

ARTICLES FOR 1-28-16 ROUNDUP

General Reyes Named Member of Aspen-Rodel Fellowship in Public Leadership

Participates in First of Three Leadership & Education Seminars

SALT LAKE CITY – Jan. 22, 2016 – The Office of the Utah Attorney General today announced that Utah Attorney General Sean D. Reyes has been named a member of the Aspen-Rodel Fellowships in Public Leadership class of 2015. The Rodel Fellowship program is open by invitation only to individuals in publicly elected office. Selected annually, each class consists of 24 Fellows identified by program leadership as America's emerging political leaders with reputations for intellect, thoughtfulness, and a commitment to civil dialogue. During the 18-24 month Fellowship, Attorney General Reyes will attend three seminars in the U.S. paid for by the Rodel Foundations and Aspen Institute, all non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations. AG Reyes is currently attending the first seminar “Political Leadership and the Principles of Western Democracy.”

"It is an honor to be recognized as a Rodel Fellow from the Aspen Institute," said Attorney General Reyes. "I greatly appreciate this opportunity to sit down with leaders from both sides of the aisle to address national and global policy issues and find common ground as we work together to build a stronger America."

The Aspen Institute-Rodel Fellowship program recognizes that by working to develop thoughtful, committed political leaders, it will also help to produce a more bipartisan approach to America's most important domestic issues. While Fellows are all elected, the Rodel Fellowship is not a political program but an educational and leadership training program based on the belief that exposing participants to a variety of philosophies, viewpoints, and strategies, will improve the quality of problem-solving in states and in local communities.

"These men and women represent the very best among the new generation of America's political leadership," former Congressman Mickey Edwards, the program's director, said in a press release announcing the new class. "They have each won the notice and praise of their constituents and their colleagues and have shown a dedication to public service that is an encouraging sign in a time of great challenge. There are now some 200 Rodel Fellows, at all levels of government, working to ensure that Americans receive thoughtful and responsive leadership. We are very proud to have these outstanding leaders join their ranks."

Members of the eleventh class of Rodel Fellows include Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush; Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, Kevin Cotter; Assistant Majority Whip of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, Jon Echols; Jenny Eck; Illinois State Treasurer Mike Frerichs; Rhode Island Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea; Speaker Pro Tem of the Louisiana House of Representatives, Walt Leger; Speaker Pro Tem of the Colorado House of Representatives, Dan Pabon; Speaker Pro Tem of the Oregon House of Representatives, Tobias Read; Majority Leader of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Dave Reed; Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf; and others.

Participation and Funding Participation

The Aspen Institute-Rodel Fellowships in Public Leadership is a nongovernmental, nonpartisan educational program for men and women, ideally under age 50, holding elective office at the state, local, or federal level. The Rodel Fellowship program provides an opportunity for our

country's young leaders to analyze and discuss historical texts and contemporary commentaries on topics such as democracy and leadership. Political neutrality is essential to the educational mission of the program and there is no identification with any political or party viewpoint and no endorsement of legislation. No lobbyists, staff members, or outside observers are permitted to attend fellowship programs. Fellows must be nominated to be considered for participation.

The Aspen-Rodel Fellowships in Public Leadership are funded solely by the Rodel Foundation. Funding is not accepted from lobbyists, governments, corporations, or special interests.

Attorney General Proposes Establishing a Public Integrity Unit

Attorney General Craig W. Richards announced today that the Department of Law proposes to establish a Public Integrity Unit within the Office of Special Prosecutions, as mentioned in Governor Bill Walker's State of the State address. The unit would work to improve public trust in government and eliminate fraud, waste, and corruption.

"Ensuring the public's trust of those in public service is one of the cornerstones of this administration," said Attorney General Richards. "The public needs to have confidence in its government, and to that end, this office would seek to bring a new level of accountability through rigorous review and oversight."

The unit would focus on three specific areas—use of force by law enforcement, corruption and fraud perpetrated upon the State, and prisoner deaths in correctional facilities. By consolidating these matters into one unit within the Office of Special Prosecutions, the matters can be given the attention they deserve by experts in the area while relieving some of the burden from other attorneys and staff.

