

NM NEWS & VIEWS FOR WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2010
THIS IS THE WORLD WE LIVE IN!

NM agencies dodge furloughs in cutting budgets:

SANTA FE, N.M. - Gov. Bill Richardson is allocating more than \$1 million in federal economic stimulus money to head off furloughs of state and judicial workers.

Richardson announced Wednesday that \$925,000 will go to executive branch agencies to protect workers and \$450,000 is for courts, including district courts in Bernalillo, Curry and San Juan counties.

Budget cuts of 3.2 percent are being implemented starting Wednesday to close a shortfall in New Mexico's more than \$5 billion budget. Richardson said more than 300 workers at state museums and monuments would have been forced to take eight unpaid furlough days without the federal money.

Employees at the alcohol and gaming division and income support workers at the Human Services Department also faced potential furloughs.

CNM begins fall term with record enrollment:

Central New Mexico Community College has begun the fall term with a record number of students.

The Albuquerque community college says it had 28,590 students enrolled when classes began Monday, an all-time enrollment record.

The previous high was set in fall 2009, with 27,999 students.

In comparison, the University of New Mexico reported nearly 27,000 students enrolled at the main Albuquerque campus for 2010, an increase of nearly 7 percent from 2009.

CNM registration continues for full-term courses through Sept. 7.

NM National Guard on border:

SANTA FE, N.M. - New Mexico National Guard troops bound for the border with Mexico have completed their training, and the 82 soldiers have been deployed on the border.

President Barack Obama in May ordered 1,200 National Guard troops to boost security along the border.

Both California and Arizona announced deployments last week.

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson says violence along the border with Mexico has been a major concern.

The National Guard troops assigned to the border area have undergone training with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and Department of Homeland Security as well as military training.

The governor's office says they will provide criminal investigative analysis and entry identification teams along the border.

Clovis voters approve school bonds:

CLOVIS, N.M. - Voters have approved a \$16 million bond issue for Clovis Municipal Schools in eastern New Mexico.

Unofficial results from Tuesday's balloting showed 1,561 votes for and 926 against.

Some 14 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. The bonds will pay for improvements to buildings and technology around the district.

They also will pay for the district's 20 percent match of a proposed new middle school and a new building at an elementary school.

APS official hears Rio Grande HS parents' complaints:

Albuquerque Public Schools Associate Superintendent, Dr. Diego Gallegos, will be at Rio Grande High School Tuesday to hear complaints about the scheduling crisis.

Dr. Gallegos will be acting as a liaison between the school and community. He will not be at Rio Grande High School to supervise the schools principal, Cynthia Hale.

Principal Hale is in her first year at Rio Grande and in her attempt to make sure all students met graduate requirements, she tossed out the master schedule earlier this month.

But at the start of the school year, schedules weren't ready.

Several parents were upset and some even showed up a school fundraising event to yell at Principal Hale. Others called for her to resign. Eyewitness News 4 has been told that will not happen.

Even though student schedules are expected to be corrected by next week, the public education department is responding to those concerns.

In a statement released to Eyewitness News 4 the department says that APS will submit a plan to address the loss of any instructional time, as well as any other problems caused by the scheduling mess.

The department is also said to review parents concerns.

Crew members injured on Cumbres & Toltec Railroad:

CHAMA, N.M. - The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad says two employees were injured when their tie crew motor car was struck by a passenger train heading west out of Antonito, Colo.

Railroad officials say the two crew members had shoulder and leg injuries as well as cuts and bruises. They were treated and released from a hospital in La Jara, Colo.

The collision shortly after noon Tuesday occurred east of Mud Tunnel in New Mexico and delayed the Antonito train for two hours.

The narrow-gauge Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad line runs for 64 miles between New Mexico and Colorado. The two states own the railroad.

Democrats earn top spot on Nov. ballot in NM:

SANTA FE, N.M. - Democratic candidates will be listed first on the general election ballot in New Mexico, with Republicans next in order.

The secretary of state's office said Wednesday that the ballot position for the political parties was determined by a drawing.

Some candidates consider it an advantage to be listed first on the ballot.

The general election is Nov. 2.

However, absentee voting starts Oct. 5 and early in-person balloting begins on Oct. 16.

The ballot order applies to state and local offices up for election in November, including the races for governor, Congress, state House of Representatives seats and county commission.

Farmington voters approve \$50 million school bond:

FARMINGTON, N.M. - Farmington voters are giving the local school district permission to sell \$50 million in bonds for school construction and other needs.

Nearly 80 percent of voters approved the bond. It passed 1,742 votes to 463.

The flagship project of the bond is the construction of a new middle school. The district has a list of other school improvement projects that will be funded with bond money.

The assistant superintendent of finance says the district likely will sell the \$50 million bond in \$9 million to \$10 million increments. The list of projects will take at least three years to complete.

Discovery building gunman spoke to NBC News
Man identified himself as James J. Lee, said he had several bombs:

Closed captioning of: Audio of Discovery gunman released: 'I have a bomb and a gun'

>> now to the hostage drama that played out for much of this day. just outside the nation's capital it played out live on nonstop cable television all afternoon. it started when a man with a gun burst into the headquarters building of the discovery channel . it didn't end until many hours later. our own tom costello was on scene covering it all in silver spring , maryland . tom, evening.

>> reporter: hi, brian. the stand-off finally ended when police shot and killed the suspect. they believe he was threatening the lives of the three hostages. all three men got out unharmed. during the crisis, nbc news called discovery. the suspect grabbed the phone away from the operator. we chose out of caution not to reveal that information until this incident was over. it all began about 1:00 this afternoon when an armed man entered the discovery channel 's headquarters in maryland , about a mile over the washington, d.c. border.

>> having lunch in the cafeteria. someone came and said, don't go into the lobby. there is some action going on there. there are cops inside.

