

Briefs

Spaceport liability legislation pushed

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — Republican Gov. Susana Martinez has pushed unsuccessfully for two years for legislation to protect spacecraft manufacturers from legal liability.

She'll now have help from the Save Our Spaceport Coalition, a group of aerospace-related companies and business associations.

The group held a news conference Thursday in Albuquerque to tout the benefits of New Mexico's Spaceport America and the need for the legislation.

Among those in attendance was Virgin Galactic chief executive and president George Whitesides. Virgin Galactic is the anchor tenant at Spaceport America.

The legislation would exempt spacecraft parts suppliers from most civil lawsuits. It has been blocked by trial lawyers, but Spaceport America says the exemption is needed to attract more business to the taxpayer-financed spaceport.

The coalition says new laws in other states have put Spaceport America at a disadvantage.

Police ID body found near charred vehicle

BERNARDO (AP) — New Mexico State Police investigators have identified the body of a man who was found near a charred vehicle in Socorro County.

They say 28-year-old Adrian Burns of Los Lunas was found Monday night by firefighters who were called to extinguish a burning car in a remote area along U.S. 60.

Police say they're considering the case a homicide and have issued arrest warrants for two brothers from Los Lunas. They're identified as 43-year-old Joe Lawrence Gallegos and 36-year-old Andrew Gallegos.

The charges listed on the warrants include murder, kidnapping, arson and tampering with evidence.

Police say the brothers have a "lengthy violent history" and should be considered armed and dangerous.

Health officials confirm first flu case

SANTA FE (AP) — This season's first case of influenza has been confirmed by the New Mexico Department of Health.

Health officials made the announcement Friday, saying the first case to be reported involves a woman from Santa Fe County.

Officials are urging New Mexicans to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

State Epidemiologist Michael Landen says getting a flu shot is the best protection against the spread of the disease, especially for children and those at high risk.

Symptoms can include a fever, body aches, tiredness and cough.

The Health Department says it doesn't track every case of flu in New Mexico. However, it does track influenza-like illness at several locations around the state to estimate the amount of flu activity.

Death notices

Marilyn Cecile West

Marilyn Cecile West, 55, of Lubbock, died Nov. 14. She was born June 20, 1957. Services are pending through Stevens Funeral Home in Lovington.

Ricardo R. Martinez

Ricardo R. Martinez, 87, of Eunice, NM passed away on November 16, 2012 at his residence. Services are pending with Calvary Funeral Home of Eunice.



Sanger Elementary

TOP: George and Martha Washington — also known as Sanger fourth graders Isaiah Alvidrez and Darline Romero — do a good old-fashioned do-si-do for classmates during an American Education Week performance Tuesday afternoon.

RIGHT: Robert Perez and Marcus Gelba add a little musical accompaniment to Sanger's fourth-grade American Education Week performance.

HOBBS SCHOOLS PHOTOS



New Mexico coyote hunting contest sparks online petition

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — The terms of the competition are simple: Hunters in New Mexico have two days this weekend to shoot and kill as many coyotes as they can, and the winners get their choice of a free shotgun or a pair of semi-automatic rifles.

But the planned two-day coyote hunting contest has sparked an online petition that has generated tens of thousands of signatures worldwide. The FBI is investigating a death threat to the gun shop owner who is sponsoring the hunt. And one protester has even vowed to dress like a coyote to trick hunters into accidentally killing a human.

But none of these episodes will likely stop the owner of Gunhawk Firearms from holding the scheduled two-day coyote hunting race this weekend, despite the international attention the idea has garnered.

"I'm not going to back down," said Mark Chavez, 50, who has faced two weeks of angry phone calls and protests — and even a threat to his life. "This is my right to hunt and we're not breaking any laws."

Under the rules of the contest, the winning team will get its choice of a Browning Maxus 12-gauge shotgun or two AR-15 semi-automatic rifles from the Los Lunas shop, and a hired taxidermist will salvage any pelts and hides from the dead coyotes for clothing.

"I'll even give the furs to the homeless if they need it," Chavez said.

The competition — which opponents are calling a "coyote killing contest" — has sparked thousands of angry emails, social media postings and a petition signed by activists from as far as Europe who have demanded that the hunt be called off. Last week, a small group of protesters held a rally outside of Gunhawk Firearms and waved signs denouncing the event as cruel and "bloodthirsty."

People are upset over the idea of making a contest out of killing an animal that usually lives peacefully alongside residents, said Susan Weiss, 74, who leads the Coexist with Coyotes group in Corrales, N.M.

"There's a tremendous amount of arrogance in conducting this hunt," Weiss said. "(Chavez) is damaging the reputation of ranchers. He is damaging the reputation of legitimate hunters."

But some New Mexico ranchers have complained about the large population of coyotes, estimated to be around 300,000 in the state. Coyotes are blamed for thousands of death to calves annually, and aren't protected under federal or state laws.

The controversy began last month when the Albuquerque-based Calibers Shooters Sports Center announced plans for a similar contest. Calibers canceled the event after pressure from Weiss and other activists and attention from national media outlets.

That's when Chavez, a former rancher and construction worker, took up the cause and decided to hold his own coyote hunt, scheduled to begin on private land on Saturday.