Officer involved shootings and other claims of unlawful force by an officer receive intense scrutiny from the general public and can erode the community's trust in law enforcement. It is important that government conducts a thorough investigation into the officer's conduct in these cases to determine whether the officer followed the law. Law enforcement officers risk their lives on a daily basis to keep our communities safe, and this unit will help to ensure the integrity of our hardworking men and women in uniform is protected by public confidence that there will be a fair and thorough review of an officer's use of force.

The unit will also investigate prisoner deaths occurring in Alaska's correctional facilities. The trust in the State's correctional system has been shaken over the past year due to some high profile inmate deaths, and the extra layer of review provided by the unit would serve to reassure the public that these situations are handled properly.

The authority of our system only functions with the public's confidence. In these tight budget times, it is even more important to make sure that no abuse or waste will be tolerated—this will be one of the priorities of the unit. For example, the unit will investigate whether any fraud has occurred through the public contracting process.

The investigation and prosecution of crimes involving government misconduct can be long and painstaking. To be successful in these types of investigations, the Public Integrity Unit needs the ability to independently investigate criminal activity and analyze electronic data to reconstruct, detect, and otherwise discover criminal activity. The unit is envisioned to include two attorneys, one forensic auditor, one criminal investigator, and a law office assistant. The goal is to pull from existing resources and reallocate positions as much as possible.

Although the unit will have its own criminal investigator, the unit will continue to partner with federal and state law enforcement agencies to identify instances of public malfeasances, uncover evidence, and initiate prosecutions. The Public Integrity Unit hopes to improve public trust in government by strongly punishing transgressions and ensuring a thorough review process when allegations of misconduct arise.

For more information, please contact Criminal Division Director John Skidmore at (907) 269-6379.

New Mexico Office of the Attorney General Joins the U.S. Marshal's Fugitive Task Force

Albuquerque, NM – On January 20, 2016 five special agents for the New Mexico Office of the Attorney General, one APD officer and one Bernalillo County Sheriff's Deputy were sworn in as Special Deputy United States Marshals as Task Force Officers (TFO). They will be joining many law enforcement officials from throughout New Mexico actively participating in the South West Investigative Fugitive Team (SWIFT) Task Force.

“These newly deputized U.S. Marshals will be assigned to the Albuquerque and Santa Fe USMS Offices, which will greatly increase our resources as a task force in order to enhance the public safety for all communities in New Mexico.” commented U.S. Marshal Conrad E. Candelaria. In attendance was New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas, his presence marks the significance of this partnership and the commitment to work with all law enforcement jurisdictions in New Mexico in order to hold accountable those who have committed horrific crimes in our communities.

The ceremony was held at the U.S. Marshals Service office in Albuquerque and U.S. Marshal for the District of New Mexico Conrad E. Candelaria administered the Oath of Office for the Special Deputy United States Marshals. The South West Investigative Fugitive Team (SWIFT) Task force is comprised of 55 law enforcement agencies from local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies for the specific purpose of pursuing and arresting dangerous, violent, career fugitives so that each can be brought to justice for crimes allegedly committed. In 2015 the Marshal's task force arrested a total of 1,367 fugitives; encompassed in those arrests were 52 homicide related arrests in 2015 alone. Since its inception in 2002, SWIFT has arrested 17,434 fugitives. Nationally the USMS and its 60 task forces arrested a total of 99,756 federal, state, and local fugitives in 2015. USMS Task Forces focus efforts on offenders with extensive criminal history, violent charges, gang offenders, and fugitives of local or national significance in an effort to reduce violence.

Colorado Attorney General Cynthia H. Coffman Unveils More Responsive and User Friendly Colorado Department of Law Website

DENVER – Colorado Attorney General Cynthia H. Coffman launches a new Department of Law website. The newly unveiled site gives Coloradans easy access to more resources, additional consumer protection tools and the ability to locate important information faster than ever before. Key features include a cleaner and more interactive design and a more engaging user experience with enhanced search and navigation tools.