>> reporter: police say the building was immediately ordered to be evacuated and most of the 1,900 employees managed to get out.

>> panic, nervous, afraid. we weren't sure if the gunman was going to come up to the other floors or anything. they told us to get into the interior offices and lock the doors and everything.

>>> a day care center was safely evacuated. authorities said all children were reunited with parents. the gunman identified as 43-year-old james jay lee held three employees hostage telling them to, quote, stay still. police began roughly three hours of telephone negotiations with the suspect but became increasingly concerned he might harm the hostages. investigators say on the scene they could see him inside the building wearing what appeared to be pipe bombs . we can reveal tonight that shortly after the crisis began, nbc news called the discovery channel headquarters when lee himself grabbed the phone and an nbc producer spoke to him for about ten minutes and recorded the conversation.

>> do you have a gun?

>> i have a gun. i have a bomb. i have several bombs strapped to my body ready to go off.

>> reporter: nbc news elected not to reveal the conversation with lee until the hostage crisis was over. just shy of four hours after the stand-off started, police decided to shoot the suspect.

>> based on the information that we had, we believed that it was -- that the hostages' lives were in danger.

>> reporter: records show lee started protesting outside discovery's headquarters more than two years ago, handing out a rambling leaflet that called for discovery to have more coverage of overpopulation and animal extinction . he was arrested in february of 2008 and pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct. members of the bomb squad tell me they plan to spend much of the night inside that building making safe at least four suspicious devices. discovery representatives said they had been aware of mr. lee for years but never took his demands seriously.

Editor's note: This article includes language some readers may find offensive.

The man who held three hostages at the Discovery Communications building before he was killed by police Wednesday told NBC News in a brief telephone conversation that he was armed with several bombs he had been working on for as long as a month.

Asked how he had learned to make a bomb, the man said that he knew how to weld and read widely but that he also picked up pointers from the TV show "Mythbusters."

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Statement from NBC News

As NBC News investigated early reports of an incident at the Discovery Communications headquarters building, NBC News producers calling the company's general number were connected to a man identifying himself as James J. Lee.

An NBC News producer continued a conversation with the man while other NBC News staff informed authorities.

The call continued for approximately 10 minutes until the man apparently terminated the call.

NBC News immediately informed Montgomery County authorities of details of that conversation, but withheld public release of those details while the incident was ongoing.

The program airs on the Discovery Channel, one of the targets of the man's years-long protest campaign against what he saw as the company's failures to adequately program shows that made clear the threat to the planet from overpopulation and animal extinction. The program's producers could not be reached for comment Wednesday night.

An NBC News producer spoke to Lee for about 10 minutes, until he terminated the call. During the call, NBC News informed Montgomery County authorities of the conversation and held off reporting it until the hostage standoff had been resolved. Police said they shot and killed the man at 4:50 p.m. ET when he pointed a gun at one of the hostages.

Gunman cites popular environmental novel

In the call, the man identified himself as James J. Lee — the same name given by numerous law enforcement authorities as police negotiated with him Wednesday afternoon at the building in suburban Washington, D.C.

NBC News producers had called the building to check out initial reports of the hostage situation, and suddenly Lee came on the line.

"I have a gun and I have a bomb," he said. "I have several bombs strapped to my body ready to go off. I have a device that if I drop it, it will f---in' explode."

Lee told the NBC producer that he had been working on the explosive devices for "three weeks — around three weeks or a month. I did a lot of research and experiments."

On the call, Lee seemed determined to get his point across, referring to a rambling statement he published on his website excoriating Discovery Communications — which, in addition to the Discovery Channel, operates the TLC, Animal Planet, Science Channel and Planet Green networks.

He made several references to the novel "My Ishmael" by environmentalist Daniel Quinn, which tells the tale of conversations between a 12-year-girl and a gorilla named Ishmael, who is seeking to hire a student to help save the world.

Quinn told msnbc.com on Wednesday that he had never been in touch with Lee.

"What his take on the book is, I don't know," Quinn said. "It's hard to imagine how he got from reading this book to his current behavior. It certainly puzzles me."

East braces for Earl's onslaught

30,000 flee N.C.'s Hatteras Island; 3 states declare emergencies:

HATTERAS ISLAND, N.C. — Hurricane Earl steamed toward the Eastern Seaboard on Wednesday as communities from North Carolina to New England kept a close eye on the forecast, worried that even a slight shift in the storm's predicted offshore track could put millions of people in the most densely populated part of the country in harm's way.

Vacationers along North Carolina's dangerously exposed Outer Banks took advantage of the typical picture-perfect day just before a hurricane arrives to pack their cars and flee inland, cutting short their summer just before Labor Day weekend.

The governors of North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland declared states of emergency, sea turtle nests on one beach were scooped up and moved to safety, and the crew of the Navy's USS Cole rushed to get home to Norfolk, Va., on Wednesday ahead of the bad weather. The destroyer was supposed to return later this week from a seven-month assignment fighting piracy off Somalia.

The North Carolina National Guard activated 81 soldiers and airmen to support

emergency operations, NBC News reported. Another 150 were on standby.

Farther up the East Coast, emergency officials urged people to have disaster plans and supplies ready and weighed whether to order evacuations as they watched the latest maps from the National Hurricane Center — namely, the "cone of uncertainty" showing the broad path the storm could take.

Earl was expected to reach the North Carolina coast late Thursday and wheel to the northeast, staying offshore while making its way up the Eastern Seaboard. But forecasters said it could move in closer, perhaps coming ashore in North Carolina, crossing New York's Long Island and passing over the Boston metropolitan area and Cape Cod.

That could make the difference between modestly wet and blustery weather on the one hand, and dangerous storm surge, heavy rain and hurricane-force winds on the other.

