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New Mexico's Commissioner of Public Lands is slated to speak Friday with a group of conservative-minded state lawmakers in Washington D.C. about his proposal to transfer federal mineral rights on private lands to the state.

Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn is also planning to meet with members of Congress in order to urge them to approve the transfer, according to spokeswoman Emily Strickler.

In an email to *NM Political Report*, Strickler said Dunn is promoting his Early Childhood Education Land Grant Act to state lawmakers at an American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) policy summit.

“The group Commissioner is presenting to at ALEC would not be voting on this legislation, but may be interested in using the legislation as a model for legislation in their states,” Strickler wrote. “Also, Commissioner will be meeting with New Mexico’s congressional delegation while in D.C. to discuss this legislation because it needs congressional approval.”

ALEC members use model legislation to spread laws throughout states, with the most high-profile example perhaps the so-called “Stand Your Ground” laws that are in place in several states. ALEC also has model legislation requiring photo ID to vote and on prison privatization.

ALEC does not disclose lawmakers who are members, but says over 2,000 individuals are members.

In 2012, several corporate members and individuals left the group after the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida. Florida has a “Stand your Ground” law.

At the time, State Sen. George Muñoz, the lone Democrat from New Mexico who was a member of the group, left. Sen. John Sapien, who attended several ALEC events but was not a member, denounced the group.

Congressman Steve Pearce’s Chief of Staff Todd Willens told *NM Political Report* Pearce was scheduled to meet with Dunn Thursday regarding the legislative proposal. Willens said the proposal “definitely interests the Congressman” and that Pearce will likely have questions.

“This is the chance to go through and discuss those items,” Willen said.

In a statement to *NM Political Report* U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich said he plans to meet with Dunn and has significant questions about how fast New Mexico can see financial returns.

“We are meeting with Commissioner Dunn to discuss his idea tomorrow and intend to do additional analysis on how many years it might take to produce revenue, but it has to be viewed in the context of a plan I already support to use existing permanent fund dollars to invest in early childhood education right away,” Heinrich said.

On the U.S. Senate floor in July, Heinrich criticized ALEC for legislative proposals that would transfer public lands from states to the federal government. He also accused ALEC of supporting selling off public land to private companies.

A spokesman for Congressman Ben Ray Lujan said his office was not aware of any meetings scheduled with Dunn.

Dunn’s proposal would transfer federally-owned mineral rights, located under privately owned land, to the state and divert proceeds from the leases to a newly-created permanent fund earmarked for early childhood education. Dunn’s office estimates the fund could raise $210 annually from lease royalties if the legislation passed and Congress approves the transfer.

New Mexico Commissioner of Public Lands Aubrey Dunn

Conservation Voters New Mexico spokeswoman Liliana Castillo said while her organization is concerned with money for education, they are also concerned that Dunn’s proposal would allow oil and gas companies to intrude on private land.

“Handing [mineral rights] over gives oil and gas operators the dominant use of [the property owner’s] land,” Castillo said. “It is still really giving the control of that land to the extractive industry.”

New Mexico statute still allows property owners the right to oppose or negotiate compensation for drilling operations on their private property.

Castillo said more oil and gas wells may raise money for early childhood education programs but that more wells will also negatively impact New Mexico.

“Climate change is going to be a huge part of our children’s future,” Castillo said.

NM Political Report reached out to New Mexico Voices for Children and Catholic Health Initiatives St. Joseph’s Children, two unrelated organizations that supported tapping the state’s Land Grant Permanent Fund for early childhood funding. Officials from both organizations declined to comment saying the groups needed to see fully written legislation to completely understand its impacts.

In New Mexico, Dunn will have his work cut out for him as he has to get the measure through the Legislature with both chambers now held by Democrats and convince Congress to transfer the land to his office’s control.

DOMENICI ON BOARD

Along with Dunn at the ALEC luncheon will be Republican Congressman Rob Bishop from Utah and former U.S. Senator Pete Domenici.

Dunn’s office announced Wednesday that Domenici, who retired in 2009, will serve as a policy advisor to Dunn. In a press release Dunn called Domenici “a wonderful asset to my administration.”

In a statement Wednesday, Domenici directly addressed Dunn’s proposal, which the two will both be discussing at the ALEC conference.

“I look forward to working with the Land Commissioner on the bill he has prepared regarding early childhood education and the assurance of funding for this initiative, as well as assisting the Land Commissioner in his overall obligation and commitment to education funding for New

Mexicans," Domenici said.

Bishop recently called on President-elect Donald Trump to abolish national monuments President Obama designated while in office.

In terms of concern over Dunn's proposal, Castillo said her group is still in "wait to see" mode, as it's still unclear what Trump's immediate plans for the Department of Interior are.

"Because of what happened in the election," Castillo said. "We're not really sure if the feds are interested in this."

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