"In the modern digital age, it is vital that Coloradans be able to easily access information and communicate their concerns quickly with our office," said Attorney General Cynthia H.

Coffman. "The new Department of Law website offers a wider array of resources and makes filing a consumer complaint or asking a question much easier."

The Attorney General's new Office of Community Engagement is featured prominently on the site's front page. Users can now quickly find information and resources concerning domestic violence, substance abuse protection, consumer protection, human trafficking prevention and Native American relations.

Easy to locate drop down tabs allows for users to access important information concerning domestic violence assistance and suicide prevention. The new Department of Law website is more inclusive, offering many resources in Spanish.

"I am extremely proud of our new Colorado Department of law website and as I mark the anniversary of my first year in office, I believe the improved site exemplifies our mission of being responsive to the needs of Coloradans by providing the best digital resource possible," said Attorney General Coffman.

Michigan AG: Flint water not even safe to 'bathe a newborn'

The water supply in Flint, Mich., is so unsafe that the state attorney general Monday warned parents to keep their children far from it -- including a warning against bathing.

"I would certainly not bathe a newborn or infant in Flint water," Bill Schuette said during a news conference. He announced that a former prosecutor and a retired head of the Detroit FBI would play key roles in an independent investigation into the lead-tainted water.

Schuette said Todd Flood, a former assistant prosecutor for Wayne County, which includes Detroit, will spearhead Schuette's investigation and serve as special counsel. He'll be joined by Andy Arena, who led Detroit's FBI office from 2007 until 2012.

The cash-strapped city switched from Detroit's municipal water system and began drawing from the Flint River in 2014 to save money. The water wasn't properly treated to prevent lead from pipes from leaching into the supply. Residents have been urged to use bottled water and to put filters on faucets.

A bottled water company owned in part by Sean "Diddy" Combs and Mark Wahlberg pledged to donate 1 million bottles of water to Flint, and to continue sending bottles until the crisis is solved. The first delivery from AQUAhydrate is scheduled to arrive Wednesday.

Wahlberg and Combs first invested and became the face of the Los Angeles-based bottled water company in 2013. Rappers Eminem, Wiz Khalifa and Big Sean have also pledged support and donations for Flint.

City officials have warned that flushing all the contaminants out of the water would take time, and replacing the damaged pipes would cost as much as \$1.5 billion, a price tag they say they can't afford.

"We will do our job thoroughly and let the chips fall where they may... This investigation is about beginning the road back, to rebuild, regain and restore trust in government," Schuette added.

Flood, who currently is a lawyer in private practice handling both criminal and civil cases, said it's a "privilege to have this opportunity to serve." Arena currently heads the Detroit Crime Commission, a nonprofit aimed at reducing criminal activity. Both will report to Schuette.

"Flint families and Michigan families will receive a full and independent report of our investigation," Arena said.

Schuette, a Republican, announced Jan. 15 he would investigate what, if any, Michigan laws were violated in the process that led to the contamination.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

US, New Mexico ink \$74 million in settlements over nuclear radiation leak

Associated Press

New Mexico and the U.S. Department of Energy inked \$74 million in settlements over dozens of permit violations stemming from a radiation leak that forced the closure of the nation's only underground nuclear waste repository.

The settlements are the largest ever negotiated between a state and the Energy Department and come after months of negotiations. The agreements were first outlined last spring, but their signing was delayed by disagreements over some of the details.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in southern New Mexico has been closed since February 2014, when a container of waste burst and released radiation in the underground facility. Twenty-two workers were exposed, and monitors at the surface recorded low levels of radiological contamination, but officials said nearby communities were not at risk.

Investigators determined that the container had been improperly packed at Los Alamos National Laboratory, and experts have said the incident could have been avoided.

The settlements call for the Energy Department to funnel millions of dollars toward road improvements and environmental projects in New Mexico. The state initially proposed more than \$54 million in penalties against the federal agency and its contractors for numerous violations at the lab and waste dump.