"Everyone is poised and ready to pull the trigger if Earl turns west, but our hope is that this thing goes out to sea and we're all golfing this weekend," said Peter Judge, a spokesman for the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

As of Wednesday night, Earl was a powerful Category 4 hurricane centered about 520 miles southeast of Cape Hatteras, N.C., with sustained winds of 140 mph, forecasters said. Earl was moving northwest about 18 mph.

The only mandatory evacuations were for 30,000 people ordered to leave Hatteras Island on the Outer Banks. Dare County spokeswoman Dorothy Toolan said there was no official notification of the evacuation order, and many residents didn't appear worried.

Nancy Scarborough, who manages the Hatteras Cabanas, said locals are ready to help each other and ride out a hurricane, even if they are cut off from the mainland for days.

"I worry about not being able to get back here" she said. "I'd rather be stuck on this side than that side."

About 5,000 tourists were ordered to leave Ocracoke Island to the south, and officials in Carteret County were evacuating low-lying areas. The North Carolina National Guard also is deploying 80 troops to help.

Just a light breeze was stirring and there wasn't a cloud in the sky along the Outer Banks — a ribbon of barrier islands a dozen miles or more off the mainland, connected to the rest of the world by a couple of bridges and a ferry.

Along the lone highway, hundreds of cars backed up at one of the bridges.

Brittany Grippaldi and her family took advantage of the good weather to pack up their Ford Explorer in Hatteras and head home to New Jersey.

CEOs lay off thousands, rake in millions

Report: Top execs made more than average when payrolls cut:

In 2009, former Hewlett-Packard Chief Executive Mark Hurd slashed 6,400 jobs and his compensation amounted to \$24.2 million that year.

When Hewlett-Packard's Chief Executive Mark Hurd resigned last month he received something few regular workers see when they quit their jobs under a cloud: A massive payout.

Turns out Hurd is far from the only top executive to be rewarded with a rich package despite a management performance that could be considered less than optimal — especially by rank-and-file workers.

A new report concludes that chief executives of the 50 firms that have laid off the most workers since the onset of the economic crisis in 2008 took home 42 percent more pay in 2009 than their peers at other large U.S. companies.

The report, from the Institute of Policy Studies, found that the 50 layoff leaders received \$12 million on average in 2009, compared with an average compensation of \$8.5 million for chief executives of companies in Standard & Poor's 500. Each of the 50 companies examined in the report laid off at least 3,000 workers between November 2008 and April 2010.

"Our findings illustrate the great unfairness of the Great Recession," said Sarah Anderson, lead author of the study, "CEO Pay and the Great Recession," the latest in a series of annual "Executive Excess" reports published by the institute, a progressive think tank. "CEOs are squeezing workers to boost short-term profits and fatten their own paychecks."

Those CEOs include HP's Hurd, who slashed 6,400 jobs in 2009 — a year when his compensation amounted to \$24.2 million.

Newsweek: When CEOs behave badly

Hurd made headlines last month when he suddenly resigned after an investigation into a sexual harassment claim against him found he had falsified expense reports related to meetings with a female contractor. Despite the findings, he walked away with a severance package that reportedly could be

worth more than \$40 million.

Coincidence Delivers Luckiest Brothers Ever:

Perhaps we should change the state nickname to Land of Coincidence. Because of course it's merely a coincidence that a week before trial, prosecutors say key evidence is missing in the case of two politically connected brothers accused of starting a brawl in an Española tattoo parlor and hookah lounge.

Of course the fact Eugene and Gabriel Rodella are brothers of ex-State Police officer/disgraced magistrate judge Tommy Rodella has nothing to do with up to five written witness statements going MIA. That Tommy Rodella is unopposed in the race for Rio Arriba County sheriff has nothing to do with the photo lineup vanishing. That the pair are brothers-in-law of state Rep. Debbie Rodella, D-Española, has nothing to do with an Española cop's personal account of the brawl disappearing into thin air. That Eugene Rodella was an Española cop at the time of the brawl has nothing to do with his then-employer refusing to release its copy of the officer's eyewitness statement.

And it's just luck Judge David Segura dismissed the Rodellas' case so that it can not be refiled.

The State Police first claimed there never were any written statements or a photo lineup, but now — like the Rodellas' lawyer and the Santa Fe District Attorney's office — the department agrees it doesn't know what happened to them.

No evidence, no case, no charges. Lucky, lucky, lucky. Just lots of coincidences.

If you believe that, there's a bridge over Rio Grande Gorge for sale.

The State Police is part of the executive branch and under the governor. But there has been no noticeable protest from the Roundhouse or the mansion. Just another coincidence?

CNM Is Turning Students Away:

Sept. 01--Central New Mexico Community College can't accommodate all the potential students who want to enroll there this year.

CNM President Katharine Winograd said a combination of budget issues and a lack of qualified part-time teachers has forced the school to cap enrollment after years of big increases.

The student population has increased about 29 percent since 2006, from 22,615

to 29,199 so far this year.

The college's budget hasn't kept pace, increasing by about 18 percent over the same period. State appropriations have actually decreased since 2006, but the college has been able to make up some of that loss through a tax that Rio Rancho passed in 2007.

Winograd said although this year's enrollment is the college's highest ever, the tight budget means not every student who wants to enroll has been able to do so.

"We have a lot of students who got dropped from the waiting list, and it's been the first time we've had to do that at CNM, so we're a little heartbroken," Winograd said.

The school's budget has gone from \$100.6million in the 2006-07 school year to \$118.9million for the current school year.

The school is attracting more students for a variety of reasons, she said.

"We provide people an opportunity to return to school and get new skills. And we have wonderful partners with our universities, especially the University of New Mexico. So I think all in all it's just a perfect storm of lots of things that are happening -- not only as a result of the bad economy, but also as a result of CNM's growth and prominence in the community," Winograd said.

