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New Mexico Municipal League

ABOUT HOTEL RESERVATIONS – Help Us Keep Low Registration Fees!

By Colette Schobbens – NMML Meetings Coordinator

Did you know that when the League contracts with any hotel for a room block, that contract usually includes a minimum guarantee between 80% and 95% of the block, depending on the property and the time of the year?

What this means is that if we contract 100 rooms for 3 nights (or 300 “room-nights”), the League guarantees say 80%, or 240 room nights, to be sold at the agreed upon rate. While individual attendees are allowed to cancel their hotel reservations 72 hours prior to arrival or even later depending on the property’s cancellation policy, the League remains responsible for 80% of the room nights.

So, you may ask… why are you telling us this? Well, quite often we see municipalities book 5, 10 or 15 rooms early on for the duration of a meeting, then at the last minute several rooms are cancelled. You multiply that by 2 or 3 nights, and you now have quite a few room nights that are not sold, and no one to buy them that late in the game. No penalty to the municipality that made the original reservation, but NMML remains liable for those 80%.

Not only does this impact conference budgets, but it also inconveniences attendees looking for a hotel during the last two weeks prior to a meeting, and who often find that room block to be full; they end up having to book a room somewhere else. Then, a few days prior to the event, cancellations come pouring in at the contracted hotel (from those mini-blocks reservations made “just in case”), and we end up well below our 80%, i.e. owing money to the hotel(s). **When budgets are in the red, guess what happens next? Registration fees need to be increased to make up for the shortfall.**

So in the future, please help us avoid that situation. First find out who definitely plans on attending a given conference/meeting before booking several rooms “just in case.” If you end up having too many rooms, try not to wait until the last minute to cancel those you don’t need. **This will help us stay within the budget and keep registration fees as low as possible!** Your understanding and cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Socorro Clerk George Patrick Salome Jr. Named 2015 “Clerk of the Year”

New Mexico Clerks and Finance Officers Association President Shawn Jeffrey (left) presents the “Clerk of the Year” award to George Patrick Salome Jr. of Socorro.

Socorro City Clerk George Patrick Salome Jr. was chosen “Clerk of the Year” by the New Mexico Clerks and Finance Officers Association during their Spring Meeting April 8-10 in Clovis. The purpose of the award is to identify and recognize a member of the Municipal Clerks and Finance Officers Association who has made an enhancement to the clerk’s own community or municipal government, made a significant contribution to the objectives of the Association in New Mexico, and has advanced the municipal clerks’ profession and/or the promotion of municipal government in New Mexico.

Salome was nominated by Socorro Mayor Ravi Bhasker and Terry Tadano, past Executive Director of the Socorro County Chamber of Commerce.

In his nominating letter, Mayor Bhasker said, “I hired Pat Salome in 1988 as the City Clerk. Six terms later, Pat is still serving our community. I believe in Pat and thank him for all the commitment he has dedicated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 27 years of excellent public service.”

Salome is a graduate of Socorro High School and graduated within three years from New Mexico State University with a double major in accounting and economics. He received a Master’s degree in economics from NMSU and taught there for three years.

Judges for this year’s award were Shawn Jeffrey, MMC, Clerk/Treasurer of the Town of Springer; Ann Mackie, MMC, Clerk of the Town of Silver City; Jini Turri, CMC, Administrator/Clerk/Treasurer of the Village of Cloudcroft; Renee Lucero, MMC, Clerk of the Town of Taos; and Renee Cantin, Clerk of the City of Alamogordo.

Six Satisfy Qualifications For Certified Municipal Official

Six people have received the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) designation from the Municipal Official Leadership Institute sponsored by New Mexico Municipal League. They will receive the official designation at the New Mexico Municipal League's 58th Annual Conference September 3 in Albuquerque. The six are: Rio Communities Councilor Frank Stasi; Deming Mayor Benny Jasso; Silver City Councilor Guadalupe Cano; Silver City Municipal Judge Sonya Ruiz; Clovis Commissioner Tom Martin; and Local Government Division Special Director Michael Steininger.

The Institute was founded in 2003 to give New Mexico municipal officials the knowledge and tools necessary to provide effective and ethical leadership to the citizens of their communities.

Participants must complete three programs of instruction: Education Program consists of two basic education sessions plus electives; Governance Program focuses on necessary traits for effective leaders; and, the Leadership Program is a course of self-directed electives. Certification can only be obtained after satisfying the Institute's required curricula.

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Red River Municipal Judge Jack Griffin Elected President of Judges Association

(From left): Judges Association President Jack Griffin, Red River; First Vice President Sonya Ruiz, Silver City; and Second Vice President J.D. Roehrig, Capitan.

Red River Municipal Judge Jack Griffin has been elected president of the New Mexico Municipal Judges' Association. He was elected April 29 during the in Farmington and will serve as the Association's President until next June.