New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ryan Flynn called the settlements unprecedented and said they represent a "good deal" for the state.

"We're here because of problems that occurred at WIPP and were caused in large part due to failures up at (Los Alamos)," Flynn said. "I prefer to have avoided this entire situation altogether and focus on other things related to these facilities, but they had some major problems and we're finally on the path to recovery."

Flynn said his staff has been working with the Energy Department and its contractors, poring over the findings of the numerous investigations and inspections done over the past two years to ensure a similar incident does not happen again.

The state agency's work also includes revamping a cleanup order and setting new deadlines for Los Alamos to remove barrels of radioactive waste from its property in northern New Mexico.

Los Alamos has faced its own delays in trying to clean up waste like contaminated gloves, tools and clothing from decades of bomb-making. The closure of the dump has complicated the

matter, but it also has halted shipments of waste from across the federal government's nuclear complex.

In its 15 years of operation, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant received shipments from more than 20 sites as part of the Energy Department's multibillion-dollar-a-year cleanup program.

Federal officials announced Thursday that they have a plan for resuming some waste storage operations at the repository by the end of 2016, but watchdog groups are skeptical.

Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said Friday in a statement that he's pleased to have resolved the permit violations at the lab and the repository so DOE can focus on resuming operations.

"The projects we are funding as part of this settlement are important investments in the health and safety of New Mexicans who work at or live nearby DOE facilities," he said.

Some critics have said the federal government should have funded the projects anyway.

Aside from road and water infrastructure improvements, the settlements call for increased sampling and monitoring of storm water runoff around Los Alamos and regular compliance reviews to ensure the facilities have implemented changes.

Attorney General Sorrell Urges Legislators to Adopt Resolution to Reduce Vermont's Reliance on Incarceration as a Response to Criminal Conduct

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After hosting three public hearings and soliciting written comments from Vermonters, Attorney General Bill Sorrell is taking the question he posed to Vermonters - should Vermont reduce its reliance on incarceration as a response to criminal conduct? - to the Vermont Legislature. The resolution to be introduced in the House is a policy statement that the State should significantly reduce its reliance on incarceration so long as public safety is not compromised.

"The three public hearings were well-attended. Dozens of Vermonters testified and sent comments. The vast majority agreed that the negative impact of incarceration is not limited to the individual sentenced to jail. The impacts on families, our communities and our budget are immense," said Sorrell. "My question to Vermonters was whether they are ready to ask the Legislature to commit to a statewide policy that reduces reliance on incarceration or lengthy incarceration in response to criminal conduct at the prosecution, sentencing and potential early release stages of a case. Based on what I heard, I think they are."

According to Sorrell, violent crime rates nationally, and in Vermont, are on the decline yet the rate at which individuals are incarcerated has increased more than threefold in the past 40 years. Vermont taxpayers now spend over \$150 million per year on corrections. Sorrell acknowledges that Vermont leaders and legislators have taken many steps during the past two decades, both through policy and legislation, to ease prison overcrowding and minimize the need to send Vermont prisoners out of state. "My goal," said Sorrell, "is to direct attention to the thousands of individual day in, day out, decisions made by police, prosecutors, judges, correctional officers and others with the power to determine an individual's fate and require them, as a matter of public policy, to at least ask whether an alternative to incarceration or continued incarceration is available before choosing that route."

Sorrell thanked the many officials and professionals in the criminal justice, human services, and public safety communities who were members of his advisory panel, including Human Services Secretary Hal Cohen, Corrections Commissioner Lisa Menard, Public Safety Commissioner Keith Flynn, Windham County Sheriff Keith Clark and representatives of Defender General Matt Valerio and the Center for Crime Victim Services, for their attendance at the forums and their perspectives and advice. He also expressed gratitude for the individuals who provided data, information about alternatives to incarceration, and the many Vermonters who ventured out in the darkness of December to participate in this important discussion.

Representative Alice Emmons, Chair of the House Committee on Institutions and Corrections, and Representative Maxine Grad, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, have agreed to sponsor the resolution.