She said there's been an increase in the number of students who already have bachelor's and master's degrees and those who opt to take two years of community college courses before transferring to a four-year institution.

"We've worked very hard to establish twoplus-two programs with UNM, NMSU and Highlands. As a result, students are feeling much more comfortable that the classes they take here will transfer to the four-year universities," Winograd said. "Five years ago, we were 60 percent career technical education, and those are the classes that lead directly to jobs after a two-year program. And 40 percent were here as transfer students. It is about 50-50 now."

Health care, film and welding are very popular classes with new students, she said.

The number of high school students taking dual credit classes and students taking classes at both UNM and CNM have doubled over the past three years.

Winograd said the school has trimmed costs by combining support programs

such as testing and advising services, eliminating some high-level positions and investing in energy savings through new technology such as more efficient toilets and lights.

Coach Says He Was Fired Due To Religion Taos Schools Cites Ruling On School-Sponsored Prayer:

TAOS -- The former Taos High School basketball coach says he was retaliated against for leading team prayers and suffered discrimination because of his Roman Catholic beliefs.

The attorney for former Tigers coach and athletic director James Branch has served notice to the Taos Municipal Schools that Branch intends to sue for being wrongfully terminated "for religious reasons."

Branch's formal tort claim notice, submitted to the district this week by attorney Anthony Lopez, says it was common knowledge that Branch was Roman Catholic and that he would continually rub a faded picture of St. Jude during games for good luck.

"It is clear that the two written reprimands and wrongful termination of Mr. Branch were acts of discrimination against him for his religious beliefs as a Roman Catholic, and acts of retaliation against him for allowing the team members to engage in prayers before games," the letter states.

The letter says the district violated Branch's First Amendment rights to freedom of religion and speech.

An attorney for the Taos Municipal Schools district disagreed, citing a U.S. Supreme Court ruling against school-sponsored prayers at athletic events. "The school district never did anything to inhibit (Branch's) personal prayers," attorney Ramon Vigil said.

Branch -- the boys varsity basketball coach and athletic director in 2009-10 -- acknowledged earlier this year that his players routinely hold prayers at halftime, but that players were told they weren't required to join in.

He added that he thinks prayer is a "a good thing to have" and said "the problem nowadays is that we don't have enough positive things like that in school."

Branch is now athletic director and assistant principal at Mesa Vista Middle and

High School.

Obama cautiously hopeful after convening first direct Israeli-Palestinian talks in 2 years:

WASHINGTON - Under the shadow of fresh violence, President Barack Obama solemnly convened the first direct Israeli-Palestinian talks in two years Wednesday, challenging Mideast leaders to seize a fleeting opportunity to deliver peace to a region haunted by decades of hostility.

"I am hopeful, cautiously hopeful, but hopeful," Obama said with the leaders of Jordan, Egypt, Israel and the Palestinians beside him in the crowded East Room of the White House. Earlier Obama had met with each individually, and they gathered afterward for dinner.

The mood appeared cordial as the leaders commenced the talks aimed at creating a sovereign Palestinian state beside a secure Israel.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shook hands warmly and thanked Obama for pressing for the renewed talks despite such seemingly intractable differences as Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank. The two leaders begin face-to-face talks on Thursday at the State Department.

"Do we have the wisdom and the courage to walk the path of peace?" Obama asked.

In turn, each of the leaders answered positively but with qualifications. And they spoke hopefully of chances for a breakthrough within the one-year timeframe prescribed by Obama.

Netanyahu said his nation desires a lasting peace, not an interlude between wars. He called Abbas "my partner in peace," and said, "Everybody loses if there is no peace."

Abbas urged Israel to freeze settlement construction in areas the Palestinians want as part of their new state, and to end its blockade of Gaza, which is controlled by the militant Hamas movement. The settlements issue is a central obstacle to achieving a permanent peace.

"We will spare no effort and we will work diligently and tirelessly to ensure these negotiations achieve their cause," Abbas said, as translated into English.

Urging them on, Obama said, "This moment of opportunity may not soon come again."

Tea party or new Grand Old Party? Fledgling movement, fresh from biggest win, clamors for more:

WASHINGTON - Is the tea party the new Republican Party? The grass-roots network of fed-up conservative-libertarian voters displayed its power in its biggest triumph of the election year: the toppling of Sen. Lisa Murkowski in Alaska's GOP primary. Political novice Joe Miller is the fifth tea party insurgent to win a GOP Senate nominating contest, an upset that few, if any, saw coming.

With the stunning outcome, the fledgling tea party coalition and voters who identify with its anti-tax, anti-spending sentiments proved that democracy is alive and well — within the Republican Party. Don't like who is representing you? Rise up, fire them and choose someone new.

The tea party has taken hold in the Grand Old Party, unseating lawmakers, capturing nominations for open seats and forcing Republicans to recalibrate both their campaign strategy and issues agenda. Out is talk of delivering federal dollars back home; in is talk of fiscal discipline.

Within minutes of Murkowski conceding late Tuesday night, Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., was among the conservative Republicans cheering Miller.

"He pulled off the upset victory of the year because he ran on principles and because Alaskans, like all Americans, want to stop the massive spending, bailouts and debt that are bankrupting our country," said DeMint.

Taking a shot at Murkowski if not the entire Republican establishment, he added: "Joe Miller's victory should be a wake-up call to politicians who go to Washington to bring home the bacon. Voters are saying 'We're not willing to bankrupt the country to benefit ourselves.'"

Murkowski, who was seeking her second full term, was the first GOP incumbent to lose her renomination bid to a tea party-backed challenger in a Republican primary.

SARAH PALIN'S PLANS MARK CHANGE IN POSTURE TOWARD IOWA:

Sarah Palin's scheduled political trip to Iowa this month marks a shift from near

silence in the leadoff presidential nominating state to the kind of outreach common among White House prospects.

