New Mexico Press Association Foundation

SHOP TALK

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2026 NMPA Sammy Lopez College Journalism Workshop

New Mexico profited $2 billion in cannabis sales amid federal crackdown on interstate sales

By Ruby Mendoza

LAS CRUCES – New Mexico, nationally known for its chile and chile festivals, now has an outsized reputation for another type of plant, cannabis.

Statistics from the New Mexico Cannabis Control Division show the state surpassed $2 billion in combined medical and recreational cannabis sales, setting local economies on fire in 2026.

In the last four years, medical marijuana use remained a steady market, bringing in over $600 million to state revenue, with recreational use creating a profit of over $1 billion.

Marijuana consumption was legalized in New Mexico in 2022. As of October 2026, there are over 1,000 established dispensaries across the state. However, under federal law, marijuana remains a Schedule 1 controlled substance. In neighboring Texas, marijuana consumption and possession is a state and federal crime.

Border Patrol checkpoints are still federal entities, and there are five on the major highways of New Mexico. For those who purchase marijuana in New Mexico intending to take it over state borders that poses a problem. Vehicles can be searched at patrol checkpoints with consent and based on probable cause.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham voiced concerns that the "scrutiny of cannabis companies appears to be greater in New Mexico than states with regulated markets that aren't along the U.S. border with Mexico."

In 2024, more than 10 legal cannabis managers and transporters filed a petition to broker free passage of shipments because jobs and investments were at stake. KRQE reported that "licensed cannabis providers file complaints that more than $300,000 worth of marijuana has been confiscated."



CREDIT: NATHAN MIRABAL CO-OWNER OF AN CANNABIS PRODUCER

Mature winter plants ready to be cut. More crystallization shows better production.

Orlando Marrero-Rubio, public information officer for U.S. Border Patrol said "although medical and recreational marijuana may be legal in some U.S. States and Canada, the sale, possession, production and distribution of marijuana or the facilitation of the aforementioned remain illegal under U.S. federal law."

Medical marijuana, too, has become controversial under President Donald J. Trump. Trump first requested removal of state protections for medical marijuana in 2025. The administration shifted gears a year later, proposing to keep state medical marijuana enactments from federal interference.

Nathan Mirabal is a commercial cannabis producer in Alamogordo, New Mexico. He and his uncle started growing in 2021. With the legalization of recreational cannabis, the pair created a profitable business. He travels across New Mexico to distribute his product.

He said he avoids checkpoints.

"For me, it's worth the drive to sell it for twice as much. But, I feel like I have seen more dispensaries going out of business because of it (the federal regulation)," said Mirabal.

Mirabal's supplemented greenhouse grows four to five harvests a year. That means taking care of 1,600 plants a year. The cannabis industry is something to take seriously, especially because herbal plants and cannabis have been used for the good of people for thousands of years, Mirabal said.

"I think cannabis has been federally criminalized. We haven't been able to fully study what cannabis actually does to people," he said.

"State laws should be (oriented) to buying and accessing. The federal government should take over the research end, but overall profits should stay to the state."

There are 425,002 full-time equivalent jobs supported by legal cannabis in the nation. The U.S. cannabis industry is expected to reach almost $47 billion in profit in 2026.

Ruby Mendoza is a student at New Mexico State University. Follow her on Instagram at @rubymedza_media.



CREDIT: NPR

Project Jupiter is a massive data center located in Doña Ana County.

The legislative backlash to New Mexico data centers

By Jules Elizondo

ALBUQUERQUE - New Mexico is attracting major investments in AI data centers, but lawmakers and residents are concerned about how the projects could affect the state's water supply, utility costs and communities.

Project Jupiter, an AI data center being constructed in Doña Ana County, is one of several projects sparking debate. Meta, also a large contributor in the tech industry in New Mexico, operates a data center in Los Lunas which it is expanding.

State Rep. Eleanor Chávez, who represents District 26 in Bernalillo County, supports a proposed moratorium that would give lawmakers time to evaluate the risks of data centers before counties and municipalities independently welcome more development.

"We need to be, for lack of a better word, protective of our community," Chávez said.

Shop Talk requested comment from Meta and Project Jupiter for this reporting but did not receive a reply.

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PROJECT JUPITER

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State Rep. Angelica Rubio, who is sponsoring legislation for a moratorium and a ban on data centers, also supports slowing development. Rubio pointed to multiple concerns surrounding Project Jupiter.

"I think one of the reasons is because of how bad Project Jupiter has sort of unraveled, and the lack of transparency with community members," Rubio said.

Chávez said large areas of available land may be one reason developers are looking at New Mexico.

Oracle said in numerous public statements that data centers like Project Jupiter create jobs and economic growth. Oracle's Project Jupiter is projected to generate $13 billion in economic impact for New Mexico over its construction and first 17 years of operation, according to an Mangum Economics analysis. But concerns have been raised over how many of those jobs will go to New Mexico residents.

A report reviewed by Searchlight New Mexico found that Project Jupiter listed no full-time or part-time jobs at the site as of June 30. The report recorded 2,105 construction jobs through that date, raising questions about when the benefits of those jobs will be felt by the local community.

Rubio said New Mexico has a history of offering tax incentives to industries that ultimately leave the state. She worries that data centers could follow a similar pattern.