FORMER CITY OF KINGMAN EMPLOYEE ARRESTED - INDICTMENT ALLEGES THEFT OF MORE THAN \$1,000,000

Contact: Mia Garcia (602) 339-5895 or Mia.Garcia@azag.gov

KINGMAN – Special Agents with the Arizona Attorney General’s Office working jointly with Immigration & Customs Homeland Security Investigations arrested a former City of Kingman employee announced Attorney General Mark Brnovich. Former Budget Analyst and Interim Finance Director Diane Maxine Richards is accused of stealing more than a million dollars from the City of Kingman. The arrest comes after a State Grand Jury indicted Richards on 23 felony counts including theft, forgery, and misuse of public monies.

“Protecting the hardworking taxpayers of Arizona is a top priority,” said Attorney General Mark Brnovich. “Taxpayers are the real victims in cases involving theft and misuse of public monies. Our office will continue to work with HSI and all law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute these cases.”

In September 2015, Special Agents with the Attorney General's Office and ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) launched an investigation after financial institutions reported unusual activity involving Richards bank accounts.

Investigators found Richards allegedly misused a City of Kingman credit card to pay for her personal expenses from July 2007 through January 2015. Those personal expenses include payments to Richards’ personal cell phone, utility, and car insurance bills. Richards is alleged to have submitted falsified invoices to account for the charges. She also is alleged to have used the City of Kingman credit card to pay off cash advances taken out at various casinos in Laughlin, Nevada. The total amount Richards allegedly spent on this City of Kingman credit card without authorization is \$121,862.11.

From September 2008 to November 2015, Richards allegedly misappropriated money from a bank account used by the City of Kingman to fund its Employee Benefits Trust. The indictment alleges Richards misused her position as Security Manager on the account to alter the access settings and granted herself sole authority to both initiate and approve transactions. Richards is also alleged to have transferred money out of the account to pay off 17 personal lines of credit. A large portion of the money was used to allegedly cover cash advances taken out on Richards’ credit cards at casinos in Laughlin. This conduct continued until Richards was terminated in

November 2015 following the execution of search warrants at her home and Kingman City Hall. Richards is accused of misappropriating \$991,727.74 from the Employee Benefits Trust account.

The total amount Richards is alleged to have taken is \$1,113,589.85. Richards is being held at the Mohave County Jail on a \$100,000 bond. All defendants are presumed innocent until convicted in a court of law.

This case was investigated by Special Agent Dilsher Ali with the Attorney General's Office Special Investigations Section.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General Michael Powell.

For additional information, members of the media may contact Mia Garcia, Director of Media Relations at (602) 339-5895 or Mia.Garcia@azag.gov.

Thousands Apply to U.S. to Forgive Their Student Loans, Saying Schools Defrauded Them

The Wall Street Journal
Josh Mitchell

Syd Andrade, a 27-year-old aspiring video-game designer living in Austin, Texas, owes \$30,000 in federal student loans. Mr. Andrade is among the thousands of Americans petitioning the Education Department to forgive their loans, arguing that their schools deceived them with false promises.

Americans are flooding the government with appeals to have their student loans forgiven on the grounds that schools deceived them with false promises of a well-paying career—part of a growing protest against years of surging college costs.

In the past six months, more than 7,500 borrowers owing \$164 million have applied to have their student debt expunged under an obscure federal law that had been applied only in three instances before last year. The law forgives debt for borrowers who prove their schools used illegal tactics to recruit them, such as by lying about their graduates' earnings.

The U.S. Education Department has already agreed to cancel nearly \$28 million of that debt for 1,300 former students of Corinthian Colleges—the for-profit chain that liquidated in bankruptcy last year. The department has indicated that many more will likely get forgiveness.

The program could prove to be one of the few lifelines for hundreds of thousands of Americans buried in student debt after attending disreputable schools that failed to land them a decent job. Federal law prohibits student debt from being discharged in bankruptcy, except in rare circumstances, and the Supreme Court last week declined to hear a case that could have expanded bankruptcy options.