Palin's plan to headline the Iowa Republican Party's annual fall fundraiser on Sept. 17 is solely to help raise money for the state party's candidates, the former Alaska governor's aides said.

And one trip to Iowa is a long way from a successful campaign for the state's 2012 presidential caucuses, still 18 months away, Iowa party insiders said.

But Palin's recent overtures to Iowa reveal a change in posture that puts her in a position — like other 2012 presidential prospects already laying campaign groundwork in Iowa — to build goodwill and relationships with influential activists, state Republican officials said.

"It does signal an interest in helping Iowans be successful in 2010," state Republican Party Chairman Matt Strawn said. "Iowa Republicans are going to look favorably on anybody that has come to this state this year to help us win in 2010."

Sarah Palin, in Iowa in 2008, to headline Iowa GOP event

Palin aides confirmed Tuesday that she plans to be the featured guest at the Iowa GOP's Reagan Day dinner on Sept. 17. Palin is also planning yet-announced political stops that day, with the state party's marquee Ronald Reagan dinner that evening.

In the dinner's nine years, it has drawn national party stars and up-and-coming figures. Some, such as former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney in 2004, have gone on to wage competitive caucus campaigns. Former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist was the guest a year later, and saw his own presidential ambition fade when Republicans lost the majority in 2006.

No Reagan headliner has gone on to become president, or even the party's presidential nominee. Still, the importance of the visit should not be underestimated, GOP leaders say.

"If she's serious about her own prospects, she needs to be here — and she's doing that with a big, high-profile event," said Ann Trimble-Ray, vice chairwoman of the Sac County Republicans and an adviser to Congressman Steve King.

Palin, a Fox News Channel contributor, has emerged as a top national Republican Party draw since stepping down from the governorship last year. She was among the top draws last weekend at a Washington, D.C., rally sponsored by

conservative commentator Glenn Beck, also with Fox News.

Palin, the 2008 Republican vice presidential nominee, is lending her voice and celebrity to the Iowa Republican party's fundraising for this year's elections — and nothing more, aides to her political action committee said Tuesday.

But after playing hard to get for the past year, Palin approached Iowa Republicans recently, party officials said.

Palin had drawn large, enthusiastic crowds during her four campaign stops in Iowa in the fall of 2008.

Iowa GOP event planners first invited Palin to headline the fall fundraiser a year ago after she stepped down as governor in July, 2009. Palin never responded, despite periodic reminders.

She touched Iowa soil once in the meantime, slipping in and out of Sioux City to sign copies of her books in December without holding any political meetings or press interviews.

Palin endorsed Republican candidate for governor Terry Branstad before the June 8 primary. But she did so with a Facebook post. Palin also contributed \$5,000 to Branstad's campaign and \$5,000 to Republican U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley's campaign in June. Last month, Palin endorsed Iowa attorney general candidate Brenna Findley, also through Facebook.

Palin hasn't avoided all early primary states. She campaigned in May in South Carolina, expected to host the first Southern primary in 2012, for gubernatorial candidate Nikki Haley.

Palin began taking a more active approach toward Iowa in late July, when her political action committee told Iowa Republican Party staff that Palin's people were planning a more aggressive fall campaign schedule and had asked whether the Reagan invitation was still open.

Palin has remained popular with Iowa Republicans. Fifty eight percent of Iowa Republican primary voters said in June they had a favorable opinion of Palin, according to The Des Moines Register's Iowa Poll.

That was slightly behind Romney, at 62 percent, and slightly ahead of former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, at 56 percent.

Still, Palin lacks the connections other Republican presidential prospects have begun assembling.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, in five trips to Iowa since last November, has been the most active in lining up a team of key supporters and strategists. He has enlisted former Iowa GOP Chairman Chuck Larson, and former George W. Bush advisers Sara Taylor Fagen and Terry Nelson.

"She's completely dark on that side," said Des Moines Republican strategist Nick Ryan, who was a top aide to former Congressman Jim Nussle. "And amongst the opinion-leader class, there's not a lot of fervor toward her."

The Iowa Poll also showed more Iowa GOP primary voters — almost 40 percent — viewed Palin unfavorably than they did Gingrich or Romney.

West Des Moines Republican Ryan Rhodes said he plans to attend Palin's appearance in Des Moines this month, but that it's too early to say whether he would support a Palin caucus campaign. "

"I'll go to the event. I'll go and see her," said Rhodes, chairman of the Iowa Tea Party Patriots. "But as far as the presidential candidates people are talking about now, I'm dissatisfied with any of them so far and hope there's somebody else who emerges."

Toyota, GM, Ford Sales Slump as Buyers Shun New Cars:

Toyota Motor Corp., General Motors Co. and Ford Motor Co., the three largest sellers of autos in the U.S., reported bigger sales declines than analysts projected as the industry posted its worst August in 28 years.

GM said deliveries fell 25 percent to 185,176 from 246,479 last August, when the U.S. government's "cash for clunkers" incentive program boosted sales. The biggest U.S. automaker was expected to report a 19 percent decrease, including an adjustment for the number of selling days in August, the average estimate of four analysts surveyed by Bloomberg. On that basis, sales fell 22 percent, Detroit-based GM said in a statement.

U.S. auto sales last month were the slowest for an August in 28 years as model-year closeout deals failed to entice consumers concerned about the economy and their jobs. Deliveries industrywide ran at an annual rate of 11.5 million vehicles last month, according to researcher Autodata Corp., based in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey. That was below the 11.6 million average of eight analysts' estimates compiled by Bloomberg and last year's 14.2 million pace.

"Consumers are being very cautious about where they spend their money," Emily Kolinski Morris, Ford senior economist, said on a conference call. "On big-ticket

items, they're undertaking those very carefully."

