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Unified Transport Bill Negotiated

Competing Plans Merged Into One

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Backers of competing bills to reform state regulation of New Mexico taxis, shuttles and moving companies have negotiated a compromise for a unified bill.

Think New Mexico Executive Director Fred Nathan

and Joe Earnest, attorney for the Movers and Warehouse Association, said they smoothed out differences in separate Senate and House bills (SB 328 and HB 194). "After several weeks of negotiations, we came to an agreement that works for both sides," Nathan said.

Think New Mexico drafted HB 194, sponsored by Rep. Tom Taylor, R-Farmington, and Rep. Carl Trujillo, D-Santa Fe. Trujillo, who also represents Capital City Cab and Sandia Shuttle in Santa Fe, drafted SB 328, sponsored by Sen. Phil Griego, D-San Jose.

Both called for rolling back hurdles for new businesses trying to enter motor-service industries by no longer requiring that applicants prove a new service is needed. The bills also would deregulate rates and prohibit price fixing. Those provisions are retained in the unified bill, which is scheduled to be heard Tuesday in the House Business and Industry Committee.

The new bill includes clauses to allow trade groups to set common standards for moving and warehousing companies, such as obligating operators to comply with dispute-reso-

lution programs and abide by a new "unfair practices" act.

It also eliminates an existing exemption from antitrust laws that has allowed moving companies to file a "common tariff" with the Public Regulation Commission. Instead, operators would be free to establish prices, and the PRC will set a "maximum tariff" to prevent price gouging.

Another compromise is inclusion of explicitly-defined operating standards for motor-service companies, such as obligating taxi businesses to have a central, 24-hour dispatch and operate enough cabs

to serve their communities.

Earnest said it is a shift from a "regulated-monopoly" system that looks at whether services already exist before authorizing new companies, to a "community standard" system that considers how well the industry is serving the public.

Taxi or shuttle services can still protest to the PRC, but they would need to prove harm, while newcomers no longer have to show another service is needed.

The unified bill also converts current temporary permits into permanent ones.