

Santiago travels extensively on taxpayers' dime

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago likes to travel – at least based on the expenses she accrues.

For the 2012-13 fiscal year, Santiago had \$12,755.99 worth of travel expenses that the county reimbursed her for.

The next highest figure was \$1,509.33. That was for Supervisor Ron Mikulaco. However, only \$637.80 was accrued after he was sworn in. He and Supervisor Brian Veerkamp have expenses for a conference that first-time supervisors attend after being elected but before being seated.

But these figures don't necessarily reflect anyone's total travel bills. Many elected officials sit on other boards where those agencies would foot the bill. And then sometimes special interest groups pick up some of the costs.



Norma Santiago travels more than any other El Dorado County supervisor.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The latter was the case for Santiago when she went on a trip in July 2012 to Santa Fe, N.M. Several West Slope chambers of

commerce went to the Urban to Rural Connection conference. The cost was \$2,100 per person just for the four-day seminar. On documentation from the July 30, 2013, Board of Supervisors meeting handwritten is "\$1,000 previously paid by 3rd party sponsor."

But a sponsor or any monetary gift must be documented on what's called Form 700. Santiago has not done so.

Supervisor Ray Nutting had a criminal complaint filed against him by the district attorney in part for not filing a Form 700 for money he received. District Attorney Vern Pierson did not return a phone call.

Santiago was not available for comment.

In addition to the questionable funds, Santiago violated county policy by asking for reimbursement after the fact and then months after the trip occurred.

On the July 30 Board of Supervisors' consent agenda was an item to reimburse Santiago for her July 2012 trip to Santa Fe and her March 2013 trip to the National Association of Counties meeting in Washington, D.C. The board approved them 5-0.

The 2013 trip had been preapproved by the board, while the 2012 one had not.

Santiago traveled on the county's dime to Washington a month later for the Capitol-to-Capitol event. That cost \$4,104.10.

Judi McCallum, Santiago's assistant, defended her boss, saying that she is the most sought after supervisor in El Dorado County for study missions, especially economic ones.

"They are excited to have Norma along. It translates to opportunities and action here," McCallum told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She added, "Sometimes access is everything and she is always

knocking on doors.”

McCallum pointed out how access helped Meyers keep its speed limit below what Caltrans originally wanted it raised to.

But something like that would require a phone call, maybe a trip to Marysville where the Caltrans district office is, or at best a trip to Sacramento. It really had nothing to do with spending taxpayer dollars, but more to do with Santiago just doing her job as a county supervisor.

McCallum said Santiago has been able to bring back dollars to the county – not just spend them. But she did not have specifics to share.