Toyota, the world's largest automaker, reported a 34 percent drop in its sales of Toyota, Lexus and Scion brand autos. The company sold 148,388 vehicles last month, down from 225,088 a year ago. Adjusted to match analysts' estimates, sales fell 31 percent, exceeding the 29 percent decline predicted by the average of four analysts' estimates.

Ford Decline

Ford sales fell 11 percent to 157,503 from 176,323 a year earlier for the Dearborn, Michigan-based automaker's three main brands. On a daily selling rate basis, sales declined 7.1 percent, more than the expected 5.2 percent decline, the average of six analysts' estimates. Including August 2009 sales by Volvo, which Ford sold for \$1.5 billion last month to Zhejiang Geely Holding Co., sales fell 13 percent.

Ford rose 33 cents, or 2.9 percent, to \$11.61 at 4:15 p.m. in New York Stock Exchange composite trading. The shares have gained 16 percent this year.

Ford said its car sales fell 14 percent and deliveries of sport-utility vehicles declined 26 percent, while sales of other trucks and vans rose 5 percent in August. Sales of the Focus small car fell 40 percent, while the Escape small SUV dropped 29 percent. Those two models were strong sellers in last year's "cash for clunkers" program, Ford said.

Ford said it plans to build 570,000 cars and trucks in the fourth quarter, down from 574,000 it built in the final three months of 2009.

Chrysler Gained

One exception was Chrysler Group LLC, which saw sales rise more than expected.

Chrysler sales rose 7 percent to 99,611 compared to last August, the company said. It's the Auburn Hills, Michigan-based automaker's fifth-straight month of year-over-year sales increases.

"We have beaten or matched the average industry sales increase for the fifth consecutive month," Fred Diaz, Chrysler's lead executive for U.S. sales, said in a statement. "We are accomplishing our goals."

On an adjusted basis, Chrysler sales rose 11 percent, exceeding the 3 percent average of six analysts' estimates.

Sales of the Jeep, Dodge and Ram vehicles increased last month, while Chrysler brand sales slipped 4 percent.

Chrysler's results are distorted by sales to rental-car companies, businesses and governments, also known as fleet sales, said Paul Ballew, chief economist for Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co. in Columbus, Ohio, in a telephone interview.

'Propped Up'

"They have been propped up by fleet for a long time and certainly this year they've been really, really propped by fleet," he said. "You can make money on fleet. Chrysler's problem is that they are overly dependent on fleet."

Sales of GM's volume brand, Chevrolet, sales fell 22 percent, as Camaro sports-car deliveries tumbled 27 percent and Traverse sport-utility vehicle sales plunged 32 percent.

Its other three U.S. brands showed better results than they did last year. Cadillac gained 83 percent, Buick increased 66 percent and GMC gained 12 percent. The automaker closed or sold four brands since its bankruptcy last year.

GM executives expect a slow recovery in the economy and in auto sales, said Don Johnson, GM vice president of U.S. sales operations. He said sales rates will pick up only modestly through the end of the year. He said that GM will not respond to the slow recovery with incentive deals.

'Bumpy' Road

"We know it's going to continue to be bumpy," Johnson said on a conference call today. "We're not panicking. We don't want to get back to putting incentives into the marketplace to keep plants going."

GM had 16.5 percent of the U.S. retail market in August, Johnson said. This compares with the company's total share of 18.6 percent for the month, reflecting gains from fleet sales. Johnson said he expects GM's retail share to rise in the second half as the company begins selling new models like the compact Chevrolet Cruze, Buick Regal sedan and redesigned heavy-duty versions of its large pickups.

"We definitely are forecasting our share of the retail market to rise," Johnson said.

Dan Akerson replaced Ed Whitacre as the company's chief executive officer

today. Akerson, who will become chairman by year-end, is GM's fourth CEO in 18 months.

Retail Decline

While automakers increased discounts by 1 percent from July to an average \$2,864 per vehicle, sales to individuals probably fell 7 percent in August from the previous month, according to researcher TrueCar.com, based in Santa Monica, California.

Consumers are avoiding showrooms as fear of a double-dip recession grows following the 27 percent plunge in existing home sales in July, said Jesse Toprak, vice president of industry trends at TrueCar.com. The U.S. unemployment rate in July held at 9.5 percent, near a 26-year high of 10.1 percent. The Conference Board reported yesterday that consumer sentiment rose to 53.5 last month from a five-month low of 51 in July. Fewer Americans said jobs were plentiful in August.

"Home sales are way down, the stock market is way down, the unemployment report is very disappointing and consumer confidence is sputtering," Toprak said. "People just don't want to make big-ticket purchases because they're uncertain about their jobs and the value of their homes."

Fleet Boost

Fleets may have accounted for 20 percent of the industry's August deliveries, up from 15 percent in July, Credit Suisse Group AG auto analyst Chris Ceraso wrote in an Aug. 26 report.

Such sales, especially to rental-car companies, have helped prop up the market as individual customers stay away, said Sophia Koropecyk, managing director of Moody's Analytics.

"Consumers are still under a considerable amount of strain and they do not have much appetite or ability to purchase new vehicles," said Koropecyk, who is based in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Compared with a year earlier, GM reduced its incentives and sold vehicles for an average of \$5,600 more, Johnson said.

That doesn't match with TrueCar's analysis, which found that GM increased sales discounts 18 percent to \$3,763 per vehicle in August, and Ford boosted discounts by 25 percent to \$3,008 per vehicle.

Sales by Japanese automakers, which benefited most from the "cash for clunkers" program, were expected to fall more than the overall market, analysts said.

Honda Sales

Honda Motor Co., the second-biggest Japanese automaker, sold 108,729 Honda and Acura brand vehicles, down 33 percent from a year ago, according to an e-mailed release from the company. Adjusting for one less sales day in the month, Honda's sales fell 30 percent, compared with a decline of 27 percent, predicted by the average of four analysts' estimates.

