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## State asked to buy jail Out-of-state spending for prisoners cited

By Todd G. Dickson  
Mountain View Telegraph

With Torrance County Detention Facility set to close next month, Estancia town trustees are bracing for its loss, but one member is calling for state prisoners to be housed in the jail.

At a recent New Mexico Municipal League conference, Trustee Manny Romero said State Auditor Tim Keller made a presentation on the state's Department of Corrections in which he said 89 percent of its \$416 million budget goes to housing prisoners out of state.

Romero said he was shocked to learn of how much New Mexico was paying to house its prisoners out of state when the town's detention center is closing.

"That's a lot of money," Romero said. "There's enough in the department's budget to buy the detention center and make it a state prison."

CoreCivic — formerly Corrections Corp. of America

CoreCivic — formerly Corrections Corp. of America — owns the detention center the company built in 1990. Last month, the company gave its employees 60-day notice that it was closing because officials said there weren't enough inmates to financially justify keeping it open. The detention center has been losing money for the past several years, CoreCivic officials said.

The detention center has a capacity for 900 to 950 inmates, but its population had frequently fallen below 700, which CoreCivic officials said they needed to just break even.

Romero shared with other trustees at their meeting Monday a letter he wrote to Gov. Susana Martinez, citing the information he learned from Keller at the conference.

"I believe that the permanent solution would be for the State of New Mexico to buy the CoreCivic facility in Estancia," he wrote, "and to (have it) be administered by the State of New Mexico Department of Corrections."

The average cost to house a male inmate is \$45,250 a year, according to the state Department of Corrections website.

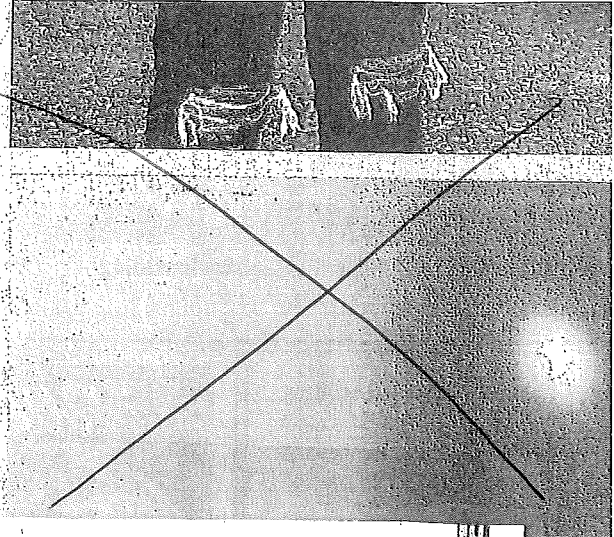
"I believe the State of New Mexico can save money by keeping the maximum prisoners in the (Estancia) facility," Romero wrote. "This money should stay in the state instead of going out of state. I believe that most tax-paying citizens in the state of New Mexico would agree with me."

The detention center is in good shape, he said, and ready to

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### Jail

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be operational.

Mayor Sylvia Chavez was part of a group that recently met with state officials about the idea of housing state prisoners at the detention facility. While it is an option the state is considering, no decision can be made before the CoreCivic pulls out next month.

Just the same, Romero said, putting public pressure on the governor and lawmakers could help convert the detention center into a prison as soon as possible.

The detention center employs 203 people and many of its workers are already in the process of transferring to other CoreCivic jails around the country.

The town stands to see an estimate drop in its gross receipts tax revenues of 60 percent once the jail closes, as well as more than \$170,000 in utility payments annually.

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