"We need to look for something that's more sustainable," Rubio said.

Data centers rely on electricity to run servers and to keep equipment cool. Some cooling systems use large amounts of water every day, which could make it harder in a community that has already faced years of drought. According to a report from Source New Mexico, data center water use in New Mexico could jump to 23.6 billion gallons a year.

"If data centers come here to build and they use a lot of water, what water are we going to use to be able to farm or feed animals?" Chávez said.

Doña Ana County's agreement with Project Jupiter said the data center will use 20,000 gallons of drinking water a day, with a 60,000-gallon limit. Oracle said the facility's cooling system will use recycled water, so it won't waste drinking water.

Peter Gonzalez, an Albuquerque resident opposed to expanding artificial intelligence and the continuation of Project Jupiter, said he worries about the environmental effects of data centers.

"We need clean air to breathe," he said.

Chávez said lawmakers need more information about the projects' current and future effects, tax incentives and employment promises.

"The major lesson is to listen to the community," she said.

She criticized the lack of transparency around Project Jupiter, and said its development has led the public to mistrust elected officials. She also wants companies to pay for the electricity used at data center facilities, rather than shifting those costs to New Mexicans.

"Who benefits and who pays?" Chávez said.

Jules Elizondo is a student at the University of New Mexico. You can follow her on social media at @julian__elizondo.

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Robinson Park: Safety and homelessness intersect in Albuquerque neighborhood

By Jules Elizondo

ALBUQUERQUE - Police officers on horseback surrounded people at Robinson Park on Sept. 25 and told them to leave, creating controversy on a key topic in Albuquerque: homelessness.

The city limited public access to Robinson Park, closing it from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and again from 2 p.m to 5 p.m. The City of Albuquerque sent neighbors living around the park a flyer with the change in schedule, stating that this was because crews needed to maintain the grounds, improve safety and coordinate outreach services for people experiencing homelessness.

Leah Epstein, an organizer with the Albuquerque Party for Socialism and Liberation, said while the restrictions target systemic issues, it risks moving unhoused people out of public spaces without providing them a place to go.

"If we want to make sure that homeless people are not in public spaces, we need to house people," she said. "It's not about pushing people out of public space and making the problem less visible."

According to a 2025 report from New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness, New Mexico saw an 8% increase in homelessness. It was found that 1,367 people across New Mexico were unhoused, meaning they were living on the streets in unsustainable conditions.

The restrictions highlighted another decision that impacted access to another Albuquerque park recently. Coronado Park was fenced off when it became extremely populated with unhoused people. Officials said they were concerned about safety, drug use and poor sanitation at the park.

Robinson Park hosts many community events, including the popular Saturday morning Growers Market, the one exception to the new schedule which ousts visitors for five hours a day, including weekends.

Albuquerque City Parks and Recreation Director David Simon said the schedule gives crews time to pick up trash, maintain irrigation and complete larger projects while allowing the city to coordinate security and programming.

Albuquerque Community Safety continues conducting outreach at the park about seven days a week, Simon said. He said that the department was already seeing improvements at the park, but referred questions on specific outcomes to community safety officials.

Meanwhile, questions remain about the resources available to the homeless impacted by the change. In September, the City Council voted to grant a neighborhood appeal and revoke the conditional-use permit for Mepower Health Service, an overnight shelter on Yale Boulevard SE.



CREDIT: KUNM

Signs displaying Robinson Park's restricted hours and photos from protest on Oct.10, 2026 in Albuquerque.

The City of Albuquerque's own Shelter Resources and Encampment Transparency page states that most shelters accept individuals through provider referral only. This means that even when shelter services exist, people may need help navigating the system before they can access a bed.

Simon said the city has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in its broader homeless response.

"We're still committed to connecting people with services they need. And making sure the park is accessible, clean, safe for all community members who enjoy the public space," Simon said. "That includes unhoused people."

Albuquerque city officials issued a statement in 2022, detailing observed violence, drug activity, and unsanitary conditions at Coronado Park. Simon said the closure showed the dangers of letting encampments grow without adequate services.

Advocates reported that unhoused people previously living in Robinson Park moved to other locations around Albuquerque, including areas near Interstate 40, where they were met with further displacement.

Simon said the Coronado Park incident and these new Robinson Park restrictions are "two completely different situations."

"People want solutions to these problems," Epstein said.

Jules Elizondo is a student at the University of New Mexico. Follow her on social media @julian__elizondo.

Mixed fleet of hybrid and electric buses strengthens Las Cruces bus system

By Uziel Ramos

LAS CRUCES – The U.S. Census Bureau, in a 2019 report, estimated that roughly 70% of all transit riders in the country lived in seven metropolitan areas it considered "transit-heavy."

Las Cruces, a city of about 100,000 residents spent over $5 million on a public transit system, according to its 2025 fiscal year report.

RoadRunner Transit is the City of Las Cruces' public transportation system, consisting of a fleet of electric and diesel buses. Operations began on April 21, 1986, and its 40 year anniversary was celebrated in April 2026. RoadRunner Transit provided 801,887 unlinked trips to riders that year, while its paratransit system, Vamonos, provided an additional 56,832 trips, according to the 2025 report. Richard Hanway is the City of Las Cruces transit director. He has 30 years of experience as a bus operator and worked with Hanway Trucking before assuming the position.