Nissan Motor Co.'s sales of Nissan and Infiniti vehicles fell 27 percent in August. Adjusting to match analysts' estimates, sales tumbled 24 percent, matching the average of four estimates.

Hyundai Motor Co., South Korea's largest automaker, reported an 11 percent drop in its U.S. sales in August.

Islamic Think Tank Awards Hartford Seminary \$1M Gift:

A theological college known widely for its research and resources has been awarded a one million dollar gift from an Islamic think tank to help endow a professorship in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations.

Announced Tuesday, the gift to Hartford Seminary will allow the Connecticut school to "continue - and expand - our leadership education programs for chaplains and imams," reported Hartford President Dr. Heidi Hadsell.

"Hartford Seminary is truly honored to be the recipient of this generous gift, which shows the commitment of IIIT to both education and service to the American Muslim community," she added after announcing the gift from the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, Va.

Presently, Hartford Seminary's Islamic Chaplaincy Program is the only accredited chaplaincy program for Muslims in the United States. The program, which started ten years ago, educates chaplains for service in the military, colleges, prisons and hospitals.

According to the non-denominational school, many of the religious needs of Muslims are being addressed through the aforementioned institutions.

In Monday's announcement, IIIT Vice President Dr. Jamal Barzinji said the Islamic think tank was impressed with Hartford Seminary's dedication to

educating and preparing chaplains and imams for leadership in their professions.

"An endowed chair will help expand and enhance these programs," he added. "Establishing endowed chairs in American academia is in line with IIIT's goal of promoting scholarship in the study of Islam in America."

According to Hartford, the first holder of the endowed chair will be Dr. Timur Yuskaev, assistant professor of Contemporary Islam and director of the Islamic Chaplaincy Program.

In his remarks, Yuskaev said his particular emphasis will be on "contributing to Hartford's impressive record of working with Muslim congregations and organizations, in the local area and beyond."

Hartford, in cooperation with IIIT and its Fairfax Institute in Herndon, Va., has begun a pilot Graduate Certificate in Imam Education that will prepare Muslim religious leaders for service in mosques and community agencies throughout the Greater Washington, D.C. area.

Hartford Seminary's Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations is the country's oldest center for such study.

EXCLUSIVE: VA Spends Millions to Maintain Vacant and Hazardous Buildings -- Cites Limited Funds for Demolition:

The Department of Veterans Affairs is spending tens of millions of taxpayer dollars every year to maintain hundreds of buildings – most of them vacant – that have fallen into such a state of disrepair that many of them are considered health hazards, an investigation by FoxNews.com reveals.

Exactly how much it costs to maintain the run-down and abandoned buildings is a matter of dispute. The Government Accountability Office estimates that the VA has spent \$175 million every year since 2007. But the VA disputes that figure, saying it spent \$85 million on the buildings in 2007 and only \$37 million last year.

Whatever the figure, the timing couldn't be worse for the VA, as tens of thousands of American troops, many of whom have served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, prepare to return to the U.S. and will require the expensive medical, psychological and support services it provides.

From Augusta, Ga., to Menlo Park, Calif., from Milwaukee, Wis., to Perry Point, Md., the VA maintains 5,507 buildings across the country. But as many as 314 of them are currently vacant — and they require huge outlays of money just to

remain standing.

Some veterans' advocates have called for the structures to be renovated or razed and rebuilt to provide housing for homeless veterans — but demolishing them or making them habitable could cost even more money, because many of the buildings contain hazardous materials.

Others say the government should sell these buildings to developers or non-profits that can make use of the facilities. But the VA is restricted by complex federal property and historical building guidelines and sanctioned share lease agreement programs that require outside organizations to come up with big bucks — no small feat for cash-strapped municipalities and non-profits in the midst of a recession.

And some of these buildings are just too old or too bizarre — anyone looking for a 325-square-foot pink, octagonal monkey house in Dayton, Ohio? — to drum up interest.

A FoxNews.com investigation has uncovered scores of these decrepit or abandoned buildings across the country that are home to rats, vermin, bird's nests, septic rainwater, exposed asbestos, lead paint, wall-to-wall fungal growth, mold, radon, fiberglass insulation, old clothes, spare tires, barrels of unidentified chemicals and even abandoned children's dolls, according to documents and first-hand observations.

On Wednesday, the VA released this statement:

"VA places its highest priority on the delivery of quality healthcare services and benefits to Veterans and their families. The Department is also called to ensure the safety and security for our Veterans, Employees and those who visit our facilities. That why VA continues to work on meeting the President's directive to reduce our inventory of unneeded buildings or convert their use to meet our key mission objectives, like ending Veteran homelessness. Over the past three years VA has disposed of 266 vacant or underused buildings consisting of over 2.6 million ground square feet and close to 200 acres of land and plans to dispose of 6.9 million ground square feet over the next five years."

The VA owns a total of 145.6 million gross square feet, of which 6.6 million gross square feet are vacant. Add another 4 million gross square feet of underutilized space — areas that are occupied but not utilized most effectively — and 7 percent of VA property is wasting both space and money.

In 2007, according to a GAO report the following year, the VA spent \$175 million annually to maintain vacant or underutilized buildings. The report noted that 5

percent of VA buildings were vacant — the same percentage of vacancy reported this year.

GAO officials told FoxNews.com that they believe the VA is still spending that same amount — \$175 million a year — on vacant or underutilized buildings.

But the VA disputes the GAO's calculations, saying it spent only \$85 million in 2007 and spent only \$37 million last year. (The VA's current calculations are based on a national average of \$2 per square foot of vacant space; GAO's calculations take into account the specific costs associated with particular buildings and uses regional averages. GAO also says the VA underreported costs and excluded property, maintenance and operational expenses.)

