

# Arizona Capitol Times

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## Two vacancies strain Clemency Board

See page 8 for more details

## Podcasts aim to increase civic literacy

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## News from other states

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*“If Trump and Hegseth think this will stop me from doing what I’ve done every day of my adult life — fighting for this country — then they’ve got the wrong guy. Tomorrow, and the next day, I will keep doing my job representing Arizona.”*

— U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly, on backlash from Trump’s administration after he and other congressional Democrats released a video telling military personnel they can “refuse illegal orders.”

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## Autism therapy center, parents sue AHCCCS, DES and insurer

BY REAGAN PRIEST  
rpriest@stateaffairs.com

Two parents of children with autism and an autism therapy center are suing the state Medicaid agency, one of its insurance contractors and the Department of Economic Security over a contract dispute that threatens to leave patients without care.

Tiana Brandon, Jessica Parisi and Centria Autism said in a Dec. 15 complaint that managed care organization Mercy Care abruptly and erroneously terminated its contract with the therapy center on Oct. 17 without engaging in good faith negotiations on increasing reimbursement rates.

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## Proposed bill aims to restrict short-term rentals in Arizona cities



This March 9, 2020, file photo shows rows of homes in Glendale, Ariz. (AP Photo/Dario Lopez-Mills, File)

BY JAKOB THORINGTON  
jthorington@stateaffairs.com

Arizona is approaching the 10-year mark since the Legislature prevented local governments from banning short-term rentals and city leaders are hoping enough time has passed for an update to the law.

Officials from the League of Arizona Cities and Towns say they will be running a bill in the upcoming

legislative session to restrict the number of short-term rental licenses that are issued within a municipality’s jurisdiction.

Similar legislation has been filed in previous years, but those bills have been unheard in committees while some cities like Sedona have seen as much as 20% of their housing stock converted into short-term rentals.

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## ASU media law professor, advocate for transparency

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## CAPITOL QUOTES



*“Today in Nevada, with leaders from all seven Colorado River Basin states at the CRWUA conference, discussing sustainable river management. Water is life — and this will be one of the most critical issues for Arizona next year as we negotiate the post-2026 guidelines that protect our farms, businesses, families and future.”*

— Senate President Warren Petersen, on Colorado River water disbursement during the Colorado River Water Users Association conference in Las Vegas.



*“They are our neighbors, they’re our families, and I want to drop this bill to show my immigrant community that I’m fighting for their humanity, for their respect.”*

— Sen. Catherine Miranda, on her bill to change the language used to describe immigrants and another measure to repeal a controversial immigration law.



*“This means pursuing innovative yet grounded solutions that are forward-looking but fiscally responsible.”*

— Sen. David Farnsworth, on his SB1024 that would set up registration for “roadable aircraft” that can operate like motor vehicles and are manufactured to meet the federal safety standards for motorcycles.



*“Massive companies like Uber will continue to take advantage of Arizona consumers with these ridiculously unfair and unlawful practices unless we do something about it.”*

— Attorney General Kris Mayes, on joining a lawsuit that alleges Uber used a variety of deceptive and unfair practices in offering and selling Uber One subscription services, which Uber promotes as saving money on rides and deliveries.

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ERIN COYLE

# ASU media law professor advocates for government transparency

BY JORDAN GERARD | [jgerard@stateaffairs.com](mailto:jgerard@stateaffairs.com)

**E**rin Coyle is a media law and ethics professor at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. She worked as a city reporter in Dubuque, Iowa, and later earned a master's degree and a doctorate in mass communication. She said her experience in journalism showed her the importance of media law and ethics.

"It's been really an amazing journey getting to work with excellent people and excellent students and learning about legal systems in different states to provide a deeper understanding of how things may vary from place to place," she told the *Arizona Capitol Times*.

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*This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity. She does not speak on behalf of Arizona State University or the Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.*

*Tara King stands beside the entrance to the White Blossom Café located within the Arizona Capitol Museum. (Reagan Proctor/Arizona Capitol Times)*

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## Erin Coyle: ASU media law professor advocates for government transparency

### What drives your passion for media law and First Amendment law?

A lot of things. I deeply believe that this is a country where people have the right to seek information, to raise questions, to engage in discussions and debate. There are a lot of different laws that relate to those rights. Some of those rights can vary from state to state. I just found myself being fascinated with these questions and wanted to find more answers to help myself and to help other members of society understand what people's rights are.

### How harmful is it for elected officials to skirt accountability and transparency?

That is a challenging question. We live in a society where we assume that representatives are elected and members of society can make choices through their voting to help choose those representatives. But members of society also have rights related to free expression, to ask questions, to enter into discussions, to engage in debate, and to try to influence how representatives are or are not acting.

When we're talking about those expression rights we're talking primarily about First Amendment rights. But in the United States, when we start talking about rights to access information to be able to learn how representatives are or are not doing their jobs, when we're focusing on transparency and government for members of the public to be informed, then we start talking primarily about legal rights that come through federal or state laws relating to accessing government-held information or accessing certain government proceedings.

The assumption is that having transparency, having access to this information helps people learn more about how the government is operating. Scholarship tells us that we assume that having access to this information is part of being able to hold representatives accountable, being able to learn how they're doing their jobs helps people to be able to have informed discussions and debates and to cast informed votes.