Hanway said he would describe the transit system as "in good shape," and said a new maintenance center, constructed in 2024, helped improve operations by moving bus maintenance and operator training to a newer facility.

"We do a really good job of covering the city limits, which is where our main responsibility is," Hanway said. "We recently just built a brand new maintenance and operations center over behind the TA Truck stop, which is on Westway Avenue, that was like a $28 million facility. Its purpose is to last us for the next 40 to 50 years.

"Prior to that, we were on a very small lot on Hadley, like the corner salon on [East] Hadley Avenue behind the aquatic center, and we had just ran out of space … the building was over 40 years old."

Hanway said one suggestion he has frequently heard from residents was to expand bus services on weekends. On Saturdays service is limited to 8:30 a.m. through 4:30 p.m., while Sundays have no service at all.

"I have the vehicles, but I don't have the funding to get more staff," Hanway said. "One of our biggest hurdles at this point would be to find a way to try to fund Sunday service. You're going to have to make a large investment on hiring some full-time people, because then we could turn around and maybe add a second shift on Saturday to have it run the same 6:30 a.m. through 10:30 p.m. hours as Monday through Friday. Or have it do that on Sunday as well."

Extending service into weekends is not the only concern. Jesiyah Franco, a culinary arts major, carries his white apron and school bag on the bus to Doña Ana Community College every day. Considering how people can conceal items in clothing or bags, Franco said he would like to see the transit department provide an extra measure of security for riders.

"I don't know how they would do it exactly, but like, maybe, metal detectors at the doors, so no one has weapons on the bus," Franco said. "Weapons are a big thing. The sign (on the bus) might say one thing, but some people will always carry weapons."

Franco said fare-free public transit provides a convenient mode of transportation to residents who do not have access to personal vehicles.

"If this bus was not free, a lot of people would not be able to get to place, to place, to places like they're supposed to do every day," Franco said. "So, it is very important in the way it is now."

After applying for a federal grant in September 2026, Hanway said that the funds would be used to purchase six hybrid electric buses instead of additional fully electric ones as a safety measure.

"The reason we pivoted from just the battery electric buses to the hybrid electric is, well, for a couple of reasons, but the main reason is that we wanted to make sure that we still had vehicles if the grid ever went down," Hanway said. "It's good to have a mixed fleet."

While on Route 2 by the Church St. and Las Cruces stop near downtown, rider Ramon Chaparro's electric bus temporarily broke down. While the interruption was inconvenient, Chaparro said he still trusts the transit network he relies on.

"It's a new technology, it's still coming along, so there will still be small things like that," Chaparro said. "Anything mechanical always breaks down from time to time, but it's not a big issue. Just gotta fix 'em."

Uziel Ramos is a student journalist with the New Mexico Press Association and at The Round Up, NMSU's independent student newspaper. Follow him on Instagram @ uziel_articles for more news.



CREDIT: UZIEL RAMOS

Two Roadrunner Transit buses parked by the RoadRunner Transit terminal station at 300 W Lohman Ave. Buses in the transit system arrive here to allow bus operators and riders switch to different buses. Oct. 8, 2026.

Thank you to our workshop mentors

By Jessica Onsurez

The first newsroom I worked in was manned by some of the smartest journalists I've ever met. Stella Davis and Martha Mauritson had combined decades of experience covering the community of Carlsbad, and they eagerly shared that institutional knowledge with a cub reporter who had a lot of enthusiasm but very little real world journalism experience. It was their mentorship, and the support of other veteran journalists like Brandon Bowers, Aaron Bracamontes and Bob Moore, that launched my career.

Mentorship is essential to a strong journalism industry because it helps emerging reporters develop the judgment, confidence and practical skills that cannot be learned from a textbook alone. In New Mexico, where newsrooms often operate with limited staff and journalists may be asked to cover several beats at once, guidance from an experienced colleague can make an immediate difference. Mentors help newer journalists sharpen their reporting, ask better questions, navigate ethical challenges and understand the responsibility that comes with serving the public.

Mentorship is especially important in a state as geographically, culturally and linguistically diverse as New Mexico. Experienced journalists can share institutional knowledge about communities, government agencies, tribal nations, border issues and rural areas that may otherwise take years to build. That knowledge helps journalists approach sources with greater care, avoid repeating harmful assumptions and produce coverage that reflects the history and complexity of the people they serve.

Strong mentoring relationships also help make journalism careers more sustainable. In New Mexico, where opportunities for advancement may require journalists to take on leadership responsibilities quickly, mentorship can help prepare the next generation of editors, investigative reporters, photographers, producers and community-focused storytellers.

Ultimately, mentorship strengthens not only individual journalists but the entire New Mexico news ecosystem.

Thank you to those journalists who volunteered to mentor the New Mexico Press Association Sammy Lopez College Journalism Workshop student journalists in this year's cohort.

It is from them that the standards of accuracy, fairness, curiosity and accountability are passed along to the next generation of reporters serving our communities.

