

Report: Nev. state pilot cut corners

by UPI

CARSON CITY, Nev. - A pilot flying Nevada's state plane risked the lives of Gov. Jim Gibbons and others by flying with low fuel, a state hearing officer found.

Gary Phillips on one occasion had to land the state's 10-seat Cessna Citation at Carson City in bad weather because he did not have enough fuel to divert to Reno, the hearing officer, Bill Kockenmeister, found last week, the Las Vegas Sun reported. Phillips also took off carrying too much weight and allowed his 14-year-old son to take the controls, the hearing officer said.

Phillips has been demoted from chief pilot to pilot. His conduct came under scrutiny after another pilot, Jim Richardson, said he had been fired for raising questions about safety.

Kockenmeister ordered Richardson's reinstatement.

The Nevada Transportation Department plans to appeal Kockenmeister's findings.

Kockenmeister cited several instances where he said Phillips operated unsafely. He said that the pilot took off without enough fuel while carrying Gibbons and other state officials on a homeland security tour and landed with only 15 minutes of fuel left when returning from Texas with a prisoner.

Â© 2009 United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Report: Nev. state pilot cut corners by UPI