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2-1 commission vote means matter to come up again

The McKinley County Board of Commissioners tabled a long-running push to establish a four-day work week for administrative offices and departments. The action took place at the Dec. 13 county commission meeting and after some very persuasive arguments by members of Gallup's real estate and banking communities.

The 2-0 commission vote to bring the matter back up at a future meeting was done so that members of the public could contribute to the matter. Commissioners Carol Bowman-Muskett and Tony Tanner (commission chairman) agreed to table the issue. Commissioner Genevieve Jackson abstained from voting, but not before saying that she thought the required leg work and publicity on the four-day work week idea had already run its course.

"Wherever we can save will help us," Bowman-Muskett said. "But I'm all for hearing from the public and the community on this issue. That is what my vote is for."

McKinley County Manager Anthony Dimas told commission members that converting to a four-day work week would lead to hundreds of thousands of dollars savings in operational costs. Dimas said there have been meetings with county administrative and managerial staff and surveys suggests a desire to go to the four-day work week. The departments that would be excluded from the proposal include the McKinley County Adult Detention Center, the McKinley County Sheriff's Office, Metro Dispatch and Thoreau Ambulance, among other county emergency responder agencies.

THE CONS

Betty Armstrong, a realtor with Century 21 of Gallup, said the county is playing with fire by flat-out wanting to convert to the four-day work week and not including the opinions of taxpayers in the decision. Once commissioners hear from constituents, then you're talking about a different ball game, Armstrong suggested.

"For us, it represents a burden," Armstrong told commissioners. "You are here as public servants. I don't think you've talked to enough people on this."

Armstrong said real estate agencies do business on a daily basis with banks and the county treasurer's office, and excluding Friday's presents big problems with respect to closing sales and with regard to the finalizing of documents.

Other realtors felt the same way and told commissioners.

Jeannie Miller of Gallup's Washington Federal asked the Board of Commissioners to think about the long and short-term impact of the decision. But it was the arguments from the realtors that attended the meeting that struck a chord.

"You're talking about a whole day," Karla Benefield, also of Gallup's Century 21, said. "This makes it difficult for people to move into homes. This is a big deal."

CULTURAL CHANGE?

Dimas called the matter something akin to "cultural change," saying folks get so used to doing things one way that there is no consideration for doing them another way.

"We have had meetings. We have talked to our employees. It will take some getting used to, but everybody is in favor of it," Dimas said.

Jackson suggested that people know what a four-day work schedule means and, therefore, personal and professional schedules can simply be reset. "I think t's something that people will get used to," Jackson said. "After a while, it (the work week change) grows on you."

Should McKinley County end up going with a new work week and new work schedule, the new county office hours would be from 7 am to 6 pm, with at least one half-hour for lunch breaks, Dimas has said. Armstrong said in a subsequent comment at the commission meeting that an

idea the county might want to consider is employing a “skeleton crew” type of work force on Friday.

“I don’t think you’re really losing if you do it that way,” Armstrong said. “That’s another way of looking at it.”

A professor from San Juan College in Farmington addressed the McKinley County Commission about a month ago and spoke about the pros (mostly pros) and cons of a four-day work week. San Juan County switched to the four-day system in 2013.

The four-day work week would be administered on a trial basis for up to three years, unless terminated by the board of Commissioners or made permanent by a personnel ordinance amendment, county officials have said.

When the work week matter does come back up, Tanner won’t be a commissioner. Bill Lee won the District 3 commission seat and starts the job in January.

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