"I felt that Calibers backed down to the pressure," he said. "We can't let that happen, especially since it's our right to hunt."

Chavez said he was inundated with complaints and support just as soon as news broke that Gunhawk would organize the hunt. A letter by one resident warned Chavez that he would be dressing in a "coyote outfit" during the contest and said participants would feel guilty once they discovered they had killed a human.

"I hope also there will be a doctor on hand to check this guy out," Chavez said. "Who says that kind of stuff?"

Someone else called and made a death threat, Chavez said. The call was reported to the FBI.

Participants in a coyote hunting contest won't be allowed to shoot coyotes on federal or state land.

New Mexico Land Commissioner Ray Powell told Chavez in a letter Thursday that a permit or lease is needed for commercial use of the state lands and none has been issued. Anyone participating in the contest on state land will be considered a trespasser, Powell said.

In addition, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management has also sent Chavez a letter to say that hunting won't be allowed on its land.

Still, Chavez said 60 teams have signed up for a two-day contest that will be conducted on private land of willing ranchers. He said in addition to the angry phone calls and emails, he's getting support for hunters and ranchers who have been battling aggressive coyotes on their lands.

Advertisement for Chapel of Hope funeral home. Includes phone number 392-5683, address 3321 N. Dal Paso Hobbs, and website www.chapelofhopefunerals.com.

Advertisement for Cindy Shoobridge, Associate Broker, phone number 575.390.1361, website shoobridgewest.com.

Advertisement for Celebrity Status SALON & DAY SPA, phone number 575-492-0144, address 1710 West Joe Harvey Blvd. Suite E, Hobbs, NM.

Advertisement for PARTY Xpress, phone number 575-391-9873, address Broadmoor Mall • 1401 N. Turner • 575-391-9873.

Advertisement for SUPERIOR PRINTING, phone number 517 E. Broadway, Hobbs 393-3261.

Jobless benefits may end for 7,000 in New Mexico

SANTA FE (AP) — About 7,000 jobless New Mexicans will lose unemployment benefits at the end of the year if Congress and the president don't agree to extend the assistance, legislators were told Friday.

That represents about a third of the New Mexicans currently receiving unemployment payments, which range from a minimum of \$74 a week to a maximum of \$397.

Workforce Solutions Secretary Celina Bussey told the Legislative Finance Committee there will be no federal extended unemployment benefits starting in January unless the program is continued.

The state pays for jobless benefits for 26 weeks, and the federal government picks up the cost of 28 additional weeks of assistance because of high unemployment.

About 21,000 New Mexicans are receiving unemployment payments, with a third of those covered by federal extended benefits. New Mexico's unemployment rate was 6.4 percent in September, down from 7.4 percent a year ago.

Unemployment assistance is one of the issues confronting Congress and President Barack Obama as they consider how to avoid a year-end "fiscal cliff" of tax increases and spending cuts.

In New Mexico, the Legislature will face decisions next year on how to shore up the state's unemployment compensation fund, which is paying out about \$750,000 a day in benefits. The program is financed

by taxes on employers.

It's estimated that employers will pay about \$234 million for the unemployment fund this year but the state will provide about \$254 million in jobless benefits.

The fund had a balance of about \$59 million earlier this month. That's projected to drop to about \$21 million next March but rebound to \$65 million by the end of 2013.

Bussey said Gov. Susana Martinez will propose changes in the upcoming legislative session to the system that determines the tax rate each employer must pay. One proposal is aimed at ensuring that employers contribute more if they have a high turnover in their workforce, which causes jobless benefits to exceed how much the employer paid into the system.

Under the current system, employers with the worst unemployment experience hit a maximum tax rate and then other businesses potentially are forced to pay more to keep the program solvent.

In recent years, the Legislature has determined a broad range of tax rates that will be in place from year to year. That decision has hinged largely on economic conditions and the cash balances in the unemployment compensation fund. The administration wants to implement a rate-setting system that responds to changes in the economy but eliminates the uncertainty of political decision-making on unemployment taxes for businesses.

Lottery numbers

- N.M. PICK 3: 1-1-0; ROADRUNNER CASH: 7-9-25-26-29; TEXAS PICK 3: 6-7-2 (day); 5-5-0 (night); TEXAS DAILY 4: 8-4-3-3 (day); 4-1-5-6 (night); CASH FIVE TEXAS: 16-22-32-33-35; MEGA MILLIONS: 5-24-26-29-53 MB: 36

News-Sun advertisement including contact info for Judy Hanna, Danial Russell, Bennie Gaddy, and details on News-Sun services like circulation and advertising rates.

Advertisement for Griffin Funeral Home, Inc. featuring "In Loving Memory" service, funeral homes, and florists. Includes address 401 N. Dalmont, Hobbs • 393-2444.

Advertisement for HARTBEAT REALTY, LLC, "Your Home is Just a Heartbeat Away", contact info for Jerry Hart • (575) 393-1826.

Advertisement for Israel Horovitz' 'LINE' comedy show at Hobbs Community Playhouse. Features Nathan Miles, David Baeza, Robert Schumacher, Karen Widman, Tim Deines. Dates: Nov. 15, 16, 17 @ 8 p.m.; Nov. 18 @ 2 p.m.