2026 New Mexico Press Association Sammy Lopez College Journalism Workshop Mentors

- Adrian Hedden, Carlsbad Current-Argus, El Rito Media
- Lily Alexander, Santa Fe New Mexican
- Trip Jennings, New Mexico In Depth
- Gregory Hasman, Albuquerque Journal
- Julia Dendinger, Valencia County News-Bulletin
- Melanie Becker-Donovan, Roswell Daily Record

If you are interested in learning more about serving as a mentor to emerging journalists, please email me at jonsurez@usatodayco.com.

The Dynamic Duo retiring after 30+ years with the Lovington Leader

Clemens Lovejoy and Shurette named to New Mexico Press Association Hall of Fame

By Ruby Mendoza

LOVINGTON – Joyce Clemens Lovejoy and Karen Shurette declared they would retire from the Lovington Leader, Lea County's oldest newspaper, this year.

The Lovington Leader first published in 1910, and operated as a family-owned paper in the 1960s. Clemens Lovejoy started working there as an advertising manager after her sister got her the job. Deciding to stick to it, Clemens Lovejoy is retiring with more than 50 years at the Leader.

"I started with making headlines and then graduated to cutting and pasting the page, and then I learned to develop the page and use the press. I would also deliver on the paper routes," said Clemens Lovejoy.

She also worked as the paper's photographer on multiple occasions. However, she chose not to have her name attached to them. Clemens Lovejoy felt like she wasn't good enough to be given credit. She was just grateful to enjoy the people she met through the paper and be with them in exciting places.

One of those people was Shurette. Once Shurette started working at the newspaper, it was like they became a family.

"Karen and I became really close. We had similar lives, if something were to happen to her first, it would happen to me next," said Clemens Lovejoy.

Clemens Lovejoy describes Shurette as the more shy and timid one of the bunch. A description that Shurette uses herself.

"Unfortunately my name is Karen, but I promise I'm not (a Karen)," said Shurette.

Working at the Lovington Leader with Clemens Lovejoy is something Shurette is grateful for, 30 years later.

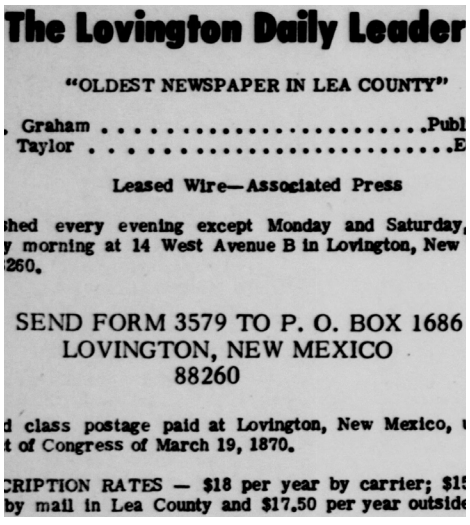
"A lot of my memories are with Joyce. We would get into some of the funniest predicaments and we were like Lucy and Ethel. Like I say, we're family," said Shurette.

Shurette grew to learn and love the ins and outs of selling a newspaper. The newspaper was a responsibility they had to work on as a team, five days a week, and eventually one day a week.

Lovington, New Mexico's current population is about 11,000. When the paper first launched there were almost 2,000 people living in the community.

"A lot of readers were older people, if they didn't get their paper they'd be upset. It was the only source for their news," said Shurette. "It was like the mail; rain or shine, you had to have that paper out."

Rain or shine, Clemens Lovejoy and



The Lovington Daily Leader

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CREDIT: NEWSPAPERARCHIVE

Printed on Oct. 1, 1970 keying the Lovington Leader as "the oldest paper in Lea County".

Shurette talk everyday and with both of them declaring retirement, they can get more involved in the community that they have served for half a century, they said.

In the decades of interviewing their neighbors, working the press, and building friendship the Dynamic Duo have gathered many stories. They met several New Mexican governors; Richardson and Martinez. They were there when President Bush visited Hobbs in 2004 on his campaign run. The Lovington Leader also featured community events like the fair and rodeo fiddlers contest, an annual tradition every August.

The pair still get calls inviting them to come out to community events, but, for now they plan to make time for themselves.

"Being retired is unreal. I'm looking forward to living and traveling and just being around people," said Clemens Lovejoy.

Shurette plans to stay in Lovington and hopefully, make a dent on the packed closet in her house.

"You know, when you work everyday, you just don't get through it," she said. "But, I'm really looking forward to enjoying being retired".

As of Oct. 1, 2026 The Lovington Leader was sold to and will be operated by the Hobbs News-Sun. Even though the newspaper is under new leadership, the duo has complete trust in its future.

"The paper needed a new turn with new people. But, we appreciate the readers all these years who have stuck with us," said Shurette.

The two women will be inducted on Oct. 17, 2026 to the New Mexico Press Association's Hall of Fame. The award has honored over 70 New Mexican journalists who have contributed immensely to local journalism and the state of their community newspapers.

Ruby Mendoza is a student at New Mexico State University. Follow her on social media at @rubymedza_media.

Inside Ed Williams' investigative work

By Jules Elizondo

ALBUQUERQUE – When a 13-year-old girl in Hobbs said she was raped at school, the school punished her instead of helping her, according to an investigation by Searchlight New Mexico.

