

March 1, 2018 – Report on Gail Armstrong - District 49 (Catron, Socorro, and Valencia counties)

Report by Randell major -

1):

I sat in on SM 30 "NO PERMIT FOR AUGUSTIN PLAINS RANCH WATER". It made it through several committees and then to the Senate Chamber and passed 36 to nothing. Which is good! Even though this memorial does not have the legal authority to direct the State Engineer what to do, it does send a strong signal.

This part is my opinion. The San Augustin Plains Ranch LLC has their lobbyist and are going strong to get our water. Senator Joseph Cervantes pointed out many different cities like Los Angeles, Phoenix, and others that get their water from somewhere else. Making the comment that NM may need to do the same" move water around". We need to keep up the fight. These guys are not going away anytime soon.

Thanks,

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2) REPORT OF MEETING WITH GAIL ARMSTRONG: (Please note that I have not received corrections from Gail Armstrong; if there are any I will send them to you)

Gail Armstrong, representative from District 49 (Catron, Socorro, and Valencia counties) met February 23 with her Datil constituents to bring them up to date on the recent legislative session. Armstrong outlined some of the Legislature's accomplishments for the large audience gathered at the Eagle Guest Café.

- \$188.9 million in new revenue provided raises for government workers, teachers and state health workers;
- \$5 million was restored to the reserves held by schools;
- Provided some funds for the problems created by the Carlsbad Brine Well, which the New Mexico government was supposed to oversee (the brine well has left an enormous hole that is threatening two highways and nearby buildings with collapse);
- Each Legislator was awarded \$500,000 for Capital Outlay. Armstrong chose to spend the Catron County portion of her amount for ambulances, streets in Reserve and the Quemado Water System.

Not everything supported by Armstrong was passed by the Legislature, however. The Constitutional Amendment to support early childhood education failed. A bill she sponsored – An Act Relating to the New Mexico State Defense Force -- passed the House, but in spite of her best efforts, was not heard on the floor of the Senate, and thus failed. (For those who want to know more, here is the link to the bill:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/18%20Regular/bills/house/HB0277.pdf>).

Making it clear time after time that feedback and communication with her constituents was a primary component of her strategy as a legislator, Armstrong stated, "I'm doing this because I care. I love this job, I want to do this job!" And, she continued, "I want to do what's right for New Mexico, not just vote along party lines."

Armstrong explained that it is easy for the legislators to overlook rural concerns and to emphasize urban issues when considering legislation. Noting that young people often leave the rural communities where they grow up, she pointed out, "I have nine grandkids, and I want them to stay in New Mexico."

She reminded the audience that New Mexico state legislators are not paid for their work: they are volunteers. And while they receive per diem during the session, fulfilling their legislative duties often costs legislators money.

Following her presentation, the audience asked Armstrong about the application to mine water in the Plains. Armstrong responded, "I have had two meetings with the State Engineer and he told me that he is very close to making a decision." "Should the application be denied," she said, "a bill to regulate large movements of water from the area of origin to a distant location would be my number one priority."

There was a discussion about the problems relating to senior centers and the need for the staff of the centers to learn how to ask the Legislature for money. There were no requests this year, in spite of the fact that the Catron County senior centers have unmet needs, such as a new roof for one of them. Armstrong plans to hold meetings with the relevant staff members to improve their ability to lobby the Legislature for their centers.

Also related to senior centers, Armstrong, as a member of the Health Committee, worked to provide money for additional fruits and vegetables for senior center meals. She promised to check to see if those funds reach rural New Mexico centers.

Armstrong predicted that real tax reform will be considered in the 2019 60-day session (this year's session was primarily related to budget matters) and she said that it "should pass, depending on who the governor is." School safety will also be considered in 2019.