

# ***NEW MEXICO SENATE DEMOCRATS***

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## **SENATE REVIEW: March 5, 2013**

### **Minimum Wage Bill Passes Senate**

On a straight party-line vote, and after a highly emotional debate, the state Senate passed a bill to raise the statewide minimum wage by a dollar to \$8.50 an hour. Senate Bill 416, sponsored by Senator Richard Martinez (Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, Santa Fe, District 5) and Senator William Soules (Dona Ana, District 37), passed the Senate by a 25-17 vote.

The minimum wage bill is a centerpiece in Democratic legislation to help working families. The increase would provide nearly \$2000 a year for full-time employees earning minimum wage. "This amount of money is not insignificant to workers trying to support their families. There is a real need out there," said Senator Michael S. Sanchez, Senate Majority Leader.

Although opponents of the bill have argued that it will negatively impact small businesses, advocates believe that the increased wages will go directly into local economies to purchase basic necessities, such as food and medication.

"Hard working New Mexicans deserve to be paid a fair wage that will allow them to provide for their families," said Senator Richard Martinez. "Even with the increase in the minimum wage, a family of four will still be below the poverty level. But this is a step in the right direction."

Senate Bill 416 now heads to the House.

### **"Compromise Bill" to be Heard Tuesday by Senate Public Affairs Committee**

On Tuesday, the Senate Public Affairs Committee is scheduled to take action on Senate Bill 521, Two-Tiered Drivers' Licenses, sponsored by Senate Minority Leader Stuart Ingle (R, Chaves, Curry, De Baca, Lea, Roosevelt, District 27). The bill would create separate levels of compliance for drivers' licensure. The bill would adopt rules for children of undocumented immigrants, recently given a path to citizenship by the Obama Administration, to apply for a New Mexico driver's license. The bill repeals the portion of current law that allows undocumented citizens with a tax ID number to apply for a license.

The bill is the purported “compromise” from the administration on the ever controversial issuance of drivers’ licenses to undocumented New Mexicans. The Public Affairs Committee is scheduled to meet on Tuesday, March 4, 30 minutes after the conclusion of the Senate floor session. The committee is made up of six Democrats and four Republicans. The House of Representatives tabled the House version of this bill in committee.

### **Senate Passes Bill to Restore Level of Care to Developmentally Disabled**

The state Senate passed a bill on Monday afternoon that would direct the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services to reapply to the federal government for a waiver that restores medical care provided to the state’s developmentally disabled to the level of services provided before a previous waiver was granted in June 2011.

Senate Bill 458, sponsored by Senator Nancy Rodriguez (D, Santa Fe, District 24), would also require the departments to obtain prior approval from the Legislature before it applies, renews or modifies any waivers submitted to the federal Developmental Disabilities Home- and Community-Based Services program that funds the care services and approves the rates paid to in-state providers.

The federal government allows the state to apply for the waivers every four years. The feds pay about 70 cents to every dollar into the multi-million dollar program while the state picks up the rest.

Advocates contend that this bill is needed because the last federally approved waiver, last applied for by the state without details known by the Legislature, severely limited the services to existing clients and reduced payments to health care providers. The last waiver resulted in many of the state’s developmentally disabled to no longer qualify for home services, and limiting the services of others, even though they had been receiving such care for many years. It also reduced payments to health-care providers.

The bill now heads to the House for review.

### **Senate Confirms Seven Regents to Statewide Institutions of Higher Learning**

The full Senate confirmed seven regents to the board of regents of three state universities and the state military academy on Monday. Unanimously appointed to the University of New Mexico Board of Regents were Suzanne Quillen, Heidi Overton and Dr. Conrad James: Named to the Eastern New Mexico University Board of Regents were Jane Christensen and Chase Sturdevant; named to the New Mexico Highlands Board of Regents were Michael Martinez and Leveo Sanchez, who was reappointed to the board. The Honorable Kea W. Riggs was appointed to the New Mexico Military Institute Board of Regents.

## **Senate Votes Down Amendment to Strike Water Quality Control Commission**

A controversial amendment to a non controversial Senate bill was voted down today on a mostly party line vote. Senator Phil Griego (San Miguel, District 39) sponsored an amendment that sparked spirited debate on the Senate Floor this afternoon. The bill in question, a combination of committee substitutes for SB 163 and 174, would extend the sunset dates of a number of boards and commissions, including the Animal Sheltering Board, Coal Surface Mining Commission, Signed Language Interpreting Practices Board, Board of Landscape Architects, Board of Barbers and Cosmetologists, Board of Nursing Home Administrators and the Water Quality Control Commission. The bill delays the sunset on these boards to July 2019.

The response from Democrats was that if the amendment passed, the Water Quality Control Commission would sunset and the duties of the board would be left in limbo.

“This commission regulates surface and ground water and adopts regulations; it hears appeals of water quality permits and sets the procedural and administrative process for permitting,” said Senate Conservation Committee Chair Peter Wirth (Santa Fe, District 25). “If this commission were to sunset, water quality appeals will go to the courts.”

Senator Cisco McSorley (Bernalillo, District 16) spoke out against the amendment, “I urge the body to consider the consequences of supporting this amendment. We have been talking a lot this session about the importance of water and now we are trying to do away with an entity that regulates water quality.”

The amendment failed on an 18 to 23 vote. After the amendment failed, the bill passed unanimously.

Read the bill here <http://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/13%20Regular/bills/senate/SB0163FCS.pdf>

### **In other Senate Action:**

\* The Senate Public Affairs Committee tabled a bill last week that would have exempted New Mexico from participating in Daylight Saving Time. Senate Bill 559, sponsored by Senator Cliff R. Pirtle (R, Chaves, Eddy, Otero, District 32), would have had the state observe Standard Time for the entire year and not change the clocks back one hour to observe Daylight Saving Time in the fall.

\* A bill that would allow voters the option of straight party voting advanced through the Senate Judiciary Committee last week. Senate Bill 276, sponsored by Senator Michael S. Sanchez (Bernalillo, Valencia, District 29) would put the “lever” back on the ballot to allow voters to cast all their votes for one party. The Secretary of State made an administrative decision to remove the option on the ballots during the last general election. The bill would add language to Article I, Chapter 10 NMSA 1978, to say “in a general election in which more than

one qualified political party is represented on the ballot, the ballot shall be designed to allow the voter to vote for all of a qualified party's slate of candidates on the ballot by marking a single straight party option for that party's slate of candidates." The bill moves on to the Senate for a floor vote.