The sudden surge in claims has flummoxed the Education Department, which says the 1994 forgiveness program is overly vague. The law doesn't specify, for example, what proof is needed to demonstrate a school committed fraud. Last week, the department began monthslong negotiation with representatives of students, schools and lenders to set clear rules, including when the department can go after institutions to claw back tuition money funded by student loans.

Education Department officials say they are still trying to grasp the potential bill that will be footed by taxpayers. They say the cost of forgiveness could ultimately be in the billions of dollars.

“We just don’t know” the potential scope, said Ted Mitchell, the Education Department’s undersecretary. “This is new territory for us.”

Mr. Mitchell added that borrowers are entitled to forgiveness—as well as potential reimbursement of repaid loans—if they have been defrauded, regardless of the taxpayer cost. “The law is clear about giving students redress when they’ve been defrauded,” he said.

Andrew Kelly of the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, said there is a danger that the program will become overly broad, encompassing not just instances of outright fraud, but also cases in which borrowers simply regret taking out the debt because they can’t find a job, through no fault of the colleges.

“It gets much more difficult when students say, ‘Well, I was told this would improve my job prospects.... I don’t have a job, and I’m mad about it, and I think I’m defrauded,’” Mr. Kelly said.

The surge in applications reflects the growing savvy of student activists, who discovered the law last year after it had largely sat dormant for two decades. Education Department officials say the agency failed to draft rules after the law was passed in the early 1990s and lacked the urgency to do so because it had only received five applications—three of them granted—before last year.

The clamoring for forgiveness represents the fallout of a college-enrollment boom—driven by a surge in students attending for-profit colleges—that caused student debt to nearly triple in the past decade to \$1.2 trillion, New York Federal Reserve figures show. Seven million Americans have defaulted, government data show.

So far, almost all of the borrowers applying for forgiveness under the 1994 program attended for-profit schools. Three-quarters went to Corinthian-owned institutions, while hundreds of others attended the Art Institutes, owned by Education Management Corp.; and ITT Technical Institutes, owned by ITT Educational Services Inc. All three have been the subject of federal investigations into illegal recruiting tactics in recent years.

An Art Institutes spokesman declined to comment. Corinthian Colleges was liquidated in bankruptcy last year; the company denied allegations of illegal recruiting tactics.

ITT said it wants “to assist students with a legitimate grievance.” But it added that it believes the company has been unfairly targeted by the Obama administration in what it characterized as a broad campaign against for-profit colleges.

AG calls for summary judgment, penalties, unsealing of records in food-labelling lawsuit

Defendant Grocery Manufacturers Association responds with own motions for summary judgment and to keep records hidden from public scrutiny

OLYMPIA — Attorney General Bob Ferguson today announced that his office has asked a court to grant summary judgment and penalize the Grocery Manufacturers Association for GMA’s intentional subterfuge in an effort to elude state campaign-finance laws. Ferguson also asked the court to unseal “confidential” GMA documents in the landmark case.

The case, *State v. Grocery Manufacturers Association*, concerns GMA’s financing of a 2013 campaign against Initiative 522, which sought to require labeling of genetically engineered products. GMA, a Washington, D.C.-based trade association, was the largest single donor to the “No on 522” political committee.

“The crux of this case is transparency,” Ferguson said. “GMA intentionally shielded from public scrutiny the true identity of the companies who donated of millions of dollars to this campaign — it was flagrant violation of state law.”

Ferguson filed a lawsuit against GMA in October 2013. The state alleged GMA violated Washington’s campaign finance disclosure laws when it solicited and collected over \$11 million from its members, placed those funds in a special “Defense of Brands” account and used them to oppose Initiative 522, all without disclosing the true source of the contributions. The allegations constitute the largest political funding concealment case in state history.

Two days after the Attorney General filed suit, GMA agreed to register with the state’s Public Disclosure Commission and provide contributor information. GMA identified contributions including \$1.6 million from PepsiCo, more than \$1 million from both Nestle and Coca-Cola, and over \$500,000 from General Mills.

