

NEW MEXICO SECTION, SOUTHWEST CHIEF COALITION

UPDATE December 2, 2014

Last Monday (November 24), members of the Southwest Chief Coalition - NM Section including Jon Messier, Bill Sauble (Colfax County Commissioner and co-founder of the three-state SW Chief Coalition), Patricia Gonzales (Colfax County Manager), Mayor Alphonso Ortiz of Las Vegas, Ford Robbins and Lynn Aldrich (NARP NM Representative), attended a hearing before the Interim Economic and Rural Development Committee (ERDC). Other Coalition members were also attended which is very much appreciated.

The New Mexico Association of Counties (NMAC), our lobbying partner, was asked by the Committee to present its legislative agenda for 2015. The first item on the NMAC agenda is the continuation of the Chief on its current route. The NMAC was allotted a half-hour for its presentation. The presentation lasted for a little more than an hour. Brian Moore, NMAC Lobbyist, introduced the issue to the Committee and then introduced Bill Sauble, who made the formal presentation. Ford Robbins served as technical expert. The presentation was well received and was followed by hard questions. Most were answered to the Committee's satisfaction. Several others were answered honestly, but left some doubt with Committee members. Hallway discussions following the hearing increased our understanding as to why there is legislative hesitancy. Clarity has slowly been building as a result of our summer activities and the November hearing before the Interim Transportation Infrastructure Revenue Subcommittee. We are at a stage in our effort where Amtrak must state clearly and directly its funding request of New Mexico, and what it commits to should funding be approved.

Subsequent to the ERDC hearing, Ford Robbins and Rick Klein, La Junta City Manager, (co-founder and Leader of the three-state Southwest Chief Coalition), sent an email to Ray Lang, (Amtrak's Senior Director of State Relations) requesting such a written commitment. Mr. Lang has acknowledged our request. We are awaiting a response.

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Two weeks ago two almost identical letters appeared on the editorial pages of the Albuquerque Journal critical of the effort to keep the Chief on its current route. The legislative team wrote a response which was printed in its entirety by the Journal on November 23. A copy is included in the "News Clippings" section on the SWCCNM web site.