### So what happens when we don't have that?

What gets really challenging is when we start thinking about the amount of information that government leaders have. Some of this information is highly sensitive and might not serve the public interest if it is released. We have a system in which government employees and government representatives have

responsibilities to think carefully about this information and to determine whether releasing this information would help the public interest or harm the public interest. There is a fear associated with giving that responsibility related to the question you're asking of what happens if people do not act in the public's best interest. I think that's a question that relates to human nature and that relates to questions about government secrecy. For generations, there have been questions about government secrecy, and when people in power use it to potentially hide wrongdoing.

Some of my scholarship has looked at news leaders' advocacy for better access to government information. Some of the themes they have brought up are that this country exists in part because of concerns about tyrannical government. The form of government that we have is supposed to help people to be able to engage in self government through steps that should prevent tyrannical leadership in the country, at all levels, not only at the federal level. So one of the concerns is that if leaders find ways to hide government-held information, why are they hiding that information? So the question about "How is it harmful and how harmful is it?" Well, we don't know exactly.

I don't want to assume that people are trying to act in harmful ways, but I think there's a fundamental issue here that if we have a breakdown in transparency, do we have a breakdown in accountability? If people can't receive the information that they need to make decisions about government and to be able to participate in communications about government, that can be fundamentally harmful to our society.

### Going into a new legislative session, should Arizona lawmakers give more consideration to accountability and transparency?

It's always an important time to think about transparency in government. I think this is an especially important time to be thinking about it when there are concerns about levels of trust for institutions and what that can mean for the effectiveness of government. There have been trends around the country in recent years with amending public records laws in specific ways for striking balances of serving the public's interest to learn about how government officials are doing their jobs in ways that are not clearly harmful to individuals who are members of communities. Those issues are always

important for the legislature to be thinking about.

### How can people demand transparency and accountability of their elected officials?

This is where exercising our freedom of expression rights becomes very important.

We can make a phone call, we can send a letter, we can send an email, we can use social media to let our elected officials know that transparency is important. It is important for people to show that they care about the government, that they care about society, and for them to express their opinions about what is working and what is not working. That's really fundamental in a society that depends on self government.

We depend on having individuals express themselves, as well as depend on elected leaders to listen to members of society.

### Do you think this topic will be more prominent in the upcoming legislative session?

I hope it will be. I hope legislators are thinking carefully about how to provide more transparency.

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Palm trees line a typical neighborhood at a suburb in Phoenix, Ariz., Sunday, March 9, 2020.

## Proposed bill aims to restrict short-term rentals in Arizona cities

“Over the 10 years of this experiment, we’ve seen that this law has not lived up to how it was sold originally in 2016,” said Tom Savage, legislative director for the League of Arizona Cities and Towns.

The 2016 law, Senate Bill 1350, established that residential properties can be used for short-term and vacation rentals, but city leaders say large developers have been purchasing units on a large scale and eliminating housing stock for Arizonans looking to buy homes in the state.

*Capitol Media Services* reported in November that the Arizona Court of Appeals recently ruled that the city of Sedona could not prohibit a 59-acre mobile home park from renting out its units for short-term rentals, reversing a Yavapai Superior Court ruling that upheld the city’s decision to not issue a short-term rental license to the company that owns the park, Oak Creek Hospitality.

The 2016 law also defined vacation rentals as any single-family or one-to-four family house or dwelling unit. Nick Ponder, a lobbyist who represents multiple cities at the Capitol, said he believes the appeals ruling is ignoring the definition of a short-term rental by allowing up to the entire mobile home park to be converted into vacation units.

“Sedona has to appeal this case to the Supreme Court saying not only do we not have enough housing for our own residents, but now you’re kicking the least fortunate of our residents out of their homes in favor of short-term rentals because you’re willing to ignore this specific language in the statute,” Ponder said.

No bill has been filed yet for the 2026 session, but the league is proposing legislation that would allow cities to cap the number of short-term rental licenses issued

### KEY POINTS

- **Cities seek update to law restricting short-term rental licenses**
- **Previous bills to regulate short-term rentals have largely gone unheard**
- **Airbnb contributed \$3.5 billion to Arizona’s economy through its hosts**

in oversaturated areas, limit the number of total licenses issued and impose minimum distance requirements for short-term rental units.

In a statement to the *Arizona Capitol Times*, Airbnb noted that less than .035% of reservations booked through the site resulted in a party allegation in 2024. In addition, it stated that the company has worked to implement several safeguards to reduce the number of disruptive parties, such as machine learning technology that prevents people from booking a reservation if Airbnb detects a person might be attempting to book a property for a large house party.

According to the company, Airbnb hosts contributed about \$3.5 billion in economic activity to the state in 2024 which helped support more than 42,000 jobs.

“We are proud of the work we’ve done unparalleled in our industry to promote responsible tourism and reduce the risk of disruptive parties – all the while providing a critical economic opportunity for everyday Arizonans at a

time of rising costs,” said Lauren Bouton, the policy lead for Airbnb. “It would be a mistake for legislators to not seek input from everyday hosts as they look toward future policymaking, which as of now, is the case.”

A survey among Airbnb hosts conducted by the company also found that 80% of hosts share just one home and 40% say renting out their property or a room at their residence has helped them afford to stay in their homes.

Next year is the first time that the league can try to change state law for the regulation of short-term rentals after it signed an agreement with Airbnb and Expedia Group in 2022 that prohibited the league from lobbying for regulations for three years. That agreement also keeps the league from trying to repeal the 2016 law through 2027 in exchange for a state law that allows cities to revoke short-term rental licenses for properties with three nuisance violations that occur in less than 12 months.

Ponder said the issue with the 2022 law is that the court process moves slowly and he’s unsure if any city has even been able to revoke a short-term rental license for a repeat nuisance offender since it can take up to seven months for a court to fully adjudicate a non-felonious nuisance violation. The league’s proposal would give cities greater flexibility in revoking nuisance offenders’ licenses.

While lawmakers have done little to regulate short-term rentals in previous sessions, a bipartisan mix of Republicans and Democrats have introduced bills on the issue, including Senate Majority Leader John Kavanagh, R-Fountain Hills; Rep. Selina Bliss, R-Prescott; Rep. John Gillette, R-Kingman; and Rep. Stephanie Simacek, D-Phoenix.

## GUEST COMMENTARIES

# Arizonans support clean energy to improve health, air quality, keep bills affordable

Every year, the American Lung Association surveys Arizona voters about the air we breathe, the energy we use, and the future we want for our state. This year's results could not be clearer: Arizonans want their leaders to take steps to clean our air and accelerate the transition to affordable, reliable clean energy.

According to our latest statewide poll, concern about air pollution remains high with 83% of Arizona voters viewing it as a serious problem. Seventy-eight percent say climate change is a serious concern as well. These numbers reflect what many Arizona families experience throughout the year: more extreme heat, more wildfire smoke, more smoggy days, and more moments when it simply feels harder to breathe.

As a result, voters overwhelmingly support expanding clean energy solutions. Three out of four Arizonans say the state should implement more clean energy policies to improve air quality and meet rising electricity demand. They strongly prefer solar (75%) and wind power (59%)



*By JoAnna Strother*

to fossil fuels, and by a wide 75% to 25% margin, they favor building new clean-energy projects over constructing new methane gas plants.

Voters also understand that clean energy will help reduce electricity bills (71%), strengthen Arizona's economy and create quality jobs (71%), and improve the reliability of our power grid (67%).

These findings come as the Arizona

Corporation Commission continues to make major energy decisions that ignore the priorities of its own voters. Despite broad public support for cleaner, more affordable power sources, the commission recently approved methane gas expansion proposals from utility companies. Yet three in five voters say utilities should stop spending money to expand oil and gas infrastructure and instead transition to wind, solar and energy-efficiency measures.

Arizonans want cleaner energy, and they want leaders to align with them. Policymakers who support clean-energy transition policies are viewed more favorably (64% more favorable vs. just 11% less favorable). Voters are watching, and they expect action.

This year's polling also reflects growing concern about the state's vulnerability to extreme weather. After another year of record heat, prolonged ozone pollution, and worsening air-quality trends, Arizonans increasingly recognize the connection between climate change and daily life.

Arizonans also want tools to make clean energy more accessible at home. A strong majority continues to support assistance for energy-efficiency upgrades that reduce consumption and lower monthly bills. Yet, the ACC is currently rolling back programs that have been in place for more than 15 years and saved customers millions of dollars.

The science is clear that fossil-fuel combustion in power generation and transportation worsens asthma, COPD, heart disease, and other respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.

Every year that we've polled Arizonans, one theme has remained constant: People across the political spectrum want their leaders to embrace clean-energy technologies.

It's time for the ACC and other state leaders to listen to the people they serve and prioritize clean energy solutions that secure a better future for Arizona's families.

*JoAnna Strother is senior advocacy director in Phoenix for the American Lung Association.*

## Rent control has failed – Tucson shouldn't repeat the mistake

Tucson Mayor Regina Romero is urging the Arizona Legislature to give cities the power to impose rent control. It is a request rooted in good intentions – helping families afford the cost of housing – but it is built on a policy idea with a long, well-documented record of failure. Rent control has been tried in cities across the country for decades, and the results are unmistakable: fewer homes get built, existing units deteriorate, and affordability gets worse, not better.

Economists rarely speak with one voice. But on rent control, the verdict is unanimous. Decades of research show that rent control discourages new construction, depresses reinvestment in older housing, and ultimately shrinks the supply of homes. When supply falls behind demand, prices rise. That isn't a theory – it's what's happened every time rent control has been enacted.

The most recent and dramatic example is Saint Paul, Minnesota. In 2021, Saint Paul enacted the strictest rent control law in America, capping annual rent increases at just 3%. What followed was immediate and devastating. Building permit applications collapsed by 80%



*By Courtney Gilstrap LeVinus*

almost overnight. Developers pulled out of projects mid-stream. Financing dried up. Builders simply chose to work in neighboring communities without rent caps. Within a year, the Saint Paul City Council was forced to gut the law because the damage was so severe. This is not an abstract warning, it's a real-world case study in how quickly rent control chokes off desperately needed housing.

This pattern is not unique. In older rent-controlled markets like New York City, decades of artificial limits on rents

have left buildings deteriorating, repairs delayed, and investment stagnant. A national survey shows more than 60% of housing providers under rent control report having to postpone nonessential maintenance because the economics no longer pencil out. When owners cannot reinvest, residents ultimately suffer.

Rent control also weakens the financial backbone of cities themselves. Property values decline under rent caps, which leads to lower property-tax revenues – the funding source for schools, parks, public safety, and essential infrastructure like roads and sewers. At a time when cities are struggling to address homelessness and fight crime, rent control would shrink local budgets and make those challenges harder to solve.

Arizona cannot afford to go down this path. Our state must continue to grow its housing supply to meet demand, driven in part by the more than 100,000 new residents who move to Arizona each year. The only sustainable way to increase affordability is to build more homes across all price points. Business leaders, housing experts, and economists agree: expanding supply is the fastest and most

reliable way to stabilize rents.

The Phoenix metro area is proof. As thousands of new homes and apartments have come online, rent prices have fallen for 11 consecutive months. This is Econ 101 in real time. When supply grows, prices moderate. Rent control would reverse this progress by discouraging the very construction we need.

Rent control tries to treat a symptom rather than the underlying issue. Arizona's challenge is simple: we do not have enough housing. The solution is equally straightforward – build more of it. That requires reducing regulatory barriers, accelerating approvals, and encouraging investment in both new construction and existing properties.

For Arizona, rent control is not a solution. It is a proven mistake. We should learn from the failures seen across the country and stay focused on what actually works – increasing supply, supporting responsible development, and ensuring every Arizonan has access to a home they can afford.

*Courtney Gilstrap LeVinus is president and CEO of the Arizona Multihousing Association.*

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

# Autism therapy center, parents sue AHCCCS, DES and insurer

Additionally, the lawsuit alleges that the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System and DES, which manages the state's Division of Developmental Disabilities, have not done enough to ensure that affected patients can continue receiving therapy services.

"Mercy Care and AHCCCS have not provided any written transition plan to (parents) to help them identify other providers via a different network or to provide an option to continue with current Centria practitioners via a different MCO," the complaint alleges.

The lawsuit stems from an ongoing contract dispute between Centria, which provides applied behavioral analysis therapy services to children with autism spectrum disorder, and Mercy Care after the insurer attempted to decrease its reimbursement rates by 25%. Centria alleges that when it tried to discuss the harm decreased reimbursement rates would cause to its services, Mercy Care instead terminated its contract without cause.

"Mercy Care has attempted to unilaterally force certain ABA therapy providers into accepting an unsustainable 25% rate decrease, just months after it reduced these providers' rates by 15%," Attorneys for Centria wrote in a court filing. "Centria determined such rate cuts were unsustainable and would detrimentally affect its quality of services to patients."

Centria is one of the largest providers of ABA (applied behavioral analysis) services for children on Medicaid in Arizona, serving around 700 children. Nearly 300 of those children are on Mercy Care's health plan, according to Centria's complaint.

The state is currently facing an ABA provider shortage and is dealing with recent layoffs of providers at another autism services provider, Arizona Autism. Centria says an estimated 22,000 children in Arizona are unable to

## KEY POINTS

- **Centria Autism and two parents of children with autism sued Arizona's Medicaid agency and one of its insurance contractors**
- **The lawsuit stems from a contract dispute between Centria Autism and insurer Mercy Care**
- **Centria and the parents allege children with autism will lose critical therapy services**

receive ABA services.

Brandon told the Arizona Capitol Times in November that AHCCCS and the Division of Developmental Disabilities had been unhelpful in finding a new provider or a new health plan for her son Micah, who currently attends Centria. Children with autism spectrum disorder are especially sensitive to change and Brandon and other Centria parents said they are worried their children will regress without stable, continued therapy.

"The best-case scenario is that these children wait six months before receiving services from a new provider — yet there is a clear risk of regression and harm to these children if they do not receive any services or treatment during that time," the complaint argues.

Centria and the parents say Mercy Care failed to provide transition and network adequacy plans for affected patients and breached its contract with Centria by terminating it without engaging in good faith

negotiations over reimbursement rates. A spokeswoman for Mercy Care did not directly address the lawsuit in a Dec. 17 statement.

"Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy is important for children and families, and we work to ensure our provider relationships align with the needs of our members and the state," Laurie Munn said in an emailed statement. "We are confident in our network of providers and our ability to ensure continuity of care for our members."

The complaint also accuses AHCCCS and DES of approving Mercy Care's termination of Centria through a submission of a material change to its provider network, despite being aware of ABA provider shortages. It also alleges AHCCCS "actively prevented" some Centria patients, like Brandon's son, from switching to a different managed care organization to continue therapy at Centria.

A spokesperson for DES declined to comment on ongoing litigation. A spokesperson for AHCCCS declined to comment on the specifics of the lawsuit in an emailed statement.

"AHCCCS is aware of the lawsuit that was filed on December 15, and the Agency is in the process of reviewing the allegations made by the Plaintiff," the statement said. "ABA is an AHCCCS covered service, and the agency and its contracted health plans continue to cover ABA services when the services are determined to be medically necessary."

Centria and the two parents also filed a motion for a temporary restraining order, asking the Maricopa County Superior Court to prevent the contract termination from going into effect in March and stop any attempts to transition Centria patients to other providers. A hearing on the restraining order is set for Dec. 19.

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**Yellow Sheet Report**

NEWS NOTES AND GOSSIP

**NO ROOM FOR INTERPRETATION**  
The state is not providing constitutionally adequate medical and mental health care to inmates of state prisons and has acted with "deliberate indifference" to the resulting substantial risk of serious harm, U.S. District Judge Roslyn Silver wrote in a 200-page order (LRSK). The state is similarly ignoring the substantial risk of harm posed to prisoners in "restrictive housing units," where inmates are subjected to extreme social isolation, lack of recreation and insufficient nutrition. The ruling follows Silver's decision to rescind a 2015 settlement in the prison healthcare case, *Jensen v. Skinn*, after the state did not improve conditions despite being held in contempt and fined millions of dollars. Silver ordered a new trial, which was held over the course of 15 days in fall 2021. The initial class-action lawsuit was filed in 2012 on

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## AGENCIES

# Quick action by governor, lawmakers needed to fix shorthanded Clemency Board

BY KIERA RILEY  
kriley@stateaffairs.com

A second vacancy on the Board of Executive Clemency puts more pressure on the governor to appoint replacements, as a three-member board, though technically allowed under state law, would create a skeleton crew.

A sitting board member still needs to be confirmed by the Senate early in the next legislative session as well, potentially leaving the membership at two.

Operating without a full board, though possible, could prove difficult given an ongoing backlog of cases and existing strain on staff, space, and resources. And filling vacancies poses its own challenges as no more than two members can come from the same professional discipline, and the position, though paid, is a full time job.

The Office of Boards and Commissions and Gov. Katie Hobbs have been working to interview potential candidates, with plans to appoint new members by early January, according to a spokesperson for the governor.

“It’s important for the board to operate efficiently, to support victims, offenders and citizens, as far as public safety,” said Gretchen McClellan-Singh, executive director of the board.

The Board of Executive Clemency is tasked with deciding whether to release inmates into parole or home arrest and whether to return an inmate to custody for violations of release conditions.

And, as the name suggests, the board reviews clemency applications, or requests for commutations, a shortening of sentences or early release for those in imminent danger of death, as well as pardons and reprieves. All recommendations on clemency matters are sent to the governor for final say.

As it stands now, the board is down to three members after Sue Stodola, appointed by Gov. Katie Hobbs in March 2023, left the board in late October and Louis Quinonez, appointed by Gov. Doug Ducey in 2017, retired prior to the end of his term in January.

Beyond the two vacancies, board member Ashley Denton, appointed by Hobbs in January 2025, must secure approval from the Senate in the early weeks of the upcoming legislative session as the one-year deadline for appointees serving sans confirmation approaches.

The board can fully operate as is with



Judge's gavel with scales of justice in background. (Credit: photobyphotoboy)

## KEY POINTS

- **Two vacancies strain Clemency Board, pressuring governor's appointments**
- **Reduced membership, limited staff, affect the number of hearings amid a growing backlog**
- **Limited applicants, requirements for varied disciplines complicate filling positions**

three members, but a two member board would face limitations due to a lack of authorization to preside over certain hearings, like parole cases dealing with serious offenses.

In the last fiscal year, the board held a total of 2,095 hearings, including 1,513 revocation hearings, 211 parole and home arrest hearings, 260 commutation hearings, 15 pardon hearings, nine absolute discharge hearings and one capital clemency hearing.

And though the board made strides in eliminating an existing backlog of commutation applications, the number of cases continues to increase, with 91 more pending since August, leaving the average hearing date about 150 days after the board receives an application.

The board has continually contended with high caseloads and limited staff, too.

Though the board hired a full-time case analyst with new funding in fiscal year 2026, the FY2027 budget request still notes an increasing caseload and the ongoing need for two more administrative staff positions, with current staff “stretched to the limit under the current workload and calendar structure.”

“A staff member is present during all Board hearings to run the virtual recording platform, handle participation from victims, inmate supporters and members of the public, and to ensure the hearing is

conducted according to procedures,” the FY2027 budget request reads. “With such a small number of staff it is incredibly difficult to complete all of the needed work in a timely manner.”

As for board members, the Governor’s Office of Boards and Commissions has received 10 applications this year, with three applying since Stolda left in late October, according to Liliana Soto, press secretary for Hobbs.

Of those 10, six proceeded to the interview stage.

“In line with the Governor’s goal for the BOEC, our team is conducting thorough due diligence to identify, interview, and appoint qualified candidates,” Soto said in a statement. “This process includes educating potential members about the Board’s responsibilities, the requirement for Senate confirmation to serve a full term, and the unique salary structure provided to its members.”

Soto noted too, prior to the two new vacancies, Hobbs had all five seats filled for the first time since 2022.

Now, the governor is looking at filling the two seats, bearing in mind the potential for a third vacancy if the Senate fails to confirm Denton.

“We are in the final stages of identifying new members and intend to complete

appointments by early January,” Soto said. “Governor Hobbs remains committed to the Board and is confident that these vacancies will be filled promptly with the best possible candidates.”

No more than two board members can come from the same discipline to ensure varied perspectives in decision making.

Board chair Mina Mendez previously worked as a Superior Court commissioner, a judge pro tem, and as an assistant attorney general representing child protective services. Sal Freni is a 30-year veteran of the Phoenix Police Department.

Denton worked in child welfare, with specific focus on grief, loss, complex trauma, substance abuse, sexual abuse and human trafficking. She also worked as a capital mitigation specialist with public defense.

Former board members brought similar backgrounds. Stodola worked as a capital mitigation specialist and a probation officer. Quinonez worked as a federal agent.

“All board members come with different backgrounds. I would say each board member pays attention to things based on their background, but you look at all factors,” Stodola said. “For me, I looked at what the victims had to say, and then I looked at, has this person changed? How have they changed over the years? What do they now say about the crime? What perspective do they have?”

Quinonez, who estimated overseeing approximately 15,000 cases during his nearly eight years on the board, likened board decisions to clinical judgment in the medical profession.

“Intuition matters. But intuition isn’t magic. It’s those thousands of experiences,” Quinonez said. “I’ve learned to pay attention to instinct and intuition, but at the same time, I recognize it comes from someplace that is much more science-based and educated. Sometimes it’s emotional in (the board room). So I think it’s important to look at all the evidence-based factors.”

As the board awaits replacements, Quinonez emphasized the importance of balanced decision making.

“To be a good board member, you have to have a bleeding heart of stone, meaning you need a little bit of both,” Quinonez said. “You have to be law and order minded and public safety minded, but at the same time, recognize some of these backstories and that people do mature and change.”

## GOVERNMENT

# League of Women Voters podcast relates to current political scene

BY JORDAN GERARD  
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The League of Women Voters of Arizona started a four-part podcast series that deep dives into the country's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights and the Constitution, and examines how those principles still echo in civic life.

"The Social Contract in Action" might be the first podcast of its kind among league chapters and it's a homegrown effort by volunteers who are excited to talk about it and passionate about advocacy and civic education, Piny Sheoran, state advocacy chair, said.

This isn't the league's first rodeo with podcasts, as they've published others on ballot initiatives, how-tos, early voting and other related topics, but it might be the first series to dissect historical documents, she added.

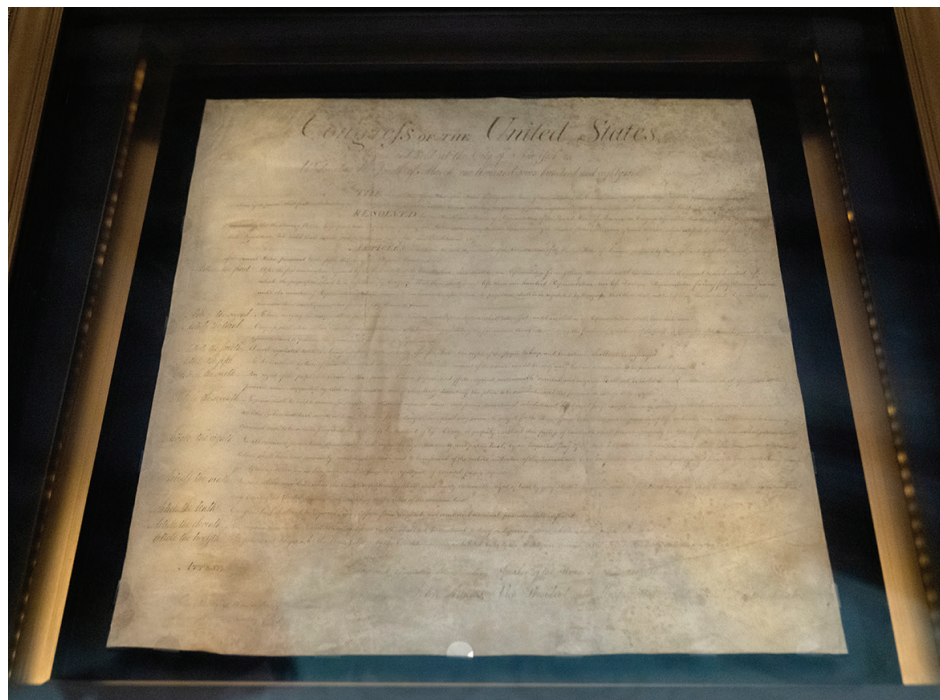
The first part, a total of eight episodes talking about the grievances in the Declaration of Independence, is completed. The next part, expected in February, will tackle the Bill of Rights. Their goal is to complete the remaining parts in 2026, the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The podcast can be found on YouTube, on the "LWV Arizona" channel or on Spotify under the "Democracy Truth Podcast" by the League of Women Voters of Arizona.

It started with an idea from a panel Sheoran was part of in June and someone had mentioned, "We all started 250 years ago with an expectation of a social contract between the government and us, and that social contract was undergirded by our founding documents and it's breaking, and the next generation is asking 'How is that social contract serving us and our futures?'"

Sheoran pulled together several league volunteers and they formulated the idea of digging into a discussion of what that social contract means. Over the summer, they researched and discussed how to structure the episodes and finally in September, started recording. The league received a few grants to help professionally record and release the series, Sheoran said.

The podcast series continues the league's mission of civic education and keeping people engaged, Emra Muslim, advocacy intern and membership chair, said. She is also studying political science and attending law school at Arizona State University.



The Bill of Rights is displayed at the National Archives on Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2025, in Washington, as the Archives unveiled a display for the first time of the entire Constitution and all 27 amendments, as part of celebrations for the upcoming 250th anniversary of founding of the United States. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

"We've seen a lot of breakings within our democracy, cracks and tendencies of authoritarianism that have really been sort of alarming to myself and a lot of my student colleagues and people I engage with in the community," she said.