For Searchlight New Mexico Investigations Editor Ed Williams, the case highlighted a larger problem: institutions designed to protect children can fail, and those responsible are not always held accountable.

Williams has built his career around revealing overlooked problems. His reporting examines the systems that affect New Mexicans, from foster care to human trafficking, often focused on people who struggled to have their voices heard.

"Being a reporter can kind of have an outsize impact for kids and especially in New Mexico," Williams said.

Children lack the lobbyists, unions and other organized groups that can advocate for their interests at the New Mexico Legislature, he said. Investigative reporting helps shed light on these issues by exposing problems to the public and holding institutions accountable.



CREDIT: SEARCHLIGHT NEW MEXICO

Ed Williams, Investigations Editor Searchlight New Mexico.

Williams was raised in Austin, Texas, and became interested in journalism while he was studying abroad in Spain during the Iraq War. He later traveled to Peru to report on U.S. coca-eradication policies - money used to destroy the plants used to make cocaine - and its harmful effects on New Mexico communities. NPR's Latino USA featured Williams and his reporting while he was still in college.

He later earned a master's degree in journalism at the University of Texas before working for KDNK in Colorado and KUNM in New Mexico. When he joined Searchlight in 2018, he worked in multimedia production. An investigation into New Mexico's treatment foster care system changed that trajectory. The story went on to win a national award and Williams became a full-time reporter.

His expertise in investigative journalism has shaped his colleagues' work. Lily Alexander, a state accountability reporter for Searchlight New Mexico, said Williams has offered valuable guidance on sourcing and public records requests while they work together on an investigation.

"He's a masterclass in investigative reporting," she said.

Some of his most inspiring work has followed issues beyond New Mexico. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Williams investigated drug and trafficking networks operating on the Navajo Nation, tracing connections from Los Angeles to New Mexico and Oklahoma. He said national outlets later covered the issue, but Searchlight was the first to report it.

For Williams, exposing misconduct is only the beginning. His investigations have helped prompt government and legislative responses. Williams said the goal is to inform people while also seeing some positive change.

When asked what advice he would give his younger self, Williams returned to his natural instinct as an investigative reporter.

"I would tell myself to not be afraid to go for the biggest story you can," he said.

Williams is to be honored with an A-Mark Prize for Investigative Reporting by the New Mexico Press Association during its Oct. 17 Better Newspaper Awards Gala.

Jules Elizondo is a student at the University of New Mexico. Follow her on social media at @julian__elizondo.

From broadcast booth to senate floor: Carrie Hamblen on strategy, service and standing her ground

By Addisyn Hartman

Former broadcast journalist turned New Mexico senator, Carrie Hamblen, credits the television show "Survivor" for not only providing an escape from reality, but for acting as a guiding beacon in her advocacy and legislative career.

"I started watching the television show Survivor, and Survivor is all about strategies and relationships," Hamblen said.

"I have an undergraduate degree in broadcast journalism. I have a master's in communication studies, and I have a master's in public administration. And as somebody who's always been fascinated by why people say the things they do, Survivor was like candy for me."

Joining KRWG as a student employee in 1992 while pursuing two Masters of Arts at New Mexico State University, Hamblen made her mark on the radio industry, trailblazing her public affairs show "Images" and serving as the regional host of NPR's Morning Edition, among other programs.

After stepping away from radio, Hamblen became executive director of the Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce in 2012, an organization devoted to aiding local economies and environmentally sustainable small businesses.

Hamblen was elected to New Mexico Senate in 2021, and has advocated for the LGBTQ+ community and social equity in all walks of life. Serving as a renowned voice to protect underserved people and lands, she was co-chair of Southern New Mexico PRIDE and has been a strong supporter of the New Mexico Human Rights Act (House Bill 207).

Hamblen is to be honored alongside Sen. Peter Wirth at the New Mexico Press Association's 2026 Better Newspaper Awards Gala with the inaugural bestowal of the Free Press Champion Award on Oct. 17. The award recognizes her efforts to protect free press and her commitment to help journalism thrive for generations to come.

Shop Talk asked Hamblen to share her thoughts on the award and freedom of the press in New Mexico.

Q: What was your initial entrance to the news world like?

A: I went into college as a mechanical engineering major because I like to build things, my brain works that way. But when I kept falling asleep in my intro to mechanical engineering class… And I was like, I think I need to change my major because I'm not interested in this. So, I went into broadcast journalism as an undergraduate degree because speaking clearly over a microphone is not a difficult thing for me. I also grew up with a single mom who hated her job, and I was like, if I'm going to work someplace, I want to make sure I like my job, and so I wanted to go into something that I liked. So, I wasn't real political then. I was really careful, also as an out lesbian, really strategic about how out I was, and so when I went to KRWG at NMSU, I was really careful about how I navigated that.

At the time I was a student announcer for a classical program called Performance Today, and then really started kind of picking up other different shifts and learning how to do that and eventually became the morning news anchor and the operations manager at KRWG. I was always cognizant of being a journalist and making sure that I didn't have biased opinions because that was something that was really important to me, but if you knew me personally and knew my politics, you could always tell what my politics were.

Q: Congratulations on being honored at the Dixon Awards. What did the Dixon Award mean to you personally and professionally?

A: It's very humbling, first and foremost, because I wasn't expecting it

It's always kind of like, an extra acknowledgement is always nice, you know, because as politicians, people have a tendency of criticizing everything that you're doing and not paying attention to anything good. And so what I'm getting recognized for with the Dixon Award is because of the lack of transparency regarding Project Jupiter,

I have friends on the (Doña Ana) County Commission. I have great respect for my friends on the County Commission. The County Commission didn't do its due diligence or was very thoughtful in what they did, and so we are now seeing a community terrified about what is going to happen to their water and their air, and the lack of transparency that is happening with Project Jupiter, the lack of insisting on transparency from the county commission.

I am not opposed to economic development. I am opposed to economic development being dictated by people who don't live in the communities where they want to place it, and that is what's happened with



CREDIT: NMLEGIS.GOV
New Mexico Senator Carrie Hamblen

Project Jupiter.

Q: So you've clearly worn so many hats over the span of your career: journalist, advocate, legislator. What personal values have stayed constant through your career transitions?

A: I've always been somebody who's felt recognized. I've always had privilege as a white person, but then also as a woman and as a queer woman. That's, you know, kind of one step forward, two steps back. Understanding that, you know, there's this thing called white saviorism, and it's where like white folks go in and try and save those communities, those impoverished communities, because we think we should.

…I know that I can help communities because I've been in this position of influence, because of my radio job, people know me that I don't even know.I know in my position that I can help people, but I don't want to participate in white saviorism. So what do I do? …My friend, her name is Susie Melton, she said, "your job is to open the door and step aside."

Q: You've spent so much of your life serving New Mexico in different capacities. What does this state mean to you personally?

A: Well, I deliberately moved to New Mexico for two reasons: a girl, and that New Mexico was much more progressive than El Paso and Texas. Knowing that I was going to be living my truth, being able to live my truth that I wasn't able to live in El Paso. You know, when I first came out all those years ago in the '90s, I was really careful about where I held my girlfriend's hand, and you know, were we sisters or were we roommates?

You know, and even trans people have to be just as cautious now today because they are now the new letter of the alphabet that are being attacked, and politicized, and demonized and harmed. And so you know I feel like in New Mexico is a state where you can help create change, and actually see it impact people, whereas, in like bigger states, you don't really do that.

Q: Do you have any final words of advice for those aiming to pursue a career path similar to yours - journalism, politics or advocacy?

A: I didn't realize this at the time, but I think that they (careers) all actually very much complement each other for a number of reasons. You know, being a journalist, you do research and you look at different sides, and you can call bullshit when you see it, and you know when there's legitimate facts. With the Green Chamber, being able to look at bigger policy at the state and federal level has really taught me (a lot.) And then with my nonprofit work, (it) really taught me about running effective meetings,

I think they've all kind of really complemented each other in that, you know, I do a podcast because of my work in radio, and I do this as a means of educating people about our legislature because there are so many people who don't understand what the process is for a bill, much less should we get paid, which we should, because 95% of New Mexicans can't quit their jobs to go and be at the table where they should be, and so it's all kind of really, it's worked out well.

Addisyn Hartman is a student journalist at NMSU's independent student newspaper, The Round Up, and the New Mexico Press Association. Follow her on Instagram @ add1synh or contact her email: addisynh@ nmsu.edu.

After 30 years of IPRA, New Mexico Task Force offers recommendations for change

By Ruby Mendoza

SANTA FE - The Inspection and Public Records Act has been in effect in New Mexico since the 1990s. Thirty years later, the Inspection of Public Records Task Force released recommendations to update the law.

State representatives suggested the need for the Inspection of Public Records (IPRA) Task Force by the New Mexico Department of Justice "to study the implementation of the Inspection and Public Records Act."

The IPRA Task Force was created by House Joint Memorial 2, which passed the legislature in 2026. The Task Force began meeting in May 2026 to compile plans and strategy based on past public comment and United States open law research.

The eight-member organization travelled to 11 cities in New Mexico over the course of six months. The New Mexico Department of Justice said in a news release that it was asked to listen to "input from public and governmental stakeholders such as schools, universities, the judicial branch, district attorneys, public defenders, and broadcast journalists."

Having open records is a "vital part of democracy and ensures effective government transparency," made in part by HJM 2 and current New Mexico laws, called Sunshine Laws, according to the news release.

New Mexico's Sunshine LawS ensure state government proceedings are open to the public under the Open Meetings Act. Known as the Sunshine Portal Transparency Act, all budgets, expenditures, revenues and public school data are public records. There is public access to local and state government records as managed by IPRA record custodians.

"The recommendations are two groups, one advocating for records custodians and the other advocating for the public, saying this is what records custodians need to get through this new era that we're in," said Christine Barber, executive director for Foundation for Open Government.

"We purposefully made it so that both sides were heard."

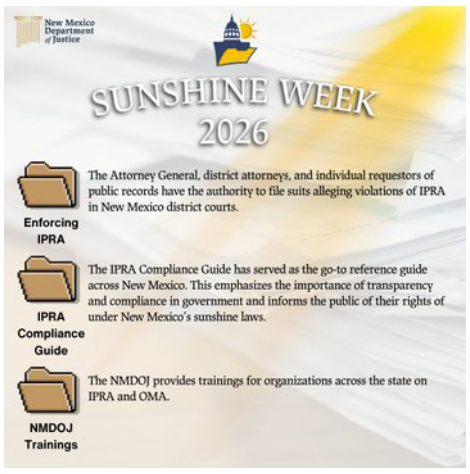
"The new era" pertains to the amount of records requests that are filed in and out of the state, helped by technological advances, that records custodians cannot healthily and easily maintain. Custodians have seen a 200% increase in the number of record requests the past three to four years.

The City of Albuquerque describes it as "disproportionate pressure on processing capacity" in its first quarter IPRA report.



CREDIT: NMDOJ FACEBOOK

The New Mexico Dept. of Justice released dates and locations for daily summer meetings where they would convene for "all New Mexicans invested in open and accountable government."



NMDOJ X

The New Mexico Dept. of Justice recognizing "Sunshine Week" on its X account. Educating and bringing awareness to citizen rights under the current state law.

The Task Force released 11 recommendations in an Oct. 1, 2026 letter to the New Mexico Attorney General. Three of the 11 recommendations were decided in unanimous vote.

Recommendation No. 4 addresses the technological advances that are changing the IPRA environment. It hopes to provide funding for software to digitize paper records.

Recommendation No. 5 addresses digitization concerns specifically for the purposes of traffic accident reports. It states, "identify classes that could be published proactively and separately pursue a public-facing portal to obtain traffic accident reports."

"Eighty to 90% of public records requests are traffic accident reports, for peoples' insurance purposes. How can we make it easier to obtain these records for the public and in turn lessen the load of record custodians?" said Barber.

Recommendation No. 11 was approved unanimously. This recommendation ensures efficiency of the requesting process.

Record custodians are required to issue responses within three days of requests and have the records within 15 days of the request, unless a response given is stating otherwise, according to New Mexico law. If there is no response from a requestor on fees owed for the request within a specified timeline, the request may be closed.

Barber described the process of the Task Force as thoughtful, respectful and patient. Members of the task force were given time to speak in discussions and become educated on presentations on potential effective recommendations.

There are also three recommendations for potential changes to actual legislative law. Recommendation No. 8 suggests a statutory scheme to require a pay rate for out-of-state requests for body camera footage. If so, any fees collected will be dedicated to increasing IPRA resources and transparency. Recommendation No. 9 suggests state consideration to establish an IPRA entity to provide assistance, training and advice to both requestors and custodians. The entity would also serve as an alternate advisor to resolve disputes and informal mediation. As well as having the power to collect data on governmental entities' IPRA implementation for submission to the legislature.

The last legislative recommendation suggests a non-exclusive set of factors for courts to consider when operating under Section 14-2-11. Section 14-2-11 states that the requestor may pursue remedies under IPRA if deemed denied. Request denial must be provided in written detail by records custodian, and a custodian who does not deliver an explanation of denial within 15 days is subject to enforce provisions and the requestor may be rewarded.

The Task Force plans to submit a final report to the interim Courts, Corrections and Justice Committee and the Legislative Finance Committee by Oct. 15, 2026.

Ruby Mendoza is a journalism student at New Mexico State University. Follow her on Instagram at rubymedza_media.


Roswell Daily Record

RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch in Roswell Region

CREDIT: ROSWELL DAILY RECORD, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Roswell Daily Record's July 8, 1947, issue, headlined "RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch in Roswell Region," became a significant item for some UFO conspiracy theorist circles.

Pat Davis' way of watering New Mexico's news desert

By Uziel Ramos

ROSWELL – After more than a century of community coverage, Roswell residents woke up to an announcement July 13 that the Roswell Daily Record would cease operations.

Two days later, former Albuquerque city councilor Pat Davis announced new management for the Roswell Daily Record.

The Roswell Daily Record began publishing in 1891. The Daily Record is known for reporting the story of Roswell Army Air Field officials recovering an unknown flying object, or UFO, near Roswell in 1947.

On July 15, after the newspaper announced its closure, New Mexico News purchased the Daily Record from its previous owner, the Beck Family. New Mexico News was founded by Davis as a non-profit newsroom in 2015.

Davis said two changes to the newspaper's strategies helped bring back some readership and subscriptions.

"The very first thing we did was taking down the paywall on the website, so that everybody could read the paper for free online," Davis said. "The second thing we did was giving away free home delivery subscriptions to everybody who wanted it.

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Meet the students of the college journalism workshop



Addisyn Hartman

Addisyn Hartman is a second-year student at New Mexico State University pursuing a degree in Journalism and Media Studies with a minor in Strategic Communications. She's in her second year with The Round Up, a student newspaper on campus, currently working as the Sections Editor and previously as a Sports Writer. In her time as a student journalist, she's become very passionate about bringing voices to all sorts of different organizations and athletics on campus. You can reach her at @add1synh on Instagram, or email addisynh@nmsu.edu.



