

Are four heads better than one?

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Dimas, Lee, Bowman-Muskett, Jackson go to Washington

Since the election, hundreds of people from around the country have traveled to Washington to sit down with congressional leaders. Last week, the McKinley County Board of Commissioners took the plunge and visited with New Mexico's congressional delegation.

The trip cost about \$4,300 and was paid for by county taxpayers. McKinley County Manager Anthony Dimas and Commissioners Carol Bowman-Muskett, Genevieve Jackson and Bill Lee flew coach via Delta and Southwest airlines to the Nation's Capital.

The trip took place from March 6 through March 9 and the meetings were conducted at the congressional offices at the U.S. Capitol. The commissioners stayed at the ritzy Embassy Suites in D.C. at \$272 per night.

The trip included meetings with Ben Ray Luján, Michelle Luján Grisham, Tom Udall, Martin Heinrich and Steve Pearce. Pearce is the sole Republican serving New Mexico. Within the past year, Luján has visited Gallup and McKinley County the most, including one local meeting at the Downtown Events Center in which future funding for NCI was discussed.

Luján Grisham has announced her candidacy for the governorship of New Mexico and Heinrich was mentioned as one of the people considered by Hillary Clinton for vice president.

According to the travel itinerary of the commissioners, there were also meetings with NM Delegation Officer Director Stephen Jochem and with Heather Dean of the Federal Highway Administration and with Bruce Loudermilk of the BIA.

"It was a very productive trip," Dimas said. "We had a chance to sit down with the entire delegation and share thoughts and ideas on a lot of topics impacting McKinley County."

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Dimas said some of the topics talked about were transportation issues like the widening of U.S. 491, various roads, the Na'Nihzhoozhi center, Inc., health issues, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a host of other issues.

Lee said trip represented the first time for some to sit-down with Pearce, who grew up in the Hobbs area, and frankly talk about McKinley County.

"I liked the chance to sit and talk about county and the needs of the county," Lee, who served as McKinley County Manager for about 18 months. "It was a productive meeting for each of us."

Dimas said there were no promises made, but each side came away with some eye-to-eye seriousness and understanding. Bowman-Muskett said the trip was productive.

"This gave us a chance to sit down and discuss issues and answers," Bowman-Muskett said. "I think trips like this are important for both sides."

***By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent***