ARIZONA
CAPITOL TIMES

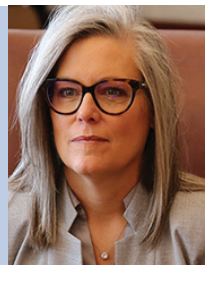
July 18, 2025



"Compromise is important, and it's important to stay at the table even when it gets really hard."

— Gov. Katie Hobbs, on working through partisanship to pass a state budget.

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2025 ARIZONA LEGISLATIVE WRAP

CAPITOL QUOTES



"There was clear frustration over the delays, and unnecessary division within the party made the process more difficult than it needed to be."

— Senate President Warren Petersen, R-Queen Creek, on the delay in passing a state budget.



"It is a bit surprising to see the fractures within the Republican parties and the Republican caucuses display themselves so openly."

— Senate Minority Leader Priya Sundareshan, D-Tucson, on her observations of the 2025 legislative session.



"They throw a fit and a tantrum, and then at the end of the day, they fold like a cheap suit, and we're back to where we were, square one."

— Rep. Oscar De Los Santos, D-Laveen, on legislative disfunction amid the state budget debate.



"There were high challenges, and our members stood up to them, and they came through. I am very grateful to our caucus. We have a group of talented legislators, and when it was needed most, they came together."

— House Speaker Steve Montenegro, R-Goodyear, on the challenges of the 2025 legislative session.

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2025 ARIZONA LEGISLATIVE WRAP

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Gov. Hobbs on 2025's victories and ongoing battles



Gov. Katie Hobbs poses for a photo in the Executive Tower, located at the Arizona Capitol, in July 2025. (Reagan Priest / Arizona Capitol Times)

BY REAGAN PRIEST, *rpriest@stateaffairs.com*

Gov. Katie Hobbs managed to score legislative wins and sign a bipartisan budget during her third legislative session on the Ninth Floor, but not without lengthy battles with Republicans and a new veto record.

Hobbs sat down with the *Arizona Capitol Times* to recap what she calls a "very successful session" that saw movement on groundwater legislation, extended funding for individuals with developmental disabilities and the passage of a $17.6 billion budget.

But several issues were left on the table when lawmakers adjourned at the end of June, like school voucher reform, education funding and affordable housing initiatives. The governor hopes more can be done to address those areas when the Legislature reconvenes in 2026.

What do you consider your biggest wins of this session?

When we saved the funding for the developmentally disabled population, I think that set a really good tone for the budget. But in and of itself, it was a huge win. And we all watched these families come to the Capitol day after day, and the House Republicans refusing to give them a chance to speak in committee. I had a round table and just heard their stories. It was gut wrenching, and that's why it was such a priority to save that program, and we did. I think my best day of the session was when we had that bill signing.

Some of your priorities weren't addressed this session, which are you hoping to keep working on?

First of all, I'm really focused on what we did get done. If you look at the budget that we passed, and what I talked about in my State of the State — laying out the "Arizona Promise" — we covered a lot of those priorities. Giving state police and firefighters a much needed raise, continuing local border support and efforts on border security, investing in child care, Homes for Heroes. So there's certainly a lot we can build on. Obviously, we didn't get any reforms on ESAs, and that's still going to be a priority, as well as getting a Prop. 123 to the voters that invests in public education and gives teachers a raise, I think that's a huge priority. And then we have more to do on housing. Housing is a big one, and Low Income Housing Tax Credits. It was really unfortunate that we couldn't get a champion there but we're not giving up. And the rural groundwater reform is also still critical. I certainly am really proud of the work we did on the urban groundwater with the Ag-to-Urban bill, but making sure that we're not taking that as a win and going away because rural groundwater is still a really critical issue.

What kind of changes are you hoping to see in the state's ESA program?

Everything's on the table. I think the plan we proposed this year was very reasonable, and something that even supporters of the program could get behind. We're not trying to eliminate the

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Gov. Hobbs on 2025's victories and ongoing battles

program. We want it to go back to its original purpose and help kids with disabilities, kids in low-performing schools. The more reporting we see on the abuses, the more ammunition, for lack of a better word, it gives a reasonable proposal. It's really mind boggling to me that Republicans want to continue to defend these abuses.

It seemed like groundwater was also going to go unaddressed this session, but the Ag-to-Urban bill came in at the last minute. What did it take to get that to the finish line?

I think it was having Senator (T.J.) Shope as the champion, and him being willing to usher that through. Last year, the bill that got to my desk … it was rushed through, and it wasn't the right compromise. And so we came back to the table. The legislative process is always weird, and sometimes things just sail through, and sometimes they stop, and then at the end is when you see the flurry of activity. I'm really glad we got the compromise that worked to make this a good program, and I think it just took the leadership of Senator Shope to get it done.

A few of the bills you signed this session had Democratic opposition and aligned with policies proposed by conservative groups. What was the reasoning there?

I have focused on not looking at the partisan solutions, but things that are addressing problems. An example is the age verification for online content. I vetoed a similar bill last year, and I've heard from more and more parents who are really concerned about content that their kids are exposed to. And this seemed like the right balance, and I have no idea that it was possibly aligned with right-wing things. To me, it's something that's addressing an issue that a lot of parents are struggling with.

I have to ask about the veto record. Why do you feel like that isn't the best way to measure your legislative effectiveness?

There was definitely an orchestrated attempt to run up the score on that veto record. Like I vetoed bills this year that I vetoed one or two times before, and nothing's changed about the bill or my position on it. I've been really clear, I'm going to be a backstop against extreme legislation that attacks fundamental freedoms of Arizonans. And a lot of those bills did that. But I think if you point to the work that we did, when people are willing to come to the table and compromise, we can get big things done. Ag-to-Urban, the DDD funding, the Axon bill, the Diamondbacks bill, the bipartisan budget — those are all things that have impact and and those are fewer and further between than the partisan stuff that goes on. Being willing to stay at the table is a lot harder than just ramming something through that you know is going to get vetoed. And I didn't come here to veto bills, but I'm going to continue to be the backstop when I need to.

You had to play hardball this session with your bill moratorium and vetoing two different budgets. How do you feel about those decisions looking back?

What we saw with the developmental disability funding and with the two House rogue budgets (was) that they decided that they didn't have to work together and that they could just do whatever they wanted and not need my support. But I'm the person that signs bills into law, and it seemed like they weren't willing to understand that. Hopefully now they do.

What lessons did you learn from this session and what lessons do you hope the Legislature learned?

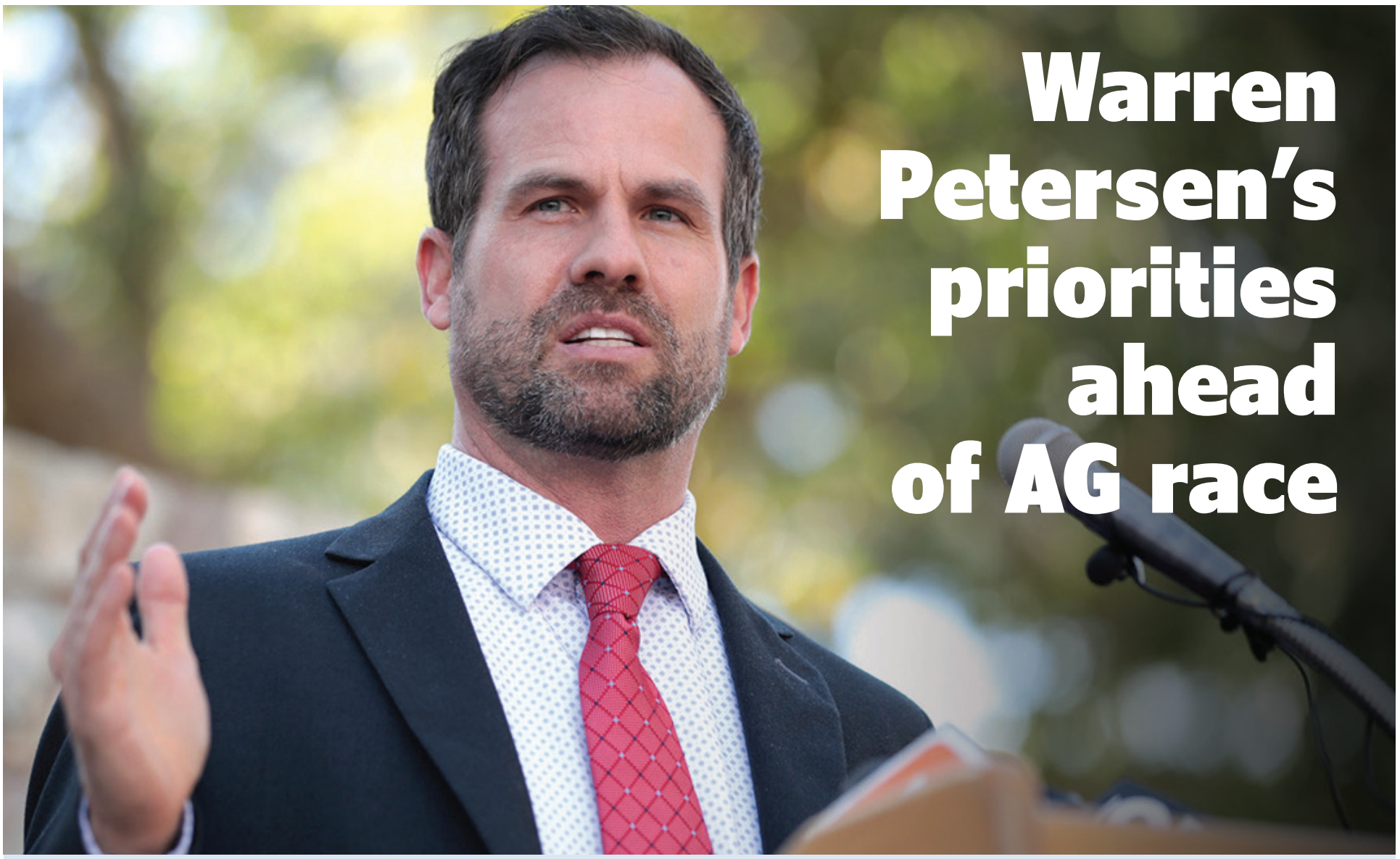
We had a very successful session, and I think it's because we've been willing to do the hard work of staying at the table, not just our office, but legislators on both sides of the aisle. We worked really hard to have support on both sides of the aisle for our budget. I think this may be the most successful budget we've had of the three. It's just that compromise is important and it's important to stay at the table even when it gets really hard. And I don't know that those are lessons that were learned or just reconfirmed again this year.



The dome of the Arizona state Capitol.
(Brock Blasdell / Arizona Capitol Times)

SENATE

Warren Petersen's priorities ahead of AG race



State Senate President Warren Petersen speaking with the media at a press conference on SB1184 at the Arizona State Capitol building in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

BY JAMAR YOUNGER, *jyounger@stateaffairs.com*

For Senate President Warren Petersen, the next legislative session will likely be his last opportunity to help advance the Republican caucus' legislative policy priorities.

Petersen is running for state attorney general in 2026, so he will look to work with his Senate Republican colleagues to revive legislation that either stalled or was previously vetoed, support the federal government on policies affecting Arizona and solidify the Senate's relationship with House Republican leadership after the two chambers clashed during budget negotiations.

The following are responses provided by Petersen after inquiry from the *Arizona Capitol Times*. Answers have been edited slightly for clarity.

What do you consider some of the biggest accomplishments from this session?

Power and water are foundational elements that contribute to our population and business growth here in Arizona. We were able to pass meaningful legislation to help us keep up with the demand, which was shown with our historic water policy, enabling us to conserve and grow, using less water even with our growing population. In response to projections showing a 60% increase in power demand over the next 30 years, we passed legislation to strengthen our infrastructure and ensure Arizona families and businesses continue to have access to reliable and affordable energy. We made significant investments in public safety to keep Arizona communities secure and delivered tax cuts to support small business owners.

What were some of the biggest challenges?

One of the biggest challenges this session was the lack of efficiency, particularly with how long it took to pass the budget. There was clear frustration over the delays, and unnecessary division within the party made the process more difficult than it needed to be. In the end, the budget that passed was the Senate's initial budget plan with some extra spending amended on by the other chamber.

Were you surprised that House leadership didn't engage in the budget negotiations and instead released their own budget?

It was par for the course for this session. We saw the chaos unfold with the (Division of Developmental Disabilities) bill and how that was handled, so I'm not necessarily surprised, but I'm disappointed that the session was drawn out with unnecessary division in our party. Two years ago, we put a budget on Hobbs desk in February. The hope is we get back to that level of efficiency.

Where did some of that disagreement come from, especially during the budget?

I'll just leave it at my (previous) statement. It's the

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SENATE



Sen. Sundareshan, policy priorities and partisanship

Senate Minority Leader Priya Sundareshan speaking with attendees at the 2025 Legislative Forecast Luncheon in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

BY JAMAR YOUNGER, *jyounger@stateaffairs.com*

For Senate Minority Leader Priya Sundareshan, the legislative session contained its share of accomplishments and challenges for the Democratic caucus.

Some of the victories included working with Gov. Katie Hobbs and Republicans to ensure the Division of Developmental Disabilities program was fully funded, securing some of their funding priorities in the state budget and remaining unified in opposition to Republican bills they considered extreme.

However, many of the caucus' priorities were unaddressed, including affordable housing, curtailing the state's Empowerment Scholarship Account program and passing legislation to address rural groundwater shortages in the state.

Sundareshan spoke with the *Arizona Capitol Times* about these issues and future priorities.

What would you consider some of the biggest accomplishments from this session for you and your caucus?

A major accomplishment for my caucus was in sticking together on issues of value to the Democratic Party and our members, including on many of the extreme pieces of legislation that the Republicans put forward. Our caucus often was the caucus holding together. We were able to show the unity of our opposition, and when those bills then made it to the governor's desk, that made it pretty clear to the governor that those were easy to veto because those were not in line with our Democratic values.

So what were some of the biggest challenges from this session?

So many things left unresolved yet again by the Republican majority in the Legislature. We can just rattle them off. For example, we were just talking about water. Rural groundwater remains unaddressed and it was very clear mid-session that there was no desire on the part of the committee chairs to continue negotiating any kind of bill that would do that. That is a huge disappointment and really tragic because there are people in rural Arizona who continue to face the issues of finding their wells running dry thanks to the unlimited ability for large corporate pumpers to just come in and leave the residents high and dry, literally.

Another thing that was left undone is Prop. 123. We had a lot of back and forth over the course of this session about how to ensure a ballot referral to the voters to renew Prop. 123 in a way that would support our education system. And that got bogged down unnecessarily by partisan bickering. I will again say that the House and Senate Republicans had decided that they wanted to start attaching unrelated policies to the Prop. 123 proposal, like voucher protections and other things, when we already have a very, extremely permissive voucher program in Arizona.

Why has it been so hard to address the rural groundwater issue?

What I've come to realize is that the reality of rural Arizona residents is just not being represented by even their own elected officials in this Legislature. I represent a suburban-to-urban district, but I have compassion for the people who are not my

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Warren Petersen's priorities ahead of AG race

normal stuff. I think human nature can creep in. But there's other things too. Anybody that was there … if you ask five people what it was, I think five people would probably all say similar things. So I'll just leave it where it's at. I mean, we've shown what we can do with divided government. Two years ago, we had budgets up on the governor's desk in February with divided government. So (we can) be efficient, and hopefully, we'll return to that next session.

What will it take for the House and Senate Republicans to solidify that relationship in time for next year's budget?

I'm confident the next session will look different. By bringing on Grant Hanna as the new Chief of Staff, the House is positioned to operate with significantly greater effectiveness.

Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed a number of border bills, including the AZ ICE Act that you sponsored. You mentioned that you could bring the bill back as a ballot measure or wait to see if a new governor is elected. Is that still a possibility?

That's a discussion we will have early on next session as a caucus, to see if it's something we want to put on the ballot. I do feel confident that we will have a new governor in 2026 who will sign the legislation.

What were some of the other big issues that went unaddressed this session?

Two major issues that were left unaddressed are immigration and election reforms. We sent the AZ ICE Act to the governor's desk, a bill that would have empowered local law enforcement to remove dangerous criminals from our streets, but she chose to veto it, putting both public safety and ICE agents in a more vulnerable position. She also vetoed our Florida-style election system bill which would have ensured faster, more transparent results on election night. Because of that veto, Arizonans will continue to face delays and uncertainty in our election process.

There were a number of bills that were introduced this session with the intention of expediting election results. Can those bills return next session?

We would definitely like to see those bills come back. We're monitoring. All eyes are on 2026, and we'll see how things are progressing. I think we'll have a Republican governor. And you know, it may be best to just put our energy into making sure we get a Republican governor. And then 300 bills a session that are getting vetoed will get signed.

So anyway, we'll look at it. I think it was close to a signature. So maybe … the bill gets tweaked a little bit and gets a signature, but we'll see. We'll have those discussions as we head into next session with the numbers.

What made this such an abnormal session?

The length. There's absolutely no reason to be wrapping up the session on June 25. So mainly the budget.

What do you anticipate will be the most significant Republican priorities for the next legislative session?

Water will definitely be a key topic in the next session, but our primary focus will remain on protecting individual rights, supporting small businesses, and upholding core conservative values. A top priority will also be addressing staffing shortages in public safety, especially within the Department of Corrections, to ensure we can add and retain the people we need to keep Arizona safe. We're also committed to advancing Prop 123 and working with the Trump Administration on federal regulations that impact our state. Additionally, we will continue to step in and defend laws that our current AG refuses to defend.

This will be your last session as Senate President before you run for attorney general. Is there anything you want to accomplish before you focus on that campaign?

We have the Arizona ICE Act, the Florida style elections. I have an SCR that I worked on that I would like to see passed that protects the taxpayer by a higher threshold for counties and cities to pass taxes. All three of those are important. Of course, we also have just the overarching issues that are important for Arizona: water, power. I'm sure I'll get very involved with the water discussions as we go forward, continuing to deal with that. I don't know that I'll point to one bill that has to happen before I leave the Legislature. But those are things I'll probably work on next session if there's a path for a signature. I do like to spend my time on bills that have a good chance … that will be signed. Really, really, really, good chance of being signed. We'll see what happens as we move forward.

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Sen. Sundareshan, policy priorities and partisanship

constituents, who are facing these water crises, and yet their own representatives are seemingly unmoved. Rep. Mathis and I introduced a bill that had Republican support from Republican elected officials in these rural areas across the state. This was something that was a bipartisan effort that we knew was reflective of the negotiations we had had with Republican legislators from last year. We worked together with other Republican elected officials from rural Arizona to put forward this proposal, and yet, that still could not get any hearing by the chairs of the committees.

Were you surprised by the budget process?

Certainly, it is a bit surprising to see the fractures within the Republican parties and the Republican caucuses display themselves so openly. I think what we observed with this budget process was to what extent the Freedom Caucus is willing to take everyone hostage — the entire state hostage — in order to achieve some of their goals, and how much of a hold they have over the Republican Party, because … they were flexing their power, and they showed that they are making demands of the broader Republican caucuses that needed to be addressed before we could move forward.

What enabled the Senate Democrats to be able to work with the Senate Republicans and the governor to reach some of the compromises in the budget?

Senate Democrats had significant concerns with the budget process, as we have for many years, because Republicans do not directly negotiate with us and so we worked with Governor Hobbs and her team to ensure that our Democratic priorities were reflected in the budget. I think we were able to significantly achieve a lot of what we were asking for by working with the governor, but we also were very dissatisfied with the failure to again address universal vouchers, which has a huge impact on the budget. Over $1 billion in the next year that is just going again to this unaccountable, fraudulent program and wasteful because it's going to people who do not even need educational support and have simply sent their kids to private schools.

But, on the other hand, we also had a number of wins by negotiating for the budget. I'll point to things like the Area Agencies on Aging that support seniors as they age and provide meals on wheels for seniors. That was a significant point that our caucus was fighting for. Another point is other services broadly for those who need it the most … refugee support and homelessness issues, there was very little funding available to put towards that. And I know many in my caucus would have loved to see a lot more go towards that but what we did see go towards that was due to the engagement of my caucus.

2025 ARIZONA LEGISLATIVE WRAP

HOUSE

Speaker Montenegro and the pulse of the House



Speaker of the Arizona House Steve Montenegro speaking with attendees on the floor of the Arizona House of Representatives on opening day of the 57th legislature in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

BY JAKOB THORINGTON, *jthorington@stateaffairs.com*

House Republicans expanded their majority in the chamber after the 2024 election, but faced ire from the governor's office, legislative Democrats and some Senate Republicans over critical issues at the Legislature this session.
In his first session leading the chamber as Speaker, Rep. Steve Montenegro, R-Goodyear, reflected on the 57th Legislative session in an interview with the *Arizona Capitol Times.*

The questions and answers have been edited lightly for style and clarity.

What were the biggest wins for House Republicans this session?

We started off the session with a very robust majority agenda centered around three major themes: Preserving the American Dream, promoting public safety and protecting individual rights and liberties. We want to focus on those areas, and, for the most part, we have. We did have major achievements when it comes to reforms. We were able to fully fund the Division of Developmental Disabilities and pass the supplemental budget, and, at the same time, advance some reforms that protect the vulnerable and ensure that the money is going where it should be.

How is the relationship between the House and Senate after the budget played out the way it did?

The relationship between the House and the Senate is fine. Historically, I think the founders have always intended there to be a certain healthy, friendly legislative tension between the House and Senate. The relationship is fine, and we're going to continue doing the people's work.

What were the biggest challenges of the session?

Understanding what some of the federal impacts are going to be on the state, whether it's in Medicaid impacts, whether it's in tax cuts, understanding how some of those decisions are going to impact the state. Not in a negative way, but just in how we should prepare and be wise stewards of the state.

The JLBC is expecting a $381 million cost to Arizona if it conforms to federal tax changes. Do you see that as a bad thing?

Well, tax cuts for Americans are never a bad thing. Republicans want people to have more of their own money in their pockets. We trust Arizonans to spend their money more wisely than the government spends its money. The larger the government, the smaller the individual. The smaller the government, the larger the individual. We want the individual to be more prosperous. Government has to learn to live within its means, just like we as citizens do.

We saw a lot of frustration from Republicans this year toward the governor's office, particularly with DDD, vetoed bills, and her executive budget proposal. How do Republicans feel about that office right now?

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HOUSE



Rep. De Los Santos and the 'dysfunctional' GOP

Rep. Oscar De Los Santos speaking with the media at a press conference for the Arizona Latino Legislative Caucus at the Arizona State Capitol in Phoenix. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

BY JAKOB THORINGTON, *jthorington@stateaffairs.com*

In his first year as House minority leader, Rep. Oscar De Los Santos, D-Laveen, helped lead his caucus to gather the most votes for a budget negotiated under Gov. Katie Hobbs among House Democrats. In a recent interview with the *Arizona Capitol Times,* De Los Santos discussed the recent legislative session.

The questions and answers have been edited lightly for style and clarity.

What were the biggest wins for House Democrats this session?

I think the two biggest issues that the state Legislature saw this year were the Division of Developmental Disabilities fight and the budget. I mean, without House Democrats, you don't have DDD being saved. And then on the budget, you have the biggest investment in child care and making child care affordable in the past 10 years for working families. We're drawing down over $200 million for tribal health care in the budget. These are some huge wins, especially in this revenue environment that we're in, which is tough. I think it's a remarkable success for the caucus.

More House Democrats voted for the budget this year than the last two budgets. How involved were Democrats with this budget?

You had a supermajority of the House Democratic caucus on the budget and that's for a reason. We were involved in the budget process from day one, engaging with Republicans and the Governor's Office, and ultimately influencing the final product. But after two years of the relationship with the Governor's Office, I think we've sort of on both sides figured it out a bit and understood how to work better together.

Why is waiving the AEL for two years instead of just one year such a big deal?

It's a big deal on a policy level because schools are on the brink of financial calamity every year, which is insane. This is money that obviously has already been appropriated. It's been approved. There's an artificial limit here that makes no sense. It's outdated, and yet the Republicans politicize it and jeopardize the education of hundreds to thousands of public school students and they sort of use it as a bargaining tool here at the Legislature and it's ridiculous. So, we avoid this fight for the next two years. On a political level, though, it's incredibly important because it takes away one of the bargaining chips that the Republicans have to extract concessions from us.

JLBC estimates that the federal budget reconciliation package will cost Arizona approximately $381 million to conform to the tax policy changes. What do Arizonans need to know about what's going on federally?

That number is a massive understatement because it doesn't take into account the cost shifts on SNAP, Medicaid, and the job cuts. You're just gutting the health care economy in particular. The Arizona Chamber of Commerce is saying that we're looking

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Speaker Montenegro and the pulse of the House

We obviously don't agree on much or how she's running the state. We've seen some challenges throughout the session. As Arizonans, we have a decision to make about the direction of the state. We're going to work together because we have to make sure that we're governing the state. At the same time, there's much that is at a standstill. If you take a look at the job creation numbers, the state fell dramatically in line with the rest of the states in our standing. That is due to the decisions made by the governor. We sent up great bills to help us maintain economic soundness in the state. If we want to be stronger economically, we're going to have to change direction in the governor's office.

How important was it for Republicans to get a resolution to designate drug cartels as terrorist organizations on the ballot?

Arizona is unique from most of the country because we are a southern state. And as of the last few years, we've always had a problem with drug trafficking, with human trafficking, but it's intensified in the last few years. If it weren't for President Trump coming in and strongly securing that border, we'd continue to be in serious trouble. We're talking about the safety of our citizens. We're talking about the ability for our children to play in our front yard without the fear of human trafficking, without the fear of child abduction. I think we've gotten to a point where citizens understand that the border has very strong dangers and the way that these cartels are operating, they are a danger to our citizens and we need to do everything possible to protect our citizens. The impact that this measure will have is that it is going to designate these drug cartels correctly and we're going to make sure that law enforcement has every tool to go after these individuals that pose a great danger.

This was your first session as speaker. What does this position mean to you, and what have you learned this session?

The most sacred thing about being a speaker is that we have the responsibility to maintain and uphold the integrity of the institution. That's the institution that our founders gave us to protect the individual rights of our citizens and their ability to achieve their American Dream. Arizonans send legislators to the Capitol to be their voice, and the Arizona House of Representatives is the place where those voices are heard. It doesn't matter what side of the aisle you're on. Disagreement is an American value. We must welcome it, and we understand that iron sharpens iron.

This session had some pressing issues. DDD, Axon, the budget. Each faced significant challenges but they were handled. How does that reflect on the caucus?

There were high challenges, and our members stood up to them, and they came through. I am very grateful to our caucus. We have a group of talented legislators, and when it was needed most, they came together. Like I said, there's disagreements, of course, but in the end, we see the challenges and we see the needs and we were able to step up and do what was best in the eyes of the majority for the state. It turns out, we got some really important things done and we're ready for the challenges that pop up and we have the leadership required to tackle those issues and govern adequately as Republicans and as conservatives.

What are your plans for the interim and what is priority one next session?

Of course, it's going to continue to be the budget and continue to make sure that we have a sound economy in the state to prepare Arizona for our future and every individual to have an opportunity to prosper. That's going to continue to be our constitutional duty in passing a balanced and sound budget that's helping our families forward. At the same time, we want to make sure that every member has the tools they need to be successful and show their constituents that they were able to be an adequate voice for Arizonans. In the interim, we're all back in our districts with our families, our communities, our citizens, meeting with moms and dads and teachers so when we come back to the Legislature, we are in tune with our constituents. That's certainly my number one responsibility.

We want to make sure that every member has the tools they need to be successful and show their constituents that they were able to be an adequate voice for Arizonans."

Speaker of the Arizona House Steve Montenegro

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Rep. De Los Santos and the 'dysfunctional' GOP

at at least 36,000 jobs lost because of this. Experts are predicting five critical access hospitals in rural Arizona are going to close. These are hospitals in rural areas where it's the only hospital in that area. If they close, people are going to die. If you're a pregnant woman who is having an emergency late during your pregnancy, where are you going to go? If you're having a heart attack or a stroke that needs immediate care, what are you going to do? And so I think the most important thing is understanding the human cost of this, and the reason it happened is because Republicans want to give tax cuts to the billionaires. Every single Republican in Congress owns it, and every single Republican in the House and Senate here in Arizona owns it because they cheered it on.

What's next for Prop 123?

House Republicans need to stop using this as a political football. They're trying to attach ESAs to Prop 123, which has never happened before. And what they're trying to do is enshrine ESAs into the Constitution. This is ridiculous for two reasons. One of them is they know the program is unpopular. If you recall, voters rejected ESAs at the ballot box by a massive margin just a couple of years ago. They know they can't win on the issue alone, so they're tying it to funding for public schools. It's a stunning admission about how unpopular ESAs are that they can't fight it on their own terms. But second of all, we just need a clean extension of Prop. 123 at this point. I mean, this is hundreds of millions of dollars that public schools depend on. We are ranked 49th in the country in per pupil funding for education. Meanwhile, you've seen the reports, it's like hundreds of millions of dollars sitting in ESA accounts.

There were a lot of real pressing issues this session. DDD, the budget, even Axon. Why did it feel like all of these came down to the wire?

It's because the House Republicans don't know how to govern. I mean, the budget that passed was basically identical to the budget deal that was struck weeks beforehand. It's just tantrums and games, and then we wind up where we started. Same thing with DDD. We drove families to the brink of calamity here. I mean, the number of moms I talked to who were in tears and who were having panic attacks. Somebody spoke about having suicidal ideations because they didn't know whether that money and that support were going to be there. It's insane, and it's solely because the Republicans just don't want to govern in a bipartisan manner. They throw a fit and a tantrum, and then at the end of the day, they fold like a cheap suit, and we're back to where we were, square one.

What will your focus be in the interim, and what is priority one in the upcoming session?

House Democrats are going to be traveling all over Arizona to examine the impacts of the state budget. We're going to head to the Navajo Nation, for example, to look at the new dialysis treatment center at Sage Memorial Hospital. We're going to plan visits to things like veteran treatment courts that we funded in this budget. The second thing that we're going to be working on is understanding the impacts of Trump's billionaire bill on Arizona and particularly on our state budget, and what it means for next year.

LEGISLATURE

2025 by the numbers

BY REAGAN PRIEST
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KEY POINTS

- **Gov. Hobbs signed more legislation this session than her previous two as governor**
- **Lawmakers introduced 1,724 bills in total, 439 made it to the governor**
- **Hobbs called the session successful despite breaking veto record**

Gov. Katie Hobbs signed more bills this session than in either of the previous two sessions she has occupied the Ninth Floor. But she also broke the state veto record she set in 2023.

The governor signed 265 bills this session, up from 259 in 2024 and 205 in 2023. That number could be due, in part, to the large number of bills introduced by lawmakers this session, though they didn't break any records like Hobbs did.

Lawmakers introduced 1,724 bills this session and 439 of those made it out of both chambers and to the governor's desk. That brought Hobbs' veto total to 174 bills, blowing past her 2023 record of 143 bills.

But Hobbs said she only broke the record with the help of Republicans, who sent her three separate budgets and several pieces of legislation she vetoed in previous sessions.

"There was definitely an orchestrated attempt to run up the score on that veto record," Hobbs said.

Without counting the 28 budget bills, 14 for each of the two House budgets the governor vetoed, Hobbs still would have broken her own veto record by three bills. But, an analysis by the Arizona Capitol Times of legislation vetoed by the governor between 2023 and 2025 found at least 18 bills vetoed in 2025 which she had also vetoed in either 2023 or 2024.

All of those bills were reintroduced by Republicans — most without any significant changes. They cover a range of issues, including elections, firearms, LGBTQ+ rights and school boards.

Despite that, almost all of the legislation Hobbs signed this session came from Republicans. Democrats only managed to get 10 bills out of the Legislature this year, seven of which came from the House and three from the Senate.

Excluding budget bills, Sen. Shawnna Bolick, R-Phoenix, takes home the title of most bills signed by a single lawmaker at 16. Republican Sens. J.D. Mesnard and David Gowan tied for second place, each with 15 bills signed.

Bolick attributed her success this session to her own tenacity and the support of her constituents in Legislative District 2.

"I didn't allow personalities to get in the way of being successful," Bolick said in a written statement. "It also doesn't hurt that I am not afraid to stand up for myself, or for the issue or the people that I am championing. Having coalitions of support to speak in favor of your bill is an absolute must."

Bolick said she received an outpouring of encouragement for her bill, which expands the definition of animal cruelty and was signed by the governor in late June.

"My fellow dog lovers would stop and thank me when I would walk our own dogs each morning because they were receiving email alerts or reading the newspaper," Bolick said. "A small gesture like a thank you is a big motivational factor when you must go to the Capitol for six months to try to force your bills to the board for a vote."

But in Arizona's Republican Party, getting the most bills signed by the Democratic governor doesn't necessarily spell success. According to conservative group Turning Point USA's lawmaker scorecard, Bolick is "losing patriotism" and only scored 68.18 out of 100 on their ranking.

"Most of the bills I have sponsored over the years received bipartisan support even under Governor Ducey because I have always represented a competitive legislative district," Bolick said. "...I am all about getting things done, not attacking my fellow Republicans."

On the Democratic side, Rep. Alma Hernandez, D-Tucson, had the most bills signed in her caucus at four. Six other Democrats each had one bill signed, including Sens. Catherine Miranda, Mitzi Epstein, Analise Ortiz and Reps. Consuelo Hernandez, Kevin Volk and Myron Tsosie.

Rep. Gail Griffin, R-Hereford, had the most bills vetoed by the governor for the second year in a row, at 18. In 2024, that number was just 12.

The increase can be attributed to Griffin's penchant for introducing rural groundwater legislation despite the governor's promise to veto "bills that are just political cover for the Legislature's inaction on water security." Nearly every bill of Griffin's that Hobbs vetoed was related to groundwater.

Griffin criticized Hobbs throughout the session for vetoing her groundwater legislation, saying in a March 18 statement, "It's time to put politics aside and pass real solutions for rural Arizona."

Republican Sens. Jake Hoffman and Wendy Rogers tied for second-most vetoes with each reaching 12 rejected proposals for the session. Several of the veto letters attached to Hoffman's bills featured a special message from the governor related to their spat over her director nominees.

"This bill is Detrimental, Ineffective, Nonsensical, and Objectionable," Hobbs wrote, in an apparent reference to Hoffman's chairmanship of the Senate Director Nominations Committee, often called DINO.

Despite breaking her own veto record and getting into spats with lawmakers, Hobbs said she feels the session was very successful and should be measured by the bipartisan legislation that passed, rather than the bills that ended up on the cutting room floor.



The Arizona State Capitol Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

Year of the mini-crises

BY JAKOB THORINGTON
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The House speaker described the 2025 legislative session as one filled with significant challenges, often facing crucial issues that needed immediate attention from legislators.

Despite some issues popping up just days before the Legislature found a solution, lawmakers stepped up to meet those challenges. In the end, the 2025 legislative session can be framed as a year of three significant mini-crises, or issues that could have abruptly derailed state politics if not solved in the final hour.

The Division of Development Disabilities shortfall

First in the session, lawmakers needed to address a $122 million budget shortfall within the Division of Developmental Disabilities at the Department of Economic Security.

The division serves more than 60,000 Arizonans with disabilities, and some feared that bickering at the Legislature over a supplemental funding bill would persist into May, ending vital services with no funding available.

Republicans largely disagreed with Gov. Katie Hobbs and Democrats on how the supplemental funding bill would look.

Hobbs wanted a "clean" funding bill that just provided the division with the funding to cover the shortfall and remove the threat of lost services, but Republicans had concerns over potential fraud within the Parents as Paid CareGivers program and wanted to include reforms on the department that Democrats largely disagreed with.

The bill that passed, House Bill 2945, initially proposed using nearly $40 million from the Housing Trust Fund to cover the shortfall. It would have also required the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System to request a waiver to reduce the number of hours parents can work as paid caregivers to a maximum of 20 hours per week, which was unpopular with many DDD parents.

The persistence of Republicans on reforms throughout the session led to weeks of bickering among lawmakers and a recall campaign that started against four key House Republicans: Speaker Steve Montenegro, R-Goodyear; Majority Leader Michael Carbone, R-Buckeye; Rep. Matt Gress, R-Phoenix; and Rep. David Livingston, R-Peoria.

After Hobbs declared a moratorium on signing any bills on April 17, with just under two weeks to go until funding for the DDD expired, lawmakers reached consensus and a supermajority passed the funding bill with amendments on April 24.

The bill fully funded the shortfall while maintaining a 40-hour weekly cap per child for the Parents as Paid Caregivers program, with some guardrails from Republicans, including the establishment of an electronic visit verification system from DES and funding for a special audit of the program.

Leaders of both caucuses in the House viewed the supplemental bill as one of their major accomplishments of the session.

"Without House Democrats, you don't have DDD being saved," House Minority Leader Oscar De Los Santos said in a July 14 interview with the *Arizona Capitol Times*.

The two representatives who were predominantly credited with leading both sides of the aisle together in reaching consensus on the bill were House Majority Whip Julie Willoughby, R-Chandler, and House Assistant Minority Leader Nancy Gutierrez, D-Tucson.

Hobbs and several DDD community members expressed gratitude during the bill's signing toward the two women for coming together and leading the House in passing a supplemental bill that could garner a GOP majority while still securing Hobbs' signature.

"It was two women who did not allow ego to get in the way of what was right," Gutierrez told the *Arizona Capitol Times* after the bill passed the House.

The state budget standoff

The standoff that arose while solving DDD's funding shortfall could be considered a prelude to the calamity that would arise amid state budget negotiations, which also saw House Republicans making a stand against the governor just days before an important funding deadline.

Senate President Warren Petersen, R-Gilbert, said the whole issue could have been avoided, and an approved state budget could have been had by April, but House Republicans were not willing to accept the Senate's budget, which was negotiated without their consent with Hobbs. That prompted the House to propose two alternatives to Hobbs in June, just days before the deadline and a possible government shutdown.

One $17.3 billion proposal was largely supported by Freedom Caucus Republicans. It received partisan Republican approval, but Democrats refused to attend the vote. The other was a continuation budget, a plan to prevent a shutdown and allow more time for negotiation between the chambers, which limited new spending to the bare minimum. It was largely a last resort from the House which remained, until that point, staunchly opposed to the Senate budget.

Both budgets were pushed through the Senate, but faced quick vetoes from Hobbs. That rejection forced the House to again resume negotiations with the Senate.

Some lawmakers, like De Los Santos, said the exercise from House Republicans was pointless because the Legislature ultimately passed a slightly modified version of the original $17.6 billion Senate budget.

However, Montenegro told the *Arizona Capitol Times* that pushing back against the Senate and Hobbs led to more public safety House requests being included in the budget, such as 5% raises for law enforcement officers. While Petersen aired his frustration toward some members of the House at the end of the session, Montenegro said the relationship between the two chambers is fine and "friendly" and that legislative tension between them was always intended.

"The House was the one that was fighting tooth and nail to make sure we got the 5% raise for law enforcement and firefighters," Montenegro said.

The House passed the bipartisan Senate budget with a supermajority on June 26, just five days before the end of the fiscal year.

Axon and Chase Field

Two other significant bills that became laws this session both required intervention from the Legislature under threat of two major businesses relocating to another state – the Scottsdale-based law enforcement technology company Axon and the Arizona Diamondbacks.

The Legislature passed Senate Bill 1543 to allow Axon to build multifamily residential apartment units at its Scottsdale headquarters without needing a local public hearing, but the bill faced strong opposition from the Scottsdale City Council and other residents who called it special legislation meant to circumvent the will of voters who collected signatures to send the zoning proposal to the ballot.

The Diamondbacks' lease at Chase Field in Phoenix expires next year, and the team ownership has sought approximately $500 million in funding assistance for stadium renovations through House Bill 2704.

Several Democrats criticized House Bill 2704 as a gift to the team *Forbes* values at $1.6 billion, but lawmakers were able to reach an agreement with the city of Phoenix and garner enough support to pass the measure.

Hobbs signed both bills, and both Axon and the Diamondbacks are set to stay in Arizona, bringing the economic impact they both provide to the state, and closing this year's chapter of mini-crises in the Arizona Legislature.

EDUCATION

Failure to extend Prop. 123 linked to GOP school choice push

BY KIERA RILEY
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Another legislative session wrought no extension or novel proposal to fill the void left by the lapse of Proposition 123, an education funding model drawing dollars from the state land trust fund. It instead brought a new, although familiar, divide.

Lawmakers, stakeholders and the governor still have another opportunity to formulate a new version of Prop. 123 next session, with eyes now on a ballot measure to run in 2026.

But whether interested parties work in tandem with or against each other remains the key question.

Gov. Katie Hobbs, Democrats, education and business and tax groups pushed for a fairly clean extension, with added flexibility to schools, similar to the initial iteration of the measure.

Meanwhile, Republicans sought to direct dollars for full-time teachers and append protections for school choice to any proposal they planned to push through.

Those dueling interests set Prop. 123 back to square one, with stakeholders now huddling in their respective corners to figure out how to start the conversation back up again in 2026.

Rep. Matt Gress, R-Scottsdale, said, "We will regroup with the caucus, and I suspect that we will re-engage with the executive again in the fall and to try this again as early as possible in the next legislative session. I think that's key. We want everybody to be on board with this package, because you win through addition, not subtraction."

The measure, as initially passed by voters in 2016, allowed a jump in the distribution rate from the state land trust fund from 2.5% to 6.9% to supplement funds for K-12 education through the 2025 fiscal year.

A new take on Prop. 123 has had a host of false starts. Lawmakers failed to get a proposal over the finish line in 2024 and continued the trend into 2025.

This session, Sen. J.D. Mesnard and Gress took the lead. The two herded an initial proposal through committee, though with the caveat that it was far from the final plan.

But then education groups, including the Arizona Education Association, the Arizona School Administrators Association, Save Our Schools, Democrats and the governor got wind of a desire by the majority to tie in school choice protections to Prop. 123 and mounted quick opposition, which toppled onto existing contentions with limiting pay increases only to full-time teachers.

KEY POINTS

- **Republicans added school choice protection to funding proposal**
- **Limiting funds only for full-time teachers caused opposition**
- **Key GOP lawmaker says proposal need to be simplified**

Tax groups had their concerns, too.

Kevin McCarthy, with the Arizona Tax Research Association, warned against creating another fiscal cliff, veering off from the state's per-pupil funding structure and earmarking the dollars for teacher pay.

He noted granting the money per-teacher could result in disparate distribution to schools.

"We should give money to the districts and charters based on how many students they have, and then let them compete for those students, but by how well they do in the classroom, how well they manage their systems," McCarthy said. "We shouldn't be rewarding inefficiency."

But, before agreeing on Prop. 123, attention then shifted to the budget and the clock slowly ran out on the session, leaving amendment or passage of any proposal less and less likely.

"Optimism was growing that we were going to be able to get something through right up until we ran into the budget buzz saw," Mesnard said.

In looking to the next session, Mesnard said he believes the Senate has a solid foundation to start. He noted no final language on reworked distribution rates or school choice provisions ever really saw the light of day.

"When all the i's have been dotted and T's crossed, when we've given folks time to recuperate and then circle back around to see where sentiment has settled, once we get to that point where we can then share language, I think people may be a little bit surprised given whatever version they had in your mind, which largely has been speculation right to this point," Mesnard said.

He continued, "I'm looking forward to that day. I wish it had come this session. It didn't. So I'm hoping very early into the next (session)."

Gress said for the next session, he hopes to see the prospective proposal simplified.

"If you make a ballot measure too complicated, you also complicate the chances of it passing at the ballot," Gress said. "It needs to be straightforward."

Gress said he saw complications in both the teacher's union, Democrats, and the governor's push to include all school staff in the school choice push.

"If you load up too many provisions in this bill, I think it again complicates passage. It has to be simple, streamlined, focused and clear so that Arizona voters, when they're going through the land trust proposal, can feel good about their vote," Gress said.

But that does not necessarily mean jettisoning school choice provisions altogether.

"I do think that both sides need to recalibrate their approach going into next year so that we can certainly ensure that teachers get a pay raise that they desperately need to stabilize that profession, but to also ensure that all school choice options are protected. I think that there is a balance that can be had," Gress said. "But again, when you create a Christmas tree of a bill, I think things can go south very quickly."

As for Democrats, education groups and the governor, the hope is for a bipartisan bill free of any school choice provisions.

Rep. Nancy Gutierrez, D-Tucson, said a clean renewal of the funds to allow flexible funding to schools would benefit more than a sequestration to teacher salaries, noting varying needs across districts.

She also stressed the need to iron something out, though, and hopes for Democrat involvement in the next session.

"It's hundreds of millions, millions of dollars that we're literally just throwing away instead of figuring out a bipartisan solution to make it work, that bipartisan solution, in no way, shape or form is going to be including vouchers, but I'm confident that we can come up with something, and I think it would be irresponsible for (Republicans) not to include us," Gutierrez said.

Hobbs echoed the same.

"It was unfortunate that we saw some folks try to put forward a very partisan renewal plan, and I think that failed even in the chambers that have Republican majorities," the governor said. "I think that indicates there's appetite to work together for a bipartisan solution, and we'll be looking at our options and working on that over the summer."

Arizona Education Association President Marisol Garcia stressed the need to bring educators themselves to the table.

"It's all about context. And I think that's the one thing that professional educators can give you is the context," Garcia said. "And so when we're not part of those conversations with legislators, you miss the mark."

"Optimism was growing that we were going to be able to get something through right up until we ran into the budget buzz saw."

Sen. J.D. Mesnard

EDUCATION

Arizona's K-12 schools sit in the large, looming shadow of federal cuts



U.S. Capitol building. (Ramaz Bluashvili / Pexels)

BY KIERA RILEY
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K-12 education funding reaped some slight wins in the Arizona budget this fiscal year, but a growing threat of federal funding cuts could still leave state schools in dire straits.

Lawmakers fully funded districts and charter schools in step with inflation but did not provide much fiscal support beyond the bare minimum, according to education groups. That decision could prove problematic for students, teachers and education officials as investment in public education wanes at the federal level.

"The unfortunate reality is that it's going to get worse," Marisol Garcia, president of the Arizona Education Association said. "For us, we realize that the governor does not have and the Legislature does not have the funding or the money that it needs to be able to invest where it wants to. Looking back on this session, this was probably the beginning of a really bad funding discussion."

This fiscal year, the Arizona Legislature increased the base level, transportation funding levels and the charter school additional assistance amounts by 2% to account for standard inflation, allocated $297 million to school facilities, continued the poverty weight for low income students, and covered the co-pay for students receiving reduced price lunch.

KEY POINTS

- **State budget maintained funding for schools, gave small boosts for certain programs**
- **Legislature couldn't pass extension of Proposition 123 in time**
- **State cannot afford to replace federal education cuts**

Rep. Matt Gress, R-Scottsdale, said there were a lot of wins for K-12 education in this year's budget, noting that lawmakers also backfilled about $300 million in funds lost from the impending lapse of Proposition 123 at the end of this fiscal year.

"That was a promise that we made, that we were not going to subject our schools to a fiscal cliff," Gress said.

He added the two-year waiver of the aggregate expenditure as well.

"That's the kind of certainty that our schools need when they're planning their budgets," Gress said. "So if I were a school finance officer, I would say things have never been better for K-12 schools in Arizona based on the budget that was ultimately passed and signed by the governor."

Rep. Nancy Gutierrez, D-Tucson, confirmed that education funding was a budget priority for Democratic leadership this year.

"We fought tooth and nail to get as much money for public schools. In a perfect scenario, we would have funded a lot more money, but we don't have a majority," Gutierrez said.

"I would have loved for it to be more. I was actually really proud of what we were able to accomplish. It's kind of disheartening, too. I've heard it called crumbs. I understand that. We all want more money for public education."

But Beth Lewis, executive director of Save Our Schools, said the funding was far from a departure from the status quo.

"There's absolutely nothing to move our K-12 schools forward," Lewis said. "They met their constitutionally obligated 2%, but that's it. There's just no effort to prioritize public education at the Capitol and it's really disappointing."

For those who believe the state isn't doing enough, the future of K-12 funding in Arizona looks even more stark after a quick view of the federal landscape. Though no true cuts have come to fruition yet, the U.S. Department of Education put about $6 billion in education grant funding nationwide on hold, including a more than

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Arizona's K-12 schools sit in the large, looming shadow of federal cuts

$124 million impact in Arizona, according to the Arizona Department of Education.

Impacted programs include professional development and educator training, migrant education, English Language Learner instruction, tutoring and afterschool programs.

Doug Nick, spokesperson for Arizona Department of Education, said the largest group of local education agencies, comprising about 627 districts or charters, was hit by holds to Title II funding for training and professional development, with an average allocation of $65,000.

Gov. Katie Hobbs sent a letter asking the department to reconsider the hold on funds, noting that districts may have to eliminate positions, including school counselors and instructional coaches, and compromise afterschool programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club and the Arizona Center for After School Excellence, which expect to see significant budget cuts.

In her message to the U.S. Department of Education, Hobbs outlined the state's inability to cover the shortfall.

"Our state budget simply does not have the capacity to backfill a federal freeze of public funding of this magnitude," Hobbs said.

Lewis outlined some of the consequences.

"You're going to see more schools shut down. We're going to see more school districts have to lay off teachers and cut programs that people truly care about and honestly, programs that are mandated."

She continued, "If you legally need to serve English language learners and there's no funding to serve them, that creates an unfunded mandate," Lewis said. "Schools are basically looking at more and more laws and exactly what they must do without funding coming in to do it."

Lewis added that federal cuts are coming at the end of a COVID relief surplus, as well as both a state and federal shift to ensure funding for school choice programs.

"It's a perfect storm that has been brewing for quite some time," Lewis said. "We might have been in the eye, and now it's like the wall is coming for us."

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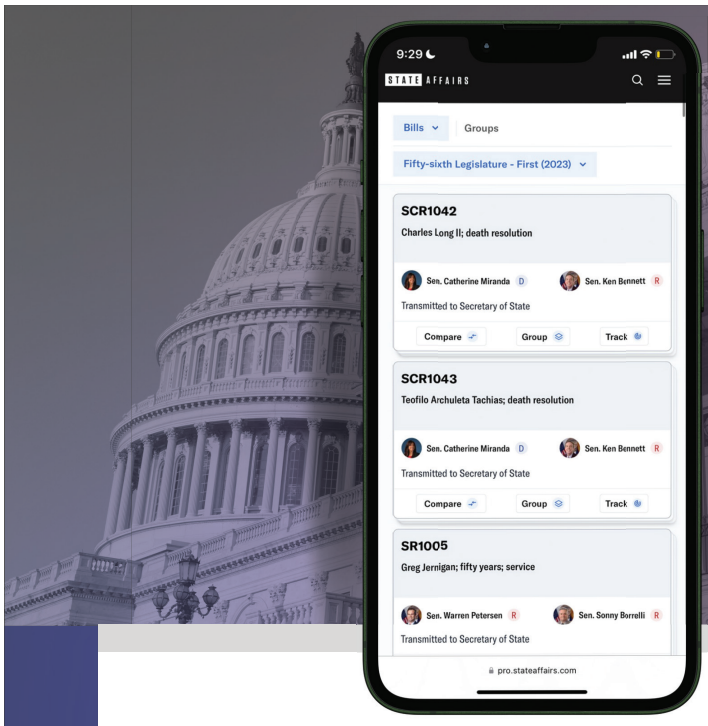
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2025 ARIZONA LEGISLATIVE WRAP

HOUSING



Construction of an apartment complex in Mesa, Arizona. (Brock Blasdell / Arizona Capitol Times)

Affordable housing: An issue yet unsolved

BY JAKOB THORINGTON
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Gov. Katie Hobbs outlined ambitious goals for Arizona's housing policy during her State of the State Address in January, but some stakeholders think lawmakers punted those issues with little accomplishment.

Hobbs had a major win with Senate Bill 1611, the "Ag-to-Urban" bill that allows high-water users like farmers to convert their farms into lower density housing, a far less water intensive alternative. According to the governor's office, the measure could result in the construction of up to tens of thousands of new homes and conserve nearly 10 million acre-feet of water.

The sponsor of the measure, Sen. T.J. Shope, R-Coolidge, called the new law the "most consequential piece of groundwater conservation legislation" since the 1980 Groundwater Management Act. Incidentally, the legislation could also have the dual effect of alleviating housing shortages by providing developers more leeway with water restrictions.

"Hard-working Arizonans will be able to pursue their American dream of homeownership as home supply increases in Maricopa and Pinal counties and prices naturally ease. Our farmers, who are ready to retire, can reap the benefits of their land while also allowing the state to save water," Shope said in a news release after Hobbs signed the bill.

Several housing policy advocates still felt unsatisfied with the 57th legislative session after the state's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program didn't receive new funding for an extension.

Hobbs called for a LIHTC extension in January, along with cutting "red tape that's driving up" the cost of housing and a $15 million appropriation for the Housing Trust Fund, but lawmakers accomplished little on those goals.

KEY POINTS

- **Lawmakers had ambitious goals for housing in 2025**
- **Very little consequential legislation passed on the issue**
- **Certain initiatives set to expire in 2026**

A group of Republican and Democrat lawmakers formed a bipartisan housing caucus at the beginning of the session to work on the "Arizona Starter Homes Act," Senate Bill 1229, and other housing issues.

The Starter Homes Act proposed targeted municipal regulations on the construction of new homes, but lawmakers were unable to reach an agreement with cities, which believed the issue overrode their zoning authority, and the measure never received a vote in the House.

The measure would have prohibited cities from requiring design features of homes like the inclusion of garages or specific amenities and floor plans. It called for minimum lot sizes of 3,000 square feet with the idea of allowing developers to build smaller homes with design features that homebuyers could afford.

This was the third consecutive year that a comprehensive zoning bill was introduced at the Legislature. Former Republican Sen. Steve Kaiser watched as his zoning reform bill failed in the Senate in 2023, and Hobbs vetoed the 2024 Starter Homes Act after it received heavy opposition from municipalities.

The League of Arizona Cities and Towns proposed its own Starter Homes Act bill in 2025 with Senate Bill 1698, but that measure wasn't supported by legislators and failed to get a committee hearing.

All of this points to a complex issue being punted further and further down the road by legislators unable to reach a reasonable agreement with stakeholders.

"We had a responsibility this session to deliver on affordable housing, and we failed," Sen. Analise Ortiz, D-Phoenix, said during her vote for the state budget.

The league's bill would have limited starter homes to individuals or families with incomes below 120% of the area median income, and it would have limited occupancy for up to 15 years, while allowing cities to have more control over density in neighborhoods than SB1229 offered.

League officials argue these provisions guarantee homes are sold to Arizona residents instead of being bought by corporations which would then turn around and list the homes on the market at a higher price while maintaining local communities.

"Buying an affordable house is a legitimate challenge across Arizona," said the League's Executive Director Tom Belshe in a news release. "We are looking out for the needs of Arizonans and are asking legislators to ensure that hard-working residents are able to buy homes – not out-of-state investors and speculators."

Although the major housing goals for the governor and other lawmakers were punted to 2026, Democrats celebrated some small housing wins.

Senate Minority Leader Priya Sundareshan, D-Tucson, noted in her budget vote that it includes $16.5 million for homelessness services such as eviction prevention and shelter operations for youth and families.

Hobbs' Homes for Heroes initiative also got $2 million, and that program helps keep military veterans from being unhoused.

All of this equates to affordable housing remaining a key issue in 2026 for legislators looking to make the American dream a little more realistic for Arizonans.

POLICY

State universities comply with Trump order banning DEI programs, policies

BY JAMAR YOUNGER
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Students celebrating graduation gather around the Old Main building at Arizona State University's Tempe, Arizona, campus. (Brock Blasdell / Arizona Capitol Times)

Arizona's public universities have faced increased pressure in recent months to comply with mandates from President Donald Trump's administration and state Republican lawmakers to end Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives at each university.

Trump issued an executive order in January targeting DEI programs at colleges, universities and government agencies that receive federal funding. To support those efforts, state Republican lawmakers introduced various bills intended to end DEI practices at those institutions.

Sen. David Farnsworth, R-Mesa, introduced Senate Bill 1694, which would have withheld state funding from colleges and universities offering courses that promoted DEI. Another measure, House Bill 2868, sponsored by Rep. Michael Way, R-Queen Creek, would've prohibited universities and community colleges from establishing DEI offices.

Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed both measures.

Despite the vetoes, the universities still faced scrutiny from state lawmakers who urged the institutions to comply with the federal directives.

Senate President Warren Petersen sent a letter to the universities in February, requesting that each institution review its DEI policies, make any necessary changes, and publicly release a plan outlining how each university was complying with the mandates.

The letter stated that it was in the best interest of each university to comply with the order to avoid the risk of any "unwanted regulatory attention."

Petersen then met with representatives of the U.S. Department of Education in April to discuss how the state's three public universities were complying with the federal government's mandate.

At the time, Petersen said he was encouraged by actions taken by the University of Arizona, but wasn't satisfied with the response from Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University.

Petersen held the same sentiment during a recent interview, praising the UofA for its efforts.

"UofA, of the three, were really the only ones that I had felt like … made good faith efforts," Petersen said.

On April 9, Petersen posted a letter on his X account from University of Arizona President Suresh Garimella, who shared an update describing how the university was complying with Trump's executive order.

According to the letter, the university removed diversity and inclusion language from its Land Acknowledgement, which appeared on all of its websites, and took down the website for its Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The university also removed its diversity and inclusion statement, which was previously included on each job posting.

In addition, administrative units and staff at the university initiated the process of discontinuing "preferential treatment" activities within those units, and college deans were directed to implement changes to activities impacted by Trump's executive order.

In May, the university announced that it was integrating its cultural resource centers that served students from diverse backgrounds into a Student Culture and Engagement Hub.

That decision drew backlash from the Coalition to Protect Students and Workers, as well as other campus groups, which protested against the consolidation of the centers and other anti-DEI measures enacted by the university.

ASU and the Board of Regents, which serves as the governing board for the state's public universities, have also taken steps to comply with the federal mandate.

ASU officials didn't provide specifics, but a university spokesman said the university "is complying with all executive orders as they are issued and as they are considered by the courts."

The spokesman said in a statement that the university was already complying with a provision passed by voters in 2010 that banned affirmative action. The university also abides by its charter, which states that ASU is "a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed."

The Board of Regents approved policy updates last month that remove outdated references to revoked federal requirements and provide clearer descriptions of the board's continued compliance with laws prohibiting discrimination, according to a board spokesman.

Northern Arizona University didn't respond to a request for comment.

While the universities have faced increased scrutiny from federal and state officials, the institutions have also received criticism from students, faculty and staff who say ending DEI programs will hurt students from marginalized backgrounds.

"This is affecting the specific targeted resources that these people could benefit from," said Alberto Plantillas, central regional director for the Arizona Students' Association, and a graduate student at ASU. "I think that's one of the worst parts of this, and UofA is just copying what ASU has been doing for the last five, six years."

Plantillas has spoken out against the DEI changes at the Board of Regents meetings and testified against SB1694 at a Senate Education Committee hearing in February.

Plantillas compared UofA's recent actions to ASU, which he says has been targeting student clubs, removing inclusive spaces and not communicating with student groups. The changes are part of a larger shift that has created a more hostile environment for marginalized students, international students and students who are lacking permanent legal status, he said.

"The conservative policies on campus are starting to align more closely with the federal government's policies. And, to me, it really seems like they're kind of caving in to a lot of these things so they're not targeted in the future," he said. "And I think that's just a very bad position for universities to be at."

KEY POINTS

- **Arizona universities ditch DEI programs after pressure from Feds**
- **Top GOP officials in AZ also sent a warning to universities to comply**
- **Student, faculty and campus worker groups protesting change**

WATER

Lawmakers reaffirm commitment to passing rural groundwater policy

BY JAMAR YOUNGER
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A canal located in Mesa, Arizona, carries water through the Phoenix Metropolitan Area. (Brock Blasdell / Arizona Capitol Times)

State lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have vowed to continue addressing the depletion of groundwater in rural areas after attempts to pass a regulatory framework stalled during the last legislative session.

Legislators introduced multiple bills that would've enacted restrictions on groundwater pumping in rural basins, but the measures were ultimately derailed by disagreements over the extent of regulation needed to preserve groundwater in the mostly unregulated areas.

While lawmakers continue to debate how much pumping should be reduced and juggle the interests of various stakeholders, residents and local lawmakers in rural areas have grown increasingly frustrated with the Legislature's inaction.

"It should be important to the whole state to keep Arizona strong, not just the urban areas, but all of Arizona strong," said Mohave County Supervisor Travis Lingenfelter. "And to do that, we have to have certainty in our water."

The state hasn't approved a groundwater management plan since lawmakers created the Groundwater Management Act of 1980, which established Active Management Areas covering mostly urban areas of the state.

However, rural areas have remained largely unprotected from excessive groundwater pumping as various proposals introduced throughout the years have stalled, with some not even receiving a committee hearing in either the Senate or the House.

Two major measures were introduced last session that aimed to establish a framework for managing groundwater in the depleted basins.

Sen. Tim Dunn, R-Yuma, introduced Senate Bill 1520, which would've created Basin Management Areas and imposed a series of restrictions intended to preserve groundwater in Gila Bend, Hualapai Valley and the Willcox Groundwater Basin.

The legislation would've repealed the Willcox Active Management Area, which was established to preserve the existing groundwater supply in the Willcox Basin, and converted it into a Basin Management Area.

However, the bill stalled in the final weeks of the legislative session after Dunn and other stakeholders failed to come to an agreement during negotiations.

KEY POINTS

- **Lawmakers say they are committed to new rural groundwater management policy**
- **Two attempts to establish a regulatory framework stalled last session**
- **Residents are growing frustrated with legislative inaction**

An update from the Arizona Department of Water Resources on the draft management goals for the Willcox Active Management Area also delayed progress on the bill after officials asked if Dunn's measure could align with those goals, he said last month.

However, Dunn said he's still committed to working with stakeholders to develop a framework that's better than the current options available to rural communities.

"I believe Arizona needs a better tool than the existing AMA and (Irrigation Non-Expansion Area) options for groundwater management," Dunn said in a statement. "We have made progress with a wide group of stakeholders at the table hearing their concerns and goals. All basins should not be treated the same."

Another set of twin bills introduced earlier this session by Sen. Priya Sundareshan, D-Tucson, and Rep. Chris Mathis, D-Tucson, would've also enacted groundwater preservation measures in certain rural areas.

The legislation, dubbed the Rural Groundwater Management Act, would've created Rural Groundwater Management Areas in the Gila Bend Basin, Hualapai Valley Basin, Ranegras Plain Basin, and San Simon Sub-basin. The Willcox AMA would've been converted to a Rural Groundwater Management Area.

However, the measures never received a hearing, despite being touted as bipartisan by the governor and a group of Republican rural lawmakers, including Lingenfelter of Mohave County.

Sundareshan said she would continue to pursue rural groundwater management reform, although any bill she introduces will probably look different than this year's legislation.

"It will probably take a different form because the bill that we had introduced this year was reflective of the negotiations that we thought the Republican legislators wanted to see," she said.

She said she hopes to work directly with rural residents, small farmers and rural Republican elected officials to better understand what needs must be addressed to gain support for future legislation.

"We'll continue to have this conversation because the need hasn't gone away," she said.

Sundareshan and Mathis' legislation would've proposed up to a 40% reduction in groundwater pumping over 40 years, although the cuts would have been incremental and started at a lower rate, while Dunn's legislation would reduce pumping by 10% — 1% each year — within 10 years of the formation of a Basin Management Area.

Critics of Dunn's proposal said the bill didn't do enough to reduce groundwater pumping and would continue to benefit large farming corporations. Those who disagreed with Sundareshan's and Mathis' proposals stated the legislation called for groundwater reductions that could hurt the agricultural industry.

Lingenfelter initially supported the Democratic proposal but was hoping to negotiate a groundwater pumping reduction within a 20-25% range, he said.

"We were hoping that the senators and the representatives would get together, they would bring some of us that are stakeholders to the table, along with working with the governor's staff, negotiate something that would be in between their bills that everybody could live with," he said. "And then that would actually be the version that would get passed. But that didn't happen. We had, I think, two meetings the whole session, and that's really it."

The Department of Water Resources designated the Hualapai Valley Groundwater Basin in Mohave County as an Irrigation Non-Expansion Area, which places limits on the expansion of irrigated lands.

But the restrictions have done little to stem the flow of groundwater pumping in the area.

AGENCIES

DINO committee made its return in 2025, with much better results than 2023

BY REAGAN PRIEST
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KEY POINTS

- **The Senate Committee on Director Nominations resumed this session**
- **Twelve nominees were ultimately confirmed, but six agencies are still without permanent leadership**
- **Hobbs blames "partisan agenda," Hoffman claims committee is working as intended**



Sen. Jake Hoffman speaking with the media outside the Arizona State Capitol building on the opening day of the 56th Legislature in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

The Director Nominations Committee battle between Gov. Katie Hobbs and Sen. Jake Hoffman continued in earnest in 2025, but with arguably better results than the first round in 2023.

Hobbs is over halfway through her first term as governor and still does not have Senate-confirmed directors at all state agencies. But 12 of her nominees managed to make it out of Hoffman's Director Nominations Committee, known as DINO, and through a full Senate vote during the 2025 session — a marked difference from the committee's progress in 2023.

Hoffman maintains that the vetting process, created specifically by the Republican Senate to evaluate the Democratic governor's nominees, is working as intended. But Hobbs and several former agency heads say it is creating chaos at otherwise apolitical agencies and scaring off potential candidates.

"There are six (nominees) still outstanding, and those are folks that Jake Hoffman continues to play political games with and hold up with his partisan agenda," Hobbs told the *Arizona Capitol Times*. "We're going to continue to look at our options and put forward qualified nominees that should be able to go through a fair confirmation process."

Hoffman and Senate President Warren Petersen, the creators of DINO, defended the committee's work throughout the session as Hobbs and her office accused Hoffman of being obstructionist.

"While some enjoy focusing on those who were rejected and colorful bantering between the Executive and the Senate, the fact is we have confirmed the vast majority of the nominees and now have just a handful of unconfirmed nominees," Petersen said in a May 6 press release. "The process is simple. If the governor sends us qualified, non-partisan nominees, they will be confirmed by a bipartisan group of Senators."

Hoffman told the *Arizona Capitol Times* that he is satisfied with the work DINO did this session and isn't planning on letting up anytime soon.

"Our goal has always been to get qualified nominees into these roles," Hoffman said. "And I think this year we showed that that was something that we could do."

The confirmation process bled into the 2025 session after Hobbs pulled her nominees from consideration in 2023. At that point, Hoffman's committee had only confirmed a few directors and had rejected or withheld others from consideration after intense and politicized hearings.

Although this year's effort proved more successful, it was still contentious and unpredictable, and resulted in several agency heads losing their positions.

Two nominees were rejected by either Hoffman's committee or the full Senate. Two others at the Department of Health Services and the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System were withdrawn by Hobbs after "it became clear" that the Senate would reject them. And two more were left unconfirmed when the session adjourned in late June, despite both appearing for confirmation hearings.

Almost all of those nominees were branded "unqualified" by Hoffman and his fellow Republican committee members, though most had decades of experience in their respective fields or in the very agencies they hoped to lead.

And even those nominees who were confirmed were often grilled extensively by the committee before receiving full approval from the Senate. Paul Brierley, director of the Department of Agriculture, was chastised for making a post in 2019 that was critical of President Donald Trump. His nomination passed out of the DINO Committee in April, but wasn't put up for a full Senate vote until June.

Elizabeth Thorson, director of the Department of Administration, had her nomination tabled in 2023 after a lengthy hearing during which she was questioned about her personal views on abortion. She was confirmed quietly without a second hearing during a last minute vote on the day the Senate adjourned sine die, over two years after she was first appointed to the position.

Hoffman defended the confirmation hearing process, noting the committee was able to hold one hearing a week for a good portion of the session. He also said he believes it has forced Hobbs to find more moderate candidates to lead agencies.

"In (almost) every case … the second person we receive has been far more qualified, far more competent and far less partisan than the initial person that was nominated by the governor," Hoffman said.

While he said he is pleased with the results, former state agency leaders say DINO has dragged good people through the mud and disrupted critical government functions.

Will Humble, director of the Department of Health Services under former governors Jan Brewer and Doug Ducey, has long been a fan of the concept of DINO, but said its execution has left much to be desired.

Humble said he felt Hoffman completely ignored the statutes that detail the qualifications required for director positions. Most of those statutes are vague and outline minimal requirements for agency directors, though some require specific degrees or areas of experience.

"Instead of harassing candidates, (Hoffman) ought to be running bills to … go into each of those agency director descriptions and update the statutory requirements for the job," Humble said.

Hoffman said he and members of DINO aren't just looking at "paper qualifications" when vetting nominees, however.

"These are very important agencies, and there's a difference between someone who can fill a function within that agency, and someone who is equipped to actually lead that agency and be really the place where the buck stops," Hoffman said.

David Lujan, Hobbs' first nominee for the Department of Child Safety who had his nomination withdrawn in 2024, said he believes the confirmation process is negatively impacting state agency work and deterring potential candidates.

"I think a lot of people who have seen how nominees are treated in that committee would think, 'Why bother? Why should I put myself through that experience and jeopardize my career goals to go through that process?'" Lujan said.

Hoffman said he believes there is no shortage of candidates for Hobbs to choose from and even suggested two to the Governor's Office whom he believes both she and the Senate could agree on.

"There are people who want to do these jobs, who are highly qualified, highly competent and willing to do a nonpartisan job in the role," Hoffman said. "I don't think Katie Hobbs wants them."

Hoffman pledged to continue the DINO Committee if a Republican is elected governor in 2026, and said he can't imagine the Legislature will return to its previous confirmation process even after he is no longer serving in the Senate. "We've shown that this process works," Hoffman said. "So why change something that is effective?"

2025 ARIZONA LEGISLATIVE WRAP

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Gov. Hobbs looking to 2026 for action on housing, water and education

BY REAGAN PRIEST
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With Arizona in its third year of divided government, Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs was forced once again to work alongside the Republican-controlled Legislature to advance her policy and budget goals. Despite months of contention, the governor managed to eke out a few wins.

Despite uneasy compromises, Hobbs told the *Arizona Capitol Times* that she thought the 2025 session was particularly productive, and even hailed the recently passed $17.6 billion budget as "the most successful budget we've had" in her time as governor.

"I'm really focused on what we did get done…" Hobbs said. "There's certainly a lot we can build on."

The governor cited approval of emergency funding for the Division of Developmental Disabilities, a process which included nearly a month of heated negotiations with Republicans, partisan attacks on her fiscal responsibility, and a mini-crisis which nearly halted payments to parents of children with disabilities, as her best day of the session.

Her office also touted a few more legislative victories, including the passage of an Ag-to-Urban groundwater bill, a bipartisan compromise on foreign adversaries owning land in the state, a funding bill for the Arizona Diamondbacks stadium and legislation allowing local company Axon to build its new headquarters in Scottsdale.

But Hobbs and legislative Democrats failed to make progress on several key priorities, like oversight for the Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program and the repeal of several unenforceable abortion restrictions still in law after voter approval of Prop. 139. Those areas were both outlined in the governor's State of the State speech in January, but did not see any movement.

Hobbs' office proposed an income cap on the ESA program to reduce its cost, but that provision wasn't implemented via legislation or through the budget. Hobbs said she isn't planning on giving up on reform for the program and will come back to the table with similar ideas in 2026.

The session also lacked meaningful legislation in the areas of affordable housing and rural groundwater management, though not for lack of trying on both the part of the governor's office and the Legislature. Hobbs said conversations in those areas stalled late in the session and have not yet picked back up.

The governor also signed several bills that put her at odds with her own party members and activists who have argued she capitulated to right-wing interests. The two most contentious bills for fellow Democrats involved a public utility company financing measure and an age verification requirement for explicit online content.

"Certainly a lot of legislation is political, and I certainly don't think about it through that lens," Hobbs said. "I'm looking at what's going to address issues that Arizonans are concerned about."

The governor did score wins in budget negotiations and secured funding in many of the areas she outlined in her executive budget proposal. However, due to the size of the state's revenue streams and uncertainty at the federal level, many of her initiatives did not receive nearly the amount of funding she proposed.

The bipartisan budget included funding for law enforcement raises, drug smuggling and human trafficking prevention at the southern border, expanded child care access, the DDD program and Colorado River litigation. But it didn't extend the Low Income Housing Tax Credit or provide nearly as much funding as Hobbs proposed for housing initiatives.

"When we first passed the Low Income Housing Tax Credits, that had bipartisan support and we really need a Republican champion to get that done again," Hobbs said. "I'm not sure why it wasn't there this session."

The final budget also left out smaller, niche proposals the governor included, like $7 million in funding for the University of Arizona to speed up efforts to return the remains of Native American ancestors to their tribes.

The governor also made headlines this session for implementing her first-ever bill moratorium during the funding battle for the DDD program and for setting a new state veto record. Hobbs said she hopes both moves show Republicans that she means business when it comes to standing up for Arizonans.

Hobbs did score some wins in another area: director nominations. Twelve of her nominees to lead state agencies were confirmed this session after many faced difficulties in the Senate in 2023.

She still has six director positions to fill after several were rejected by the Senate or its Director Nominations Committee or withdrawn because they would not be confirmed. Hobbs said, "it continues to be frustrating" that the confirmation process will extend into the final year of her first term as governor.

Both Hobbs and the Legislature will have a lot to focus on when the body reconvenes in January 2026, including Proposition 123 funding and federal Medicaid cuts. And they will do it all while staring down the barrel of the midterm election season, during which Republicans hope to oust the governor.

KEY POINTS

- **Governor believes this year's session was successful**
- **Law enforcement pay, urban groundwater and budget shortfalls**
- **Some of Hobbs' priorities still unaddressed**



Governor Katie Hobbs on the floor of the Arizona House of Representatives after the 2025 State of the State Address at the Arizona State Capitol in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

POLICY



Governor Katie Hobbs delivering the 2025 State of the State Address on the floor of the Arizona House of Representatives at the Arizona State Capitol in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

Conflict defined the 2025 legislative session — will it set the stage for 2026?

BY KIERA RILEY
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Conflict — whether between lawmakers, caucuses or chambers — is a natural fact of any legislative session, and this session was no exception.

Beyond intraparty splits and squabbles over bills, some observers noted key events colored this session and stand to shift the next. One of the most prominent events was the loss of the House of Representatives majority chief of staff and the ousting of the Senate majority leader after a series of seconds on unwelcome budget amendments.

But, despite pointed press releases, barbed floor speeches, failed bills, a particularly fiery budget process and a last minute change in leadership, lobbyists, consultants and a lawmaker say any wreckage left after the end of session typically becomes long forgotten by the time lawmakers convene again in January.

Still, 2025 created a point of reflection for political analysts. Which lawmakers fared well? Which stoked proverbial fires? What factors came to impact legislation and budget negotiations? And how does all of that stack up for the future?

And with the election approaching, tensions are likely to flare again, mirroring the national political landscape as lawmakers polish their portfolios for voters.

"I don't know that I'm going to observe anything earth shattering, beyond common sense here, that both sides are going to get dug in even more," consultant Jason Rose said. "So the sausage making might be even more colorful next year because of the election than it was this year."

KEY POINTS

- **House left adrift by loss of chief of staff**
- **Conflicts followed, but likely won't stick**
- **Election cycle to flare tensions next session**

The session started out standard. But in February, longtime House Chief of Staff Michael Hunter departed his post, leaving a key position in the chamber vacant.

Nick Ponder, senior director of Government Affairs at High Ground Consulting, said Hunter's departure effectively left the House a "ship without a rudder."

"The abrupt departure of Michael Hunter remained a challenge for the House," Ponder said. "It would be for almost any legislative body, because of his depth of knowledge and experience."

The House persisted without a chief of staff, but not without its share of obstacles.

Members clashed over supplemental funding to the Division of Developmental Disabilities, specifically after stonewalling from Rep. Matt Gress, R-Scottsdale, and Rep. David Livingston, R-Peoria. That only ended after Rep. Julie Willoughby, R-Chandler, cut out of the caucus and worked across the aisle to get a clean continuation passed.

There were also some terse exchanges between Republicans over legislation to impose higher penalties for stolen valor, and the Axon saga, a conflict spawned by the business's efforts to create a massive headquarters in Scottsdale, drew further lines in the sand between lawmakers.

And then came the budget — marked by a House head start, fractured fiscal approaches, some knock-down, drag-out soliloquies against the opposing chamber, an Italian wedding and a premature sine die.

But it all led to a budget with the blessing of both chambers and the governor.

"Two thirds of chambers voted for the budget. Not everyone's happy. But how many budgets are people really happy (with)? Especially when you have divided government," consultant Barrett Marson said.

Though Gress missed the final budget vote, he said the end of the year sparring is par for the course.

"Every legislative session ends with tension. Bills die, bills get voted down. Bills never get heard," Gress said. "The interim is a healing time for members. They go back to their districts, they can decompress from activity at the Capitol, and then we all rally again on opening day. We're excited to see each other and regroup."

Marson similarly noted the need to have some semblance of a bounce back in the Legislature.

"If every little slight is going to be the armageddon for you, you're not going to live a productive legislative career," Marson said.

At the end of the session, though, the powers that be saw a shift, specifically with Senate majority leader Janae Shamp booted and replaced with Sen. John Kavanagh — a change consultants say could alter the dynamics of the Senate and create new tension.

"It doesn't matter if you're in the Arizona State Senate or you're working at Circle K, demotions are not wonderful for the locker room, so it'll be interesting to see her approach with the team over the next year," consultant Jason Rose said. "When you look at someone like John Kavanagh, who is both very conservative but also sagacious and practical, you clearly see a chamber and a body that's looking to and leaning on that."

The next session also brings lawmakers closer to an election, which could change the dynamics among elected officials, especially those seeking higher office.

Rose pointed to Senate President Warren Petersen as one example, noting that he is running for attorney general while concurrently serving as the Senate President.

"(Attorney General Kris) Mayes is among the most talented elected officials, like her, or not, in the last 20 years in Arizona, and that positioning battle between those two is really going to be something," Rose said. "That's Pay Per View political Arizona television, right there."

FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION

Arkansas

FARMER LAUNCHES BID TO CHALLENGE US SEN. TOM COTTON'S REELECTION BID

LITTLE ROCK — A farmer from northeast Arkansas has announced her bid for the U.S. Senate. Hallie Shoffner, a Democrat, plans to challenge Republican Sen. Tom Cotton, who is seeking a third term. Shoffner, from Newport, says she will focus on cutting taxes for workers, restoring Medicaid and lowering costs for everyday people. Cotton, first elected in 2014, is a prominent Republican and potential 2028 presidential contender. He has over $8 million in campaign funds and endorsements from top GOP leaders. Arkansas' primary is scheduled for March 2026, with the candidate filing period set for November. Cotton's campaign has not commented on Shoffner's announcement.



California National Guard are positioned at the Federal Building, June 10, 2025, in downtown Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Eric Thayer, File)

California

PENTAGON ENDS DEPLOYMENT OF 2,000 NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS IN LA

***LOS ANGELES* — The Trump administration said it is ending the deployment of 2,000 National Guard troops in Los Angeles. Chief Pentagon Spokesman Sean Parnell announced the decision in a statement. Roughly 4,000 National Guard troops and 700 Marines had been deployed. It wasn't immediately clear how long the rest would stay in the region. The troops were tasked with protecting federal buildings and guarding immigration agents as they carried out arrests. The deployment began in early June and was slated to last 60 days.**

Colorado

PROSECUTION IN FIREBOMBING ATTACK ON DEMONSTRATION FOR ISRAELI HOSTAGES MOVES AHEAD

DENVER — A judge has ruled that Colorado prosecutors can move ahead with their case against a man accused of killing one person and injuring a dozen more in a firebomb attack on demonstrators showing their support for Israeli hostages. A Sept. 9 arraignment has been scheduled for Mohamed Sabry Soliman to enter a plea to murder, attempted murder and other charges in the June 1 attack. Soliman's lawyer says she plans to ask for the arraignment to be delayed and suggested that a plea deal is possible. Investigators say Soliman told them he hoped to kill the roughly 20 demonstrators in Boulder when he threw Molotov cocktails at them while yelling, "Free Palestine!"

Florida

MAN PUT TO DEATH FOR KILLING 2 OUTSIDE A BAR, THE 26TH U.S. EXECUTION THIS YEAR

STARKE — A man convicted of fatally shooting two people outside a Florida bar in 1993 as part of an attempted revenge killing has been executed. Officials say 54-year-old Michael Bernard Bell was pronounced dead after a lethal injection at Florida State Prison near Starke. Bell was convicted in 1995 and sentenced to death for the murders of Jimmy West and Tamecka Smith. He was the 26th person executed in the U.S. so far this year, surpassing last year's total, and the eighth person put to death in Florida. A ninth is scheduled for later this month.

Idaho

FEDERAL AUTHORITIES END SEARCH FOR SUSPECT IN KIDS' DEATHS

BOISE — Federal authorities in Idaho say they have ended a search in the Sawtooth National Forest after determining it was a case of mistaken identity. The search began Saturday after the U.S. Marshals Service Greater Idaho Fugitive Task Force said a family reported they saw a man who looked like Travis Decker, who is wanted in connection with the deaths of his three daughters in Washington state. U.S. Marshals Service Supervisory Deputy Michael Leigh says authorities located the man the family saw on Wednesday afternoon and confirmed he was not Decker. Leigh says the man did have similar coloring, build and tattoo placement, and he was hiking in the same area.

Kentucky

SUSPECTED CHURCH SHOOTER HAD A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HEARING THE NEXT DAY

A man accused of killing two women at a Kentucky church on Sunday had been scheduled for a domestic violence hearing the following day. Police say the violence began when 47-year-old Guy House shot a state trooper during a traffic stop near Lexington. He stole a vehicle and drove to the church, where police shot and killed him. Star Rutherford, a relative of the two women, said the shooter was looking for one of her sisters. Told she wasn't there, he declared: "Well I guess someone's going to have to die then," and shot her 72-year-old mother in the chest. Authorities offered no motive and the investigation was ongoing.

Minnesota

GRAND JURY INDICTS MAN ACCUSED OF KILLING FORMER HOUSE SPEAKER HORTMAN

MINNEAPOLIS — A federal grand jury has indicted the man accused of fatally shooting a prominent Minnesota state representative and her husband and seriously wounding a state senator and his wife. The indictment handed up lists murder, stalking and firearms charges against Vance Boelter. The murder counts in the deaths of former House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband could carry the federal death penalty. Boelter is accused of going to the lawmakers' homes June 14 disguised as a police officer in a fake squad car with lists of other Democratic officials as potential targets.

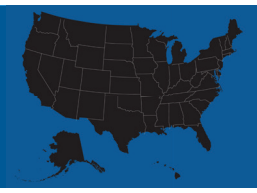
Nebraska

RETIRED ARMY OFFICER PLEADS GUILTY TO SHARING CLASSIFIED INFO ON RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

A retired Army officer who worked as a civilian Air Force employee has pleaded guilty to conspiring to share classified information about Russia's war with Ukraine. David Slater admitted that he transmitted national defense secrets through a foreign dating platform to someone claiming to be a woman in Ukraine. Slater worked at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska and had access to top-secret information. Sentencing is set for Oct. 8. Prosecutors and his attorneys agreed that he should serve about six to seven years in prison, though the judge will ultimately decide.

FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION



Montana

WARMING RIVERS PROMPT FISHING RESTRICTIONS

Nearly a dozen rivers in western Montana and a handful of rivers inside the borders of Yellowstone National Park are under restrictions as biologists seek to reduce angling-related sources of fish mortality. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks announced on July 9 that portions of Upper Rock Creek, the Clark Fork River, the Bitterroot River and the entirety of Silver Bow Creek are closed to angling after 2 p.m. to protect fish during the hottest hours of the day. The day prior, the agency announced hoot owl restrictions for sections of four other rivers and the entirety of the Jefferson River. The announcements come following alerts about declining streamflows across much of the state.

New Mexico

200 HOMES DAMAGED AS OFFICIALS SURVEY THE AFTERMATH OF A DEADLY FLOOD

SANTA FE — Officials in southern New Mexico say the number of homes destroyed and damaged by a deadly flash flood will only rise as crews survey more neighborhoods in the mountain village of Ruidoso. They put the tally at least 200, saying that could double as more damage assessments are conducted in the coming days. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham says her office has received partial approval for a federal emergency declaration that includes personnel to help with search and rescue efforts and incident management.

New York

WITH EPSTEIN CONSPIRACY THEORIES, TRUMP FACES CRISIS OF HIS OWN MAKING

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump's strategy has been to downplay the uproar over the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking case as his supporters demand the Justice Department release much-hyped records in the investigation. Trump claimed on July 15 without citing evidence there are credibility issues with the unreleased documents. Speaking to reporters, he also called the case "pretty boring" and said he didn't understand the fascination with it. Trump's problem is the nothing-to-see-here approach doesn't work for those who've learned from him they must not give up until the government's secrets are exposed. Last week, the Justice Department and the FBI walked back the notion there's an Epstein client list of elites who participated in the New York financier's trafficking of underage girls.

Oklahoma

FARMER KILLED IN WATER BUFFALO ATTACK, POLICE SAY

JONES — Police in Oklahoma say a farmer has been killed in an attack by a pair of water buffaloes he purchased at a livestock auction a day earlier. Police in the rural Oklahoma City suburb of Jones say they received a call Friday evening that Bradley McMichael had been attacked by a water buffalo. Police Chief Bryan Farrington said in a statement when first responders arrived, they initially couldn't get to McMichael because two water buffalo were so aggressive. He says McMichael suffered deep lacerations that proved to be fatal. Farrington says both animals were euthanized because they were so aggressive.

Oregon

TRANSGENDER ASYLUM SEEKER RELEASED FROM ICE CUSTODY

PORTLAND — A transgender asylum seeker from Mexico has been released from a Washington state immigration detention center after being held for over a month. Attorneys confirmed her release on Tuesday after a federal judge in Oregon ordered Immigration and Customs Enforcement to free her. U.S. District Judge Amy Baggio found that the transgender woman, identified in court filings as O-J-M, had been detained without proper due process. O-J-M was arrested in immigration court in Portland, Oregon, in early June. She was then transferred to an ICE detention facility in Tacoma, Washington, where she was held for over 40 days.

Pennsylvania

DOGE SPROUTS IN RED STATES, AS GOVERNORS EMBRACE THE COST-CUTTER BRAND

HARRISBURG — President Donald Trump's Department of Government Efficiency has spawned state-level DOGE initiatives as Republican governors and lawmakers aim to show that they're in step. Critics say some of these initiatives are nothing new or duplicative, while some governors are using their DOGE vehicles to target welfare programs or diversity, equity and inclusion programs. The state initiatives have a markedly different character than Trump's slash-and-burn approach. Steve Slivinski of the libertarian Cato Institute says much of what he's seen is the same mundane stuff states routinely do to save money. Analysts at the pro-labor Economic Policy Institute say some governors and lawmakers are using DOGE agendas to consolidate power.

South Carolina

DEMOCRATS ALREADY LINING UP FOR 2028 PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN EARLY VOTING STATES

SENECA — The voters in early presidential nominating states are used to seeing contenders months or even years before most of the country. But the political jockeying in 2025 for the 2028 presidential contest appears to be playing out earlier, with more frequency and with less pretense than ever before. While the first presidential primary votes won't be cast for another two and a half years, three Democratic presidential prospects are scheduled to campaign in South Carolina for 10 days this month. Nearly a half dozen others have made recent pilgrimages to South Carolina, New Hampshire and Iowa. This week, both Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear and Rep. Ro Khanna will be in South Carolina.

Tennessee

A CENTURY AFTER A MAN WAS CONVICTED OF TEACHING EVOLUTION, DEBATE ON RELIGION RAGES

NASHVILLE — The 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Tennessee, where a teacher was prosecuted for teaching evolution, continues to influence debates on religion in public schools. The trial highlighted tensions between science and religion, sparking a broader cultural conflict. Today, similar debates persist as conservative efforts push for more religious presence in schools, such as displaying the Ten Commandments. Legal challenges are ongoing, with advocates for church-state separation opposing these measures. Experts see parallels between the Scopes trial and current disputes, emphasizing the enduring struggle over balancing religious freedom and secular governance in education.

Utah

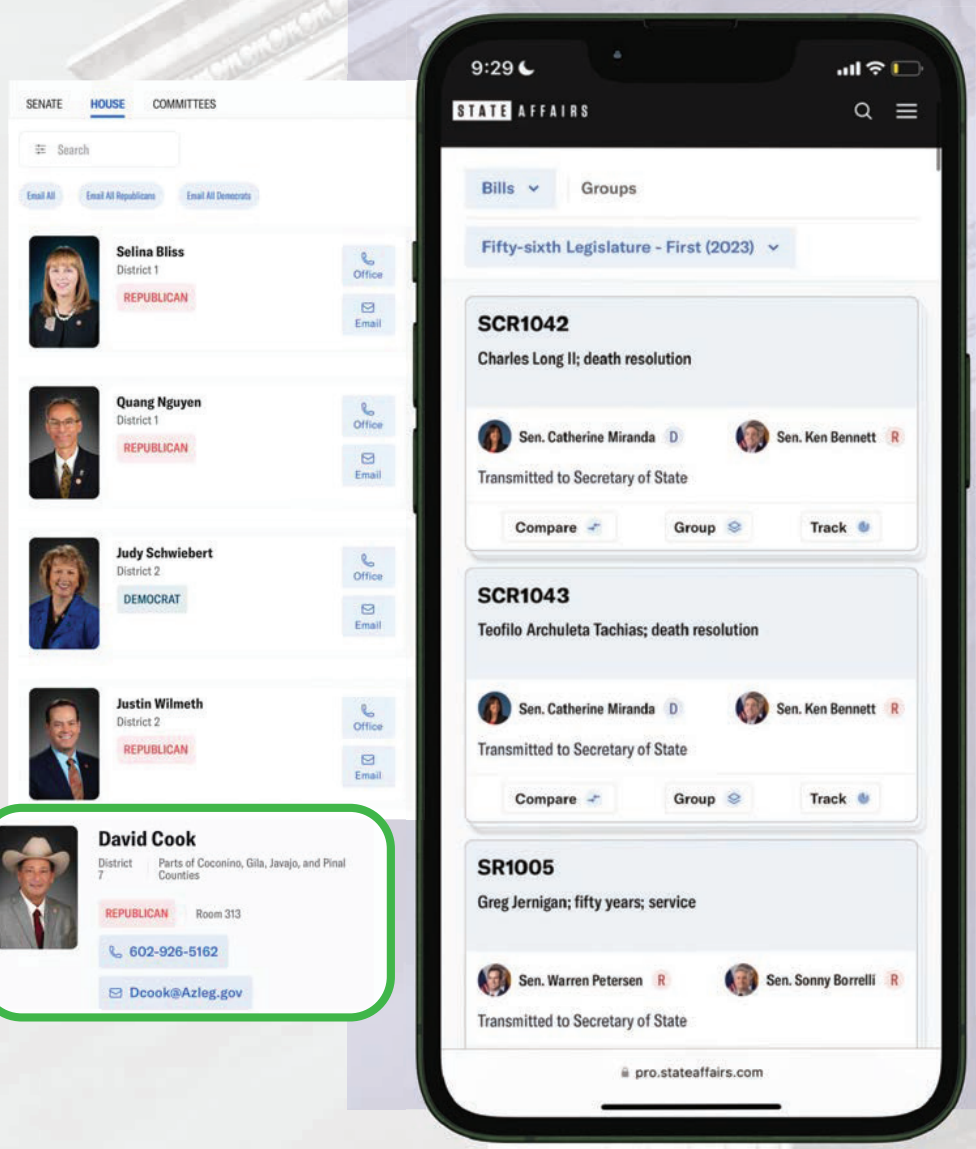
CHARGES DROPPED AGAINST MAN ACCUSED OF THROWING AWAY $28,000 IN COVID VACCINE DOSES

The federal government has dismissed charges against a Utah plastic surgeon accused of throwing away COVID-19 vaccines worth thousands of dollars during the pandemic. Dr. Michael Kirk Moore was also accused of giving children saline shots instead of the vaccine and selling faked vaccination cards. U.S. Attorney General Pamela Bondi said in a post Saturday on X that the charges against the Midvale, Utah, doctor were dismissed at her direction. Moore and other defendants faced up to 35 years in prison. The trial began Monday in Salt Lake City with jury selection. It was expected to last 15 days.

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