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Over $26K of taxpayer money used for governor's trips

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Gov. Susana Martinez. AP file photo

Posted: Saturday, August 13, 2016 11:15 pm | *Updated: 11:22 pm, Sat Aug 13, 2016.*

By Steve Terrell
The New Mexican

Gov. Susana Martinez has traveled out of state this year to campaign for failed presidential candidate Marco Rubio, to speak at a New York Republican Party dinner attended by Donald Trump and other GOP candidates, to attend meetings of the Republican Governors Association, which she chairs, and to attend memorial services for slain police officers.

And while political organizations that invite the governor to out-of-state events pay for her expenses, state taxpayers covered $26,270.98 for the governor's travel during the first five months of the year.

Just a small portion of that sum — $3,407.58 — was for expenses incurred by Martinez and her staff. But the state spent $22,863 for transportation, hotels and food for the governor's security team to travel with her.

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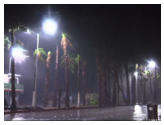

The Governor's Office and the state Department of Finance and Administration provided these figures in response to a public information request.

Not surprisingly in an election year, political travel accounted for much of Martinez's travel. She went to Washington, D.C., on Feb. 18 for meetings of the Republican Governors Association and the National Governors Association, returning to New Mexico on Feb. 22. The state paid just $136.61 to cover expenses for the governor and her staff but also $11,590.66 for her security.

In March, shortly after she endorsed Rubio for president, Martinez went to Wichita, Kan., Kansas City, Mo., and Jacksonville, Fla., to campaign for him. She left Florida on March 5 to attend a Republican Governors Association function, and returned to New Mexico on March 7.

The total for her March travel was $3,640.98 — all for her security officers. However, that figure includes a trip to Las Vegas, Nev., for the Mountain West basketball tournament — which in recent years has become a Martinez tradition — and a "trade mission" trip to Los Angeles in late March.

In April, the governor spoke at a New York Republican Party dinner that was attended by the three GOP presidential candidates — Trump, Ted Cruz and John Kasich — who at the time were still in the race. From there, she flew to West Palm Beach, Fla., for a Republican Governors Association meeting. While there, she attended a meeting at the mansion of billionaire GOP donor David Koch, where she and other Republican governors made scathing remarks about Trump.

There were no reported expenses for Martinez's April travels — which included a weeklong trip to New York and South Carolina with New Mexico Amigos, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan corporation that's officially designated as "goodwill ambassadors" for New Mexico.

During a five-day period in May, Martinez flew to St. Louis for a Republican Governors Association event. This was on her way to Washington, D.C., where she attended the burial of Albuquerque police Officer Daniel Webster at Arlington National Cemetery. Webster, who was shot and killed on duty in October, was a former Army Ranger. While in Washington, Martinez also attended a candlelight vigil in memory of officers who died on duty last year.

On her way back, Martinez stopped in Omaha, Neb., where she spoke to the Nebraska Republican Party's convention.

This trip cost taxpayers $3,270.97 for Martinez and her staff, plus $7,631.76 for her security officers.

Martinez is not the first governor of this state who has spent taxpayer dollars to go to political events outside New Mexico.

Her predecessor, Democrat Bill Richardson, makes Martinez seem like a homebody, especially in 2007, when he was campaigning for president. In the latter part of that year, there were some months in which Richardson spent more time out of state than he did in New Mexico. One of his spokesmen told The Associated Press in 2007 that Richardson's political committee paid the travel expenses for the state police who accompanied him for security.

After his own campaign ended in early 2008, Richardson continued making many out-of-state trips to campaign for Democratic presidential nominee Barack

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Obama. Richardson in 2008 told The Associated Press that the Obama campaign was paying for his travel, but the state was paying for his police security detail.

The New Mexican, in its June 14 public records request, asked for "any and all records related to out-state-travel expenses for Gov. Susana Martinez from January 1, 2016 to the present. This would include, but not be limited to, records of expenses and reimbursements for the governor, her security detail and any other staff that traveled with her."

But instead of providing the actual records, the Department of Finance and Administration provided two lists — one for the governor and her staff and one for her security team — of total expenses broken down by month.

Department spokeswoman Julia Ruetten said in an email, "Due to the security risk of disclosing specific details of the governor's out-of-state travel, we do not disclose the itemized procurement card statements for the governor, governor's security detail, and staff traveling with the governor out-of-state. The release of such itemized procurement card statements ... would identify the public safety officer assigned to protect the governor on specific dates and would include transaction-level detail, including the transaction date, vendor name (e.g., hotel or restaurant), and city and state of the transaction. Disclosure of such information could compromise the physical and identity security of the governor or her family, thereby compromising the governor's and her family's right to be free from physical harm."

Ruetten cited a Texas case in which that state's Supreme Court ruled against three newspapers that tried to obtain travel vouchers for Gov. Rick Perry's state police detail.

New Mexico officials have made the same argument in the past in withholding the governor's travel records.

"The Department of Finance and Administration has created and provided you with a reasonable compilation of security expenditures at a level of detail that does not jeopardize the governor's security, but also adequately provides information related to out-of-state travel expenses," Ruetten wrote.

But Susan Boe, executive director of New Mexico Foundation for Open Government, said that reasoning doesn't fly in New Mexico.

"There is no exception under the [New Mexico inspection of Public Records Act] for security issues as the law has been interpreted by New Mexico Courts," Boe said. "The case [Ruetten] cited in your denial is from Texas, which has no authority here."

Three years ago, Boe said, the state Supreme Court decided that unless there is a clear exception in the law, requests for records can't be denied.

Martinez continues to travel out of state. She went to Washington state June 25 to campaign for Republican Bill Bryant for governor. She was in Dallas for a memorial for slain police officers in mid-July before she flew to Cleveland for the Republican National Convention. Early last week, she went to Dallas for political meetings. Her political action committee paid for the travel, a spokesman said.

Contact Steve Terrell at 505-986-3037 or sterrell@sfnewmexican.com. Read his political blog at tinyurl.com/roundhouseroundup.

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Governor's out-of-state travels

• Jan. 2-3: Dallas, personal

• Feb 18-22: Washington, D.C., Republican Governors Association/National Governors Association

• March 4-5: Wichita, Kan., Kansas City, Mo., Jacksonville, Fla., campaigning for Marco Rubio for president

• March 5-7: Salt Lake City, Republican Governors Association

• March 10-13: Las Vegas, Nev., Mountain West Tournament

• March 28-30: Los Angeles, California trade mission

• April 13-15: New York, New York Republican Party event

• April 15-17: West Palm Beach, Fla., Republican Governors Association

• April 23-29: New Mexico Amigos, New York and Charleston, S.C.

• May 10-11: St. Louis, Republican Governors Association

• May 11-14: Washington, D.C., National Law Enforcement Memorial events, including the burial of Albuquerque officer Daniel Webster

• May 14: Omaha, Neb., Nebraska Republican Party event

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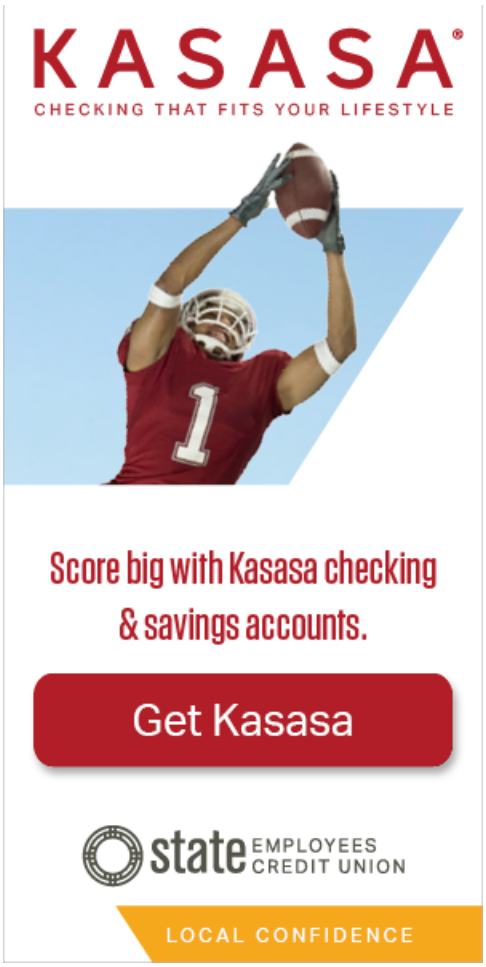

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For out of state trips, how many state police accompany Gov. Martinez and her former undersheriff husband?

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Why not compare that to what got spent when good ol Wild Bill traveled all over the world. Oh how quickly they forget.

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Lee Garcia

This is typical in NM Government. The politicians are living a hollywood life while the community is scrounging to buy food and pay bills. Governor Martinez has not done a damn thing for NM. I wish her term was over. Politicians here are pathetic thieves.

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Ban KKiller · Works at JP Morgan Chase Bank

I did not know our "STATE" works for candidates of any persuassion. Trade missions, ok, Governor meetings, ok, but campaigning for ANY candidate is not what Governor Martinez was elected for...at least I don't recall that.

Governor Martinez is out of touch with the future. She should look at what other states are doing with Hemp. As usual we will join the hemp movement when the other states are far, far ahead of us in production and manufacturing of hemp products. She is too busy stumping for other States candidates. Oh, and NOW she likes the movie industry after almost destroying it?

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Don't even get us started on what big banks have done to screw up the country.....

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Gerry Maestas

Twenty six thousand? Outrageous. The city of Santa Fe lost only 30 million taxpayers' dollars. SF County sherifff spent some time learning to use ebay i think. The SF County manager is under indictment? We won't go into detail re Richardson. Expert at covering tracks. But Dems care about the poor and the middle class so brush it off folks.

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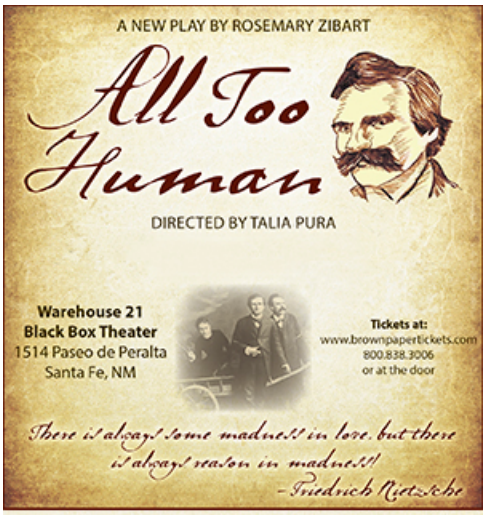

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