Starting with the Declaration of Independence lays the foundation for the remainder of the series, Sarabeth Spencer, an advocacy consultant with the League of Women Voters of Metro Phoenix, said.

"I think the Declaration was really that document that developed that idea of the social contract that this whole series is based on," she said. "It's all of the reasons why they were breaking, that our country broke away from the British government."

Another reason for dissecting these historical documents is making them accessible and digestible, Grace Marie Theesfeld said. Theesfeld is an advocacy consultant for the Tucson chapter and voter services chair for the League of Women Voters of Arizona. She is a student at the University of Arizona studying psychology and nutrition.

Theesfeld hosted the first part of the series, accompanied by a panel of college students, including Muslims, and community members. Having younger voices speaking was intentional, Sheoran said.

"We have these vibrant young people who are thoughtful, and who are really paying attention, and we know that the younger people are going to listen to their peers," she said. The group plans to invite more

community leaders and experts to speak as well.

The group didn't only want to talk about it in the podcast, but they want other people to talk about it too, said Keisha Mohan, an advocacy consultant and a student at ASU who plans to go to law school.

"We wanted to show that this was something that continues into today, and that those are still our founding principles, and we wanted people to be able to look at that and say, 'OK, I understand how this applies to us now, let me talk about it with people in my life and show them how it's relevant today,'" she said.

The group's participation in the podcast has become more than just podcasting, Sheoran said, adding they took ownership of it. They didn't hesitate when she asked the group about doing this project, she added.

"I think it's very easy to feel paralyzed by the chaos that's happening around us, but in my opinion, I think the way out of that chaos is organizing and coming together as a group of people, and I knew that this podcast would be a great way to do that," Theesfeld said. Connecting with like-minded peers who are also motivated to make quality social change in their communities has been another bonus, she added.

Mohan, who studied history, said she was excited to dig into the documents and help people understand why it's important to care about "old things."

## KEY POINTS

- **League of Women Voters of AZ launches podcast series on founding documents**
- **"The Social Contract in Action" explores Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, and Constitution**
- **The podcast aims to increase civic literacy amid polarization.**

"I was so excited when we were doing this, because it really does matter to learn about these historical documents, because that's where we came from, that's how this whole thing started, and we have to know where we came from to know where we're going," she said. "It's so important to know the origins of things and how they affect us today, and how we can still live up to those ideals and principles."

Spencer said as she researched for the episodes, she didn't really come across a lot of similar projects, and revisiting historical documents felt personally relevant and powerful to her.

Another reason for participating is today's political climate, Muslim said, adding that people are living in a time of polarization, civic disengagement and more distrust in the government and its institutions. The podcast has been a unique way to increase civil literacy, she said.

"You don't get to see a lot of young people coming together and community members to talk about what's on their minds, to have the absolute freedom to say what's on your heart and on your mind," she said. "I think that it will resonate across communities and bring people together and talk about what they believe in, what they want to see from democracy and government in general."

After dissecting the documents that founded this country, what do they want people to take away after listening?

"I think that one of the key takeaways that I hope people come to find from our podcast is that pulling at a thread of injustice helps to unravel the entire cloth. So, whatever small area of civic engagement you find yourself in, you are helping to address larger issues, and I think this podcast is a great kickstart to that," Theesfeld said.

# FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION



## Alabama

### DEMOCRATIC FORMER SEN. DOUG JONES LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN FOR GOVERNOR

*BIRMINGHAM* — Former U.S. Sen. Doug Jones has launched his campaign for Alabama governor. Jones is the last Democrat to hold statewide office in the state. He told supporters at a rally in Birmingham that Alabama has pressing needs that are not being addressed. The campaign kickoff came on the anniversary of his 2017 Senate win. He could see a rematch in the general election against Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville, who defeated Jones previously and is also running for governor.

## Arkansas

### 1ST STATE TO END CONTRACT WITH PBS, EFFECTIVE JULY 1

*LITTLE ROCK* — The commission that oversees public television in Arkansas has voted to sever ties with PBS, making it the first state to end its contract with the broadcast giant. PBS provides such popular television programs as “Sesame Street,” “Nova” and “Antiques Roadshow.” The eight-member Arkansas Educational Television Commission said that it planned to disaffiliate from PBS effective July 1. The commission cited annual membership dues of about \$2.5 million and described those as “not feasible.” It also cited the unexpected loss of about that same amount of federal funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which was targeted for closure earlier this year and defunded by Congress.

## Florida

### US COMMAND IN LATIN AMERICA CHANGES HANDS AMID CRITICISM OF BOAT STRIKES

*DORAL* — A U.S. Navy admiral who oversees military operations in Latin America has handed off command responsibilities as scrutiny increases over the Trump administration’s deadly strikes on alleged drug boats in the region. Adm. Alvin Holsey is retiring one year into a posting that typically lasts three to four years. During a ceremony at U.S. Southern Command headquarters near Miami, Holsey didn’t mention the reasons for his early retirement or the ongoing military operations. But Holsey urged his successor to uphold longstanding partnerships in the region by standing firmly behind the shared values of democracy and support for the rule of law.