Late Friday afternoon, the state filed a Motion for Summary Judgment under seal pursuant to existing protective orders in the case (available [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), which give the court discretion over the release of documents GMA asserts contain confidential information. The motion asks the court to decide the lawsuit in the state’s favor.

The state’s lawsuit also asks for penalties in the case. Under the law, a court may impose penalties for campaign finance disclosure violations, including a penalty equal to the amount not reported as required. If the court finds that the violation was intentional, that penalty amount can be tripled.

The Attorney General’s Office also filed a Motion to Lift Protective Order as to the summary judgment motion and evidentiary documents. The motion calls upon the court, “in the interest of open justice,” to make all relevant documents public, citing Article I, Section 10 of the Washington State Constitution: “Justice in all cases shall be administered openly, and without unnecessary delay.”

Also late Friday, GMA filed its own Cross Motion for Summary Judgment, asking the court to dismiss the state’s case against the trade group. GMA also filed a Motion to Seal certain information filed with its summary judgment motion.

The Attorney General’s motion to lift the protective order applies specifically to all documents filed with the court in conjunction with the state’s motion and any cross-motions from GMA. Any other documents produced in the matter are subject to standard public records requests, and GMA has the burden to seek a protective order should the state receive such requests. (See para. 9 of Oct. 17, 2014 order.)

The briefs were filed in Thurston County Superior Court. A hearing on the state's motion to lift the protective order is scheduled for Jan. 29, 2016, with a hearing on the summary judgment motion set for Feb. 19, 2016. Superior Court Judge Anne Hirsch will preside.

The Office of the Attorney General is the chief legal office for the state of Washington with attorneys and staff in 27 divisions across the state providing legal services to roughly 200 state agencies, boards and commissions. Attorney General Bob Ferguson is working hard to protect consumers and seniors against fraud, keep our communities safe, protect our environment and stand up for our veterans. Visit www.atg.wa.gov to learn more.

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Lyft Agrees to Settle Class-Action Lawsuit With California Drivers

By MIKE ISAAC

For more than two years, ride-hailing companies have fought with their drivers over the drivers' employment status. Now, one of those companies has found a way to bury the hatchet.

Lyft, a popular start-up based in San Francisco, agreed late Tuesday to settle a class-action lawsuit brought in 2013 by Lyft drivers in California. The drivers had sought to be recognized as full-time employees who would be eligible for benefits from the company, rather than as independent contractors.

Under the settlement, Lyft drivers will continue to be classified as contractors. The company agreed to pay \$12.25 million to those represented in the suit and said it would amend the terms of service to which drivers must agree when signing up with the platform so that they are consistent with the definition of a contractor. The settlement is subject to court approval.

"We are pleased to have resolved this matter on terms that preserve the flexibility of drivers to control when, where and for how long they drive on the platform and enable consumers to continue benefiting from safe, affordable transportation," Kristin Sverchek, Lyft's general counsel, said in a news release.

Shannon Liss-Riordan, the attorney representing the drivers in the suit, said in a statement that the settlement would "provide substantial benefits to drivers and distribute reimbursement for some of the expenses they have incurred while driving for Lyft." Lyft agreed to pay arbitration fees and other costs in claims initiated by the company or drivers, for instance, and Ms. Liss-Riordan said the company would no longer be able to terminate drivers at will; it must find cause to do so.

The employment status of those who work for ride-hailing services and other on-demand companies has become a hot topic of debate. While on-demand companies say independent contractors gain a lot of flexibility by not being full-time employees, critics say the workers are shortchanged because they do not get benefits and other protections. Politicians and others have taken up the issue, which is likely to be closely scrutinized this year during an election cycle.

Uber, Lyft's chief rival, remains embroiled in a similar class-action suit in California in which drivers are seeking full-time employee status.

Any change in worker classification could hurt the business models of companies like Lyft and Uber. By treating workers as contractors, the companies can keep labor costs low, since they do not need to pay drivers' payroll taxes and are not subject to minimum-wage and overtime laws.