Silver City Municipal Judge Sonya Ruiz was elected First Vice President and Capitan Municipal Judge J.D. Roehrig was elected Second Vice President.

Griffin has been municipal judge in Red River since 1989. He previously served as President of the Municipal Judges Association in 2005-06.

Three New Mexico Cities Honored for NLC Membership

Artesia, Carlsbad and Santa Fe have been cited for their 35-year membership and participation in the National League of Cities (NLC).

In letters to Mayors Phillip Burch of Artesia, Dale Janway of Carlsbad and Javier Gonzales of Santa Fe, NLC Executive Director Clarence E. Anthony congratulated each for their 35 years as members in the national organization.

In his letter, Anthony said "Your membership value also comes from programs and services and the way we help save precious time and money. I hope you have taken advantage of some of our most popular programs such as the NLC Prescription Discount Card Program, U.S. Communities Government Purchasing Alliance, NLC University and Peer Networking through communities and Councils.

"Since joining NLC on January 1, 1980, your city has faced many challenges that have changed the way it does business and serves its citizens. The elected officials and staff have worked hard, sharing their leadership, knowledge, skills and experience and NLC is here to assist," he wrote.

Each city also received a certification honoring their membership and participation.

Los Alamos Airport – A History

By David Ploeger, Los Alamos Airport Manager

Los Alamos Airport was originally constructed in 1947 to support the Atomic Energy Commission's requirements at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. As such, it was closed to all air traffic except those flights in direct support of the laboratory. After much petitioning by local pilots, in 1960 the Atomic Energy Commission opened the airport to use by private aircraft owners who met the security requirements established by the AEC. All other aircraft were required to receive prior permission before using the airport.

The AEC, and then the Department of Energy (DOE), maintained ownership and operational control of the airport until October of 1996 when the airport was leased to the Los Alamos County. At that point the airport officially changed to a public-use airport and was added to the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS). In 2008, following the remediation of two waste sites at the airport, the DOE officially deeded the airport to the County.

Since 1996 the County, assisted with grants from the FAA and the NMDOT-Aviation Division, has made significant improvements to the airport facilities. A new runway lighting system has been installed, a new aircraft parking apron constructed, drainage has been improved, the runway was repaved and extended to a length of 6,000 feet, and a new Master Plan has been written. Today the airport is home to 60 based aircraft and facilities including a terminal building, storage building, 45 privately owned hangars and a self-service 100LL fueling facility.

The airport enjoyed commercial air service to Albuquerque airport at various times in the past and is currently in the process of negotiating a new airline contract. This, together with future planned infrastructure improvements, should ensure the airport remains a valuable asset to the community for many years.

States Debate Who's Helped, Hurt in Shifting Tax Burdens

By Elaine S. Povich, Stateline Staff Writer

About a half-dozen states are considering cutting income taxes and simultaneously increasing sales or excise taxes — sparking debate on whether wealthier taxpayers will benefit disproportionately at the expense of those living on lower incomes.
The offsets often are proposed as a way to comply with state balanced-budget laws. Or, cuts in income taxes are proposed as part of political deals to balance raising gasoline or other excise taxes. But the effect is the same: The tax burden is being shifted at a time when there's growing concern over income inequality.

Arguments in support of the shift, which is mostly playing out in Republican-dominated states, are that cutting income taxes for households and businesses will create jobs, and that putting money in the pockets of taxpayers of all incomes helps stimulate the economy. The counter argument is that sales and excise taxes are more regressive than income taxes because poorer families spend a higher percentage of their income on basic goods and services.

Every state already relies on a regressive tax system, although some states depend on sales and excise taxes more than others, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, a liberal think tank. A 2015 ITEP study found that the effective state and local tax rate burden was 10.9 percent of income for those in the bottom 20 percent of income, but just 5.4 percent for those in the top 1 percent.

Many proposals under debate in the states would continue the trend. In Ohio, Republican Gov. John Kasich has proposed cutting income taxes 23 percent over two years, with a 15 percent immediate cut. He also proposes eliminating taxes on businesses with gross receipts of $2 million or less.

To partially offset the cuts, Kasich proposes increasing the state's sales tax from 5.75 percent to 6.25 percent and broadening it to cover more goods and services. He also wants to increase the cigarette tax a dollar to $2.25 a pack, hike taxes on other tobacco products and impose a tax on "vaping," products which deliver nicotine without tobacco.

Kasich argues that the tax cuts would make Ohio more attractive to business, boosting the state's economy. He said cutting income taxes puts more money in taxpayers' pockets, allowing them to decide whether to spend those dollars buying goods that are subject to sales taxes.

To ease the burden on lower-income taxpayers, Ohio is instituting an earned income tax credit for the working poor. However, that tax is not refundable, which means taxpayers cannot get money back unless they earned enough to be taxed in the first place. In contrast, the federal earned income tax credit is refundable, as it is in many states.
Kasich's argument is that lower taxes lead to investment and job creation.