Meanwhile, advocates for homeless veterans are urging the VA to find some way to utilize these structures to provide health and psychological services to veterans across the country — and to prepare for the thousands more who will return home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"You got dormant buildings? You want to give them away? Refurbish them! Use them!" said Larry Van Kurant, spokesman for Veterans of Foreign Wars who is against VA's divestment of property.

Bob Young, who served on President Bush's advisory council for historic preservation and has testified before VA committees on adaptive reuse of historic properties, acknowledged that the "VA does not have enough housing for the veterans it treats."

But, he said, "VA has limited funds and it must weigh the balance between spending money on patient care and infrastructure. If constructing a new building or leasing a building is less expensive than rehabilitating a historic structure, it's easy to see why the historic building option would not be the choice to make."

"It's all about the money," he said.

VA spokesman Drew Brookie gave FoxNews.com this statement:

"VA places its highest priority on the delivery of quality services and benefits to veterans and their families — first and foremost. Demolishing unneeded buildings is often costly and requires the careful balancing of priorities for resources, especially since our department's mission is to care — often 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — for our nation's veterans."

"VA understands the importance and implications associated with an inventory of

vacant and underutilized buildings. VA has been and continues to actively work on reducing its inventory of unneeded facilities.”

Many of the vacant VA buildings FoxNews.com visited have been declared health hazards, documents show.

— An environmental site report prepared by Brilliant Lewis Environmental Services at the VA campus in Montrose, N.Y. found a risk of lead and radon contamination in the local drinking water supply; contamination also was suspected from lead-based pipes lining the water towers. Reports from VA sites elsewhere in the country suggest radon and lead seepage may have contaminated potable water supplies at health care facilities or in surrounding areas.

— Outside Chicago, at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Medical Center, the basement of a 58,000-square-foot former nurses' residence is flooded with chemical-laden water. The VA spends an estimated \$20,000 a year to maintain this building, which has been empty for at least 15 years. Demolition must be approved by the state historic agency and will cost \$500,000; hazmat removal costs \$426,000.

— In Menlo Park, Calif., FoxNews.com found Building 301, a 15,200-square-foot structure built in 1929, formerly outleased to Stanford University. It was slated for demolition in 2001 but is still standing, albeit barely, and is filled with garbage and old clothes. The state historic agency must approve demolition.

— At the Sepulveda branch of the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center, two former treatment buildings not used for patients since 1999 have been leased to a nonprofit with plans to build 147 temporary homeless residences. The 2010 taxpayer cost, records show, is \$48 million. But construction is on hold while funding is sought.

— In Augusta, Ga., FoxNews.com found two boarded-up buildings at the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center, where property surveyors found 300 gallons of hazardous materials and antiseptic cleaners — some dangerously close to active electrical fuses, records say. The VA spends about \$12,000 a year on both buildings.

But the Augusta buildings are success stories. A nonprofit has plans to turn them into housing facilities. At the end of 2009, the VA says, similar projects provided 1,015 beds for homeless veterans by leasing vacant VA buildings across the country to outside groups who turned the buildings into housing.

The VA concedes it has mismanaged historical properties and just awarded a \$2.5 million contract to companies who will help it stop wasting millions on

vacant buildings—and use that money elsewhere.

Mark Walker, deputy director of the American Legion's economic division and an advocate for facilities to house homeless vets, has a few ideas on what to do with the money the VA will save. "We could really do a lot with that \$175 million," he said.

WH Economist Calls for More Spending, Less Taxes

Departing White House economist Romer calls for increase in government spending, reduced taxes:

Departing White House economist Christina Romer says the government has the tools for bringing down unemployment, but policymakers need to find the will and wisdom to use them.

Romer called on officials Wednesday to move forward on policies that will increase government spending and cut taxes. She also called for investments in infrastructure and new trade agreements.

Romer said that while some new policies should be viewed as emergency measures, most should be paid for with future spending cuts or revenue returns. She said concerns about the mounting deficit should not be used as an excuse "for leaving unemployed workers to suffer."

Romer is leaving her post as head of the Council of Economic Advisers to return to the University of California, Berkeley, as an economics professor.

NEWS MAKER OF THE DAY:

Pastor Don Kimbro from Heights Christian Church in ABO, joined us this afternoon to talk about the Biblical World View Conference, Revival and the book he's now writing. Live from Belen, Don says, 'It's the first time ever I was part of Evangelicals & Catholics being of One Mind,' speaking of the Kiva event, which took place last week, with over 1,400 in attendance. 'Now we need to stabilize and move forward,' he stated. Don was instrumental in pulling together a revival meeting in Willard, NM, earlier this year, but like he said, the key is follow up and fleshing out what we believe. He encouraged everyone to sign the Manhattan Declaration, to take a stand for Life, Marriage & Religious Liberty! this is John 17 coming to its fulfillment, but too many people are in fear and broken in Christ. 'It was an historic event!' Don exclaimed and he's hoping it'll go to every state around the nation. He exhorted us all to stay in prayer, take a stand and says, 'We are United In Christ!' He told us all to vote, know your candidates and take a stand. 'We want people who reflect the values of Christ.' He's writing a book,

'Red Letter Lectures, Learning Discipleship From The Words Of Jesus.' You can hear Don every weekday morning and evening on KKIM at 7:30, with his 'Nuggets Of Truth' program and keep listening, because he has a friend coming to NM from Israel, so you won't want to miss him.

DEWEY'S DAILY CUP:

If you missed this program today, check our program guide for the repeats, which will be played on Saturday & Sunday. Pastor Jimmy Sandoval from Grace Community Church in Santa Fe, joined us this afternoon and he'll be broadcasting his new program, starting this Friday on KKIM/KARS at 2:30pm MT, which can also be heard WORLDWIDE on <http://mykkim.com> !

Many Blessings,
Rev. Mark F. Tross
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