funds to renovate and improve the historical and cultural water systems unique to New Mexico.

Senate Bill 546, sponsored by Senator Pete Campos (Colfax, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, Santa Fe, Taos, District 8), would provide a onetime influx of \$10.88 million from the New Mexico Works Construction Irrigation Fund to small-town farms in the Land of Enchantment. *Acequia* is the Spanish word for ditch, and Spanish settlers expanded upon the acequia systems already in place by Native Americans during the Colonial period, which began in 1598 upon the arrival of Don Juan de Oñate.

"The acequias running through our state have historically been the lifeblood of this region, just like the veins circulate life-sustaining blood through our bodies," Senator Campos said. "Many of the small-town farmers who struggle to keep these cultural treasures functioning need help to restore them.

"It is important that we help to preserve acequias so that we can ensure that they can be passed along to future generations, just like they have been for centuries before."

Senator Campos said the ditches in need were identified by the New Mexico Acequia Association. They include the Acequias de Llano de San Juan Neopumuceno, 1892 Luna Irrigation Ditch Association, West Puerto de Luna, Acequia Cañon de Luna, Acequia de la Aguila, Acequia de Rainsville Norte, Tularosa Ditch Association, Acequia de la Plaza de Dixon, Acequia del Medio de Coyote, Acequia de San Rafael del Guique, Northside acequia madre de Villanueva, Ponderosa Community Ditch, San Ysidro Community Ditch, Acequia del Barranco de Jacona, Acequia Larga de Jacona, Acequia de los Chupaderos, Acequia de la Otra Banda, Acequia de la Cienega, Acequia del Monte del Rio Chiquito, Las Colonias Community Ditch, Acequia de San Jose and Acequia de la Isla, Acequias de Chamisal y Ojito, Acequia de los Pinos, Los Ranchos de Atrisco Acequia, West Pecos Community Ditch, Cebolletita Acequia, Acequia de la Madera, Acequia de la Mesa Prieta, Acequia de la Posecion, Acequia de los Ranchos;

Acequia del Llano-Dixon, Acequia del Rincon, Cecilia Ditch Gallina, Gallina Community Ditch, Archibeque Ditch, Acequia del Portrero, Acequia de Arriba del Llano de San Miguel, Acequia de la Sevadilla, Acequia del Canon, Acequia de Canoncito de la Cueva, Acequia Venita de Teodoro Romero, Placitas Reservoir, Talpa Reservoir, Acequia de Agua Fria, Acequia Otra Banda-

Canjilon, East Puerto de Luna, Indian Ditch, Rosario Lopez Community Ditch, Nacimiento Ditch, Vadito Southside Ditch, Los Prandos, Ceboyetita Acequia, La Madera Acequia, San Francisco de Pauda Ditch, Los Gallegos Acequia, Acequia Encinal y Canoncito, Acequia del Medio, Acequia Venita de Teodoro Romero, Hormigoso Ditch, Vado de Juan Pais, Tecolotito Ditch, Upper Anton Chico Ditch and lower Anton Chico Ditch.

Increasing the Local Liquor Excise Tax To Fund Detox Centers and Programs

Senator George Munoz (McKinley, Cibola, San Juan, District 5) hopes to increase funding for a program he says is necessary and often overlooked: social detoxification treatment and detoxification centers in McKinley County.

Senate Bill 387 would increase the McKinley County Local Liquor Excise Tax from 5 percent to 6 percent and would amend the law to allow the Local Liquor Excise Committee to use funds from this tax for social detoxification.

The bill states that the increased revenue would go to the center providing services to the largest number of adult clients, including adult detoxification treatment for drugs and alcohol. The remaining amount would be used by a committee to fund alcohol and drug treatment programs for juveniles.

“Sadly there is a growing need for these programs throughout the state,” Senator Munoz said. “The treatment center in my district is full on a weekly basis, This tax can provide additional funding for adults and teens that really need the extra help.”

Senate Bill 387 passed the Senate floor on a 33-5 vote.

“Breaking Bad” Bill Moves Forward

An amended version of a House bill dubbed the “Breaking Bad” bill was approved Friday by the Senate Corporations and Transportation Committee. The goal of House Bill 379, sponsored by House Majority Whip Moe Maestas (D, Bernalillo, District 16) is to bring more productions to New Mexico by increasing the current 25 percent tax credit to 30 percent for shows filming in New Mexico.

Production crews would essentially get 30 cents back for every dollar spent filming in the state. An amendment would cap rollover tax credits at \$10 million. Another amendment puts a three-year sunset on the funds.

“I’m very pleased my colleagues in the Senate are behind this jobs bill -- the ‘Breaking Bad Bill’,” said House Majority Whip Maestas. “New Mexicans need jobs -- good paying jobs -- and this legislation will boost our economy, sending a strong message to the film and TV industry.

“My bill's five percent rebate increase for TV productions filming in New Mexico is a critical investment because we know that successful TV shows employ New Mexicans and also purchase goods and services from local small businesses for consecutive years.”

Maestas continued, "HB 379's year-to-year carry forward provision will not only attract more film productions to New Mexico by making unused funds available in future years, but it also maintains budget stability which is a priority of the administration.

“Additionally, I'm very proud that this legislation protects New Mexico workers, ensuring that *they* are the individuals who will benefit from the new jobs created by this bill.”

The bill moves to Senate Finance Committee.

In other Senate Action:

* The Public Affairs Committee on Friday passed an amended version of Senate Bill 577, “Domestic Violence Substitute Addresses,” sponsored by Senator Howie Morales (Catron, Grant, Socorro, District 28), that would add an exception to the Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA). SB577 would safeguard personal information of a victim of domestic violence from any IPRA request after a victim applies for and is granted a substitute address from the Secretary of State’s office. The office would receive the victim’s mail then forward it to the victim’s confidential address, according to the bill, which also calls for employees handling the secure information to undergo background checks and training in the areas of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

* The Senate on Friday honored former House Representative r J. Paul Taylor y Romero of old Mesilla, and his biographer Ana Pacheco who wrote his biography, “J. Paul; Taylor, the Man from Mesilla.” Taylor served in the House from 1986-2004 and was called the “conscience of the Legislature” by his biography. On top of his many accomplishments, Taylor and his wife donated their historic property on the Old Mesilla Plaza to the state and it is now known as the Taylor-Barela-Reynolds-Mesilla State Monument.