"We've got to get people jobs. The single biggest cure for poverty is a job, OK? And that's what I'm out to do in Ohio," Kasich told reporters last week at a luncheon in Washington sponsored by *The Christian Science Monitor*.

But John C. Green, director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron, said Kasich's plan shifts the tax burden in favor of wealthier taxpayers at the expense of lower income taxpayers.

"Certainly many of the taxes the governor wants to raise would be regarded by economists as regressive," Green said. "The income tax in Ohio mostly applies to rich people. When you lower income taxes, it benefits wealthy people."

Jonathan Williams, vice president for the American Legislative Exchange Council Center for State Fiscal Reform, a conservative research group that advocates for limited government and free markets, disagreed. He said that taxes in general inhibit economic growth—and income taxes are the worst kind.

"I think some of the regressivity concerns over sales taxes are overblown," Williams said. "Many states exempt food and clothing from sales taxes, and there are no sales taxes on purchases with EBT (food stamp assistance debit) cards. For the truly needy out there, they are not being disproportionately affected."

Ohio exempts groceries and food stamp purchases from sales tax.

The Ohio House has passed a far different budget. It calls for reducing upper income tax rate from 5.33 percent to 4.99 percent, far less than Kasich wanted, and scraps his plans to increase sales and other use taxes. The Ohio Senate has yet to act. Lawmakers have until the end of June to resolve the budget.

Offsets in Other States

Similar debates are raging in Maine, South Carolina and New Jersey. In Maine, Republican Gov. Paul LePage has proposed eliminating the income tax over three years while raising and broadening the sales tax to apply to more goods and services. He argues that the sales tax, along with higher taxes on hotel rooms, rental cars and restaurant meals, are often paid by tourists, while the income tax hits working Mainers.

LePage also has proposed eliminating the estate tax, getting rid of the property tax exemption for non-religious non-profits with a value of more than $500,000 and eliminating state revenue sharing with municipalities. Cities argue they would have to raise property taxes to make up for the lack of revenue sharing, further hurting Maine residents. The legislature is taking a skeptical look at these plans.

In South Carolina and New Jersey, Republican governors or majority GOP legislatures are talking about cutting income taxes or inheritance taxes to make an increase in the gasoline tax more palatable.

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POSITIONS AVAILABLE

To check the municipal job opportunities click on
http://nmml.org/classifieds/positions-available/

States Debate Taxes . . . continued from page 5

In South Carolina, Republican Gov. Nikki Haley has recognized that the gas tax needs to go up to support the state's transportation system, but says she won't agree to that without an offsetting income tax cut. Her plan would cut income tax rates from 7 percent to 5 percent over a decade and increase the gas tax from 16 cents a gallon to 26 cents a gallon.

The South Carolina House and Senate have passed different plans. The House version imposes a 6 percent excise tax based on the wholesale price of fuel. The Senate plan raises the gas tax by 12 cents a gallon and imposes more fees on hybrid and electric cars, but doesn't touch income tax rates.

New Jersey 'Tax Shift'

In New Jersey, some lawmakers have advocated a cut in the state's estate and inheritance taxes to make way for an increase in the gasoline tax, which is the second lowest in the country at 14.5 cents a gallon (Alaska's is the lowest).

Republican Gov. Chris Christie hasn't made his preferences known, saying only that "everything is on the table" in the budget discussion. The legislature is considering raising petroleum taxes at the wholesale level, which would translate to an increase of about 25 cents a gallon, according to Gordon MacInnes, president of New Jersey Policy Perspectives, a liberal study group. That's a big jump, but it would still put New Jersey's gasoline tax below neighboring New York (49.9 cents a gallon) and Pennsylvania (41.8 cents a gallon).

A broad coalition that includes business groups favors an increase because New Jersey's infrastructure is crumbling. But the entire New Jersey House is up for re-election this fall, and many members are looking for cuts in other taxes to help shift part of the burden.

Rep. Jay Webber, a Republican, said that any gasoline tax must be accompanied by cuts that will help alleviate, or at least not increase, the burden on all citizens. Webber has called for elimination of the "death tax," a favorite political name for the estate tax. He has called the estate tax one of the "state's biggest obstacles to economic growth."

"I and a number of other Republicans are going to insist on a tax cut so the most over-taxed people in the state don't have another tax on their backs," he said.

But a break in estate taxes won't benefit poor citizens while they're paying higher taxes at the gas pump, according to MacInnes, who advocates an increase in the state's earned income tax credit to offset the proposed gasoline tax hike for lower-income people.

"It (the gas tax hike) disproportionately affects the lower income people in the state," he said.

Stateline is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news service of the Pew Center on the States that provides daily reporting and analysis on trends in state policy.