Julian 'Jules' Elizondo

Jules Elizondo is a Multimedia Journalism and Business Management student at the University of New Mexico. She is expected to graduate in Spring 2027. Raised in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, she brings a diverse perspective from a multicultural background and a passion for writing stories that highlight marginalized communities. She currently works at KOB 4, working in production and on-air programming, and previously interned at KRQE News 13, gaining experience in broadcast writing and producing. She is especially interested in photojournalism, broadcast journalism, and corporate communications. Outside of journalism, she enjoys shooting film photography, diving deep into music culture of all kinds, and exploring new travel destinations.



Uziel Ramos

Uziel Ramos, or "Uzi", is a student at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Uziel was first introduced to journalism as a field of study during his senior year of high school in El Paso, Texas. He was a staffer at his high school's yearbook club, where they prioritized writing articles in a journalistic style and implementing the visual medium of photojournalism. After that introductory experience, Uziel knew he wanted to be a professional journalist. In his first year at NMSU, Uziel joined the school's independent student-run newspaper, The Round Up, as a staff writer intern. There, he not only refined his writing to be suitable in the press, but he also became familiar with the Associated Press Stylebook and learned how to find the stories that matter through interacting with community members. As of the Fall 2026 semester, Uziel is the News Editor of The Round Up.



Ruby Mendoza

Ruby Mendoza is a fourth year journalism and media studies student at NMSU from Alamogordo, New Mexico. Growing up in a city of 30,000 people with a small town mindset, where everybody knows everybody, Mendoza saw the value of community and connection.So she decided to become a journalist. After three school years of being an anchor and reporter for student-produced KRWG News22, Mendoza interned at her first television station in El Paso, TX in summer 2026. She is currently a staff writer for student media newspaper, the Round Up. Mendoza has covered various kinds of stories. One day she's looking through a telescope and the next, wearing a bee suit. She hopes that as a journalist, she can find small voices and give them a platform to be seen and heard.

WATERING

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"The paper had lost a lot of subscribers over the last year as they reduced print, and we wanted to give people a chance to stick around with us long enough to see what we would do next. Between those two, we were able to increase online readership 20% in the first month, and we were able to increase subscriptions 12% in the first month. We're still digging out of a big hole, but it's in the right direction."

Santa Fe New Mexican reporter Mike Easterling said the Record is just one of many New Mexico newspapers that closed its doors in recent history.

"The Record's shutdown leads it to follow in the footsteps of other New Mexico newspapers that have closed their doors in recent years, including the Independent in Gallup, which was shuttered in February, and the Farmington Daily Times, which ceased operations in June 2024," Easterling said.

Now that New Mexico News has the Daily Record, Davis said he planned to expand coverage in the region by using Roswell as a local news anchor.

"We are looking to build an Eastern New Mexico news group anchored by Roswell, just like we did in Albuquerque and Santa Fe," Davis said. "Because we can have one reporter that covers politics for three or four papers in that part of the state and ensures they all have coverage and create good journalism jobs."

According to KUNM Radio reporter Florian Knowles, Davis' strategy of purchasing local news has already met controversy in New Mexico.

"The News Group owns several papers in the Albuquerque-Santa Fe metro area, including the Santa Fe Reporter, City Desk ABQ, and the Sandoval Sign Post," Knowles said. "But Davis has faced some controversy in the journalism sphere for his business approach. This includes down-sizing and layoffs after launching or acquiring some newsrooms."

The Daily Record's editor, Christina Stock, was asked by the New Mexico Press Association for insight into any additional changes coming to the newsroom, and did not comment on the matter.

Davis said his purchase should inform other local newspapers that the way forward in local journalism must be through collaboration, not competition.

"We publish some of them by contract because there's a benefit that we get, as a larger publisher, that we can give those economies of scale back to smaller papers that can't negotiate for cheaper print prices or better website services or cheaper newsletters," Davis said.

"We have to stop thinking about competing with our neighbors and start thinking about collaborating."

Uziel Ramos is a student journalist with the New Mexico Press Association and at The Round Up, NMSU's independent student newspaper. Follow him on Instagram @ uziel_articles for more news.

Shop Talk staff

Jessica Onsurez, Editor of Shop Talk

Jessica Onsurez is the News Director at the Las Cruces Sun-News, part of the USA TODAY NETWORK. She is a native New Mexican who has worked in the newspaper industry for over a decade, serving as editor of five different publications. Jessica is an award winning reporter who has covered crime, courts, education, local government, energy and environment and politics during her career. She is a graduate of Eastern New Mexico University Portales and holds a master's degree in digital journalism from American University. She is a returned Peace Corps volunteer. She is past president and current board member of New Mexico Foundation for Open Government.

Julia M. Dendinger, Assistant Editor, Valencia County News-Bulletin

Julia M. Dendinger is the board president for the Society of Professional Journalists Rio Grande Chapter. She has served on the board for almost four years, and has a passion for educating the next generation of reporters, and deeply appreciates what new reporters bring to the field. She is the assistant editor of Valencia County News-Bulletin. Julia has worked a t the community paper since 2006. During that time, her writing and photography has been acknowledged by the New Mexico Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

Christy Anchondo, Shop Talk Designer

Christy has worked in the field of graphic design for over three decades which has included production, print prepress, layout and design. She has written and illustrated comic books for Doña Ana County and the Albuquerque Public Schools that teaches children about illegal dumping and community recycling. Her work with the Las Cruces Bulletin has been recognized by the New Mexico Press Association.

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