## Georgia

### SENATE PANEL TO QUESTION DEMOCRATIC DA OVER TRUMP PROSECUTION

*ATLANTA* — Fani Willis is set to face questions from a Georgia state Senate committee about her prosecution of Donald Trump. The Republican-led committee was created to investigate allegations of misconduct against Willis, the Democratic district attorney in greater Atlanta’s Fulton County. She won indictments against Trump and others for efforts to overturn Trump’s 2020 election loss in Georgia. The committee has focused on Willis’ hiring of special prosecutor Nathan Wade, alleging a conflict of interest due to a romantic relationship. Willis was removed and the case was later dismissed. Democrats criticize the panel as politically motivated.

## Illinois

### BORDER PATROL OFFICIAL IS BACK IN CHICAGO DURING IMMIGRATION RAIDS

*CHICAGO* — Senior Border Patrol official Greg Bovino has returned to the Chicago area, about a month after leaving to lead immigration crackdowns in other cities. Bovino initially arrived in the Chicago area in September amid Operation Midway Blitz, which netted thousands of arrests and fueled fear among immigrant communities. The operation has become known for its aggressive tactics. As the face of the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown, Bovino was photographed Tuesday in a predominantly Mexican American neighborhood as activists blew whistles and shouted.

## Indiana

### TRUMP WAS UNABLE TO INSULT HIS WAY TO VICTORY IN REDISTRICTING BATTLE

Indiana Republican senators turned down President Donald Trump’s redistricting proposal this week. In interviews with The Associated Press, senators said Trump’s insults and coarse language put them off. They also said their constituents didn’t want to redraw the state’s congressional maps. The outcome was a significant political defeat for Trump, undermining his nationwide redistricting campaign that was intended to boost Republicans’ chances in the upcoming midterm elections. The proposed map aimed to divide Indianapolis to dilute Democratic influence, but some felt it was political cheating.

## Louisiana

### PLANS FOR NEW ORLEANS ATTACK THWARTED, AUTHORITIES SAY

*BATON ROUGE* — Authorities say plans for an attack in New Orleans were thwarted after an ex-Marine was arrested. Court documents obtained by The Associated Press say 28-year-old Micah James Legnon was arrested while on the way to the Louisiana city with guns, a gas cannister and body armor. Legnon was charged with threats in interstate commerce. Federal authorities say Legnon has ties to an extremist anti-capitalist and anti-government group. Authorities say four members of the group were arrested last week in California on suspicion of trying to plan bombings in Southern California.

## California

### ROB REINER’S SON FACES 2 COUNTS OF MURDER IN KILLING OF HIS PARENTS

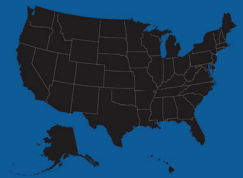
*LOS ANGELES* — Nick Reiner, son of Rob Reiner, was scheduled to appear in court this week as he faces charges of first-degree murder in the killing of his parents. Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman announced the charges. The 78-year-old actor and director Rob Reiner and his wife, Michele Singer Reiner, were found dead from stab wounds in their Los Angeles home. Nick Reiner was arrested hours later. Prosecutors added special circumstances of multiple murders and a special allegation of using a knife, which could lead to a greater sentence.



Nick Reiner arrives at the premiere of “Spinal Tap II: The End Continues” on Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2025, at The Egyptian Theatre Hollywood in Los Angeles. (Photo by Richard Shotwell/Invision/AP)

# FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION



## Massachusetts

### SEARCH GOES ON FOR SUSPECT IN FATAL SHOOTING OF MIT PROFESSOR

*BROOKLINE* — Police intensified their search for a suspect in the fatal shooting of a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in his home in a Boston suburb. The Norfolk District Attorney's Office says Nuno F.G. Loureiro, a 47-year-old professor of nuclear science and engineering, was shot in Brookline and died at a local hospital. Officials say no suspects are in custody. Loureiro, who is from Portugal, joined MIT in 2016 and was named last year to lead its Plasma Science and Fusion Center.

## Michigan

### 16 STATES SUE OVER BILLIONS IN WITHHELD ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING FUNDS

*DETROIT* — Sixteen states and the District of Columbia are suing President Donald Trump's administration for what they say is unlawfully withholding billions of dollars in funding for two electric vehicle charging programs. The lawsuit filed in Washington state is the latest legal battle several states are pursuing to secure funding for EV charging infrastructure they say was obligated to them under former President Joe Biden.

## Mississippi

### US SUPREME COURT WILL HEAR APPEAL OF BLACK DEATH ROW INMATE OVER JURY MAKEUP

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear the appeal of a Black death row inmate from Mississippi whose case was handled by a prosecutor with a history of dismissing Black jurors for discriminatory reasons. A federal judge had previously overturned the murder conviction of the inmate, Terry Pitchford, but an appeals court reversed that ruling. The justices stepped into the case involving the same prosecutor, former District Attorney Doug Evans, who was at the center of a high court case that resulted in a 2019 decision that overturned the death sentence and conviction of Curtis Flowers. The court ruled nearly 40 years ago that jurors can't be excused from service because of their race.

## Montana

### EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS BLOCKED FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A Montana judge has blocked an education savings account program for students with disabilities, ruling that lawmakers did not fund the program. The 2023 law created education savings accounts allowing parents of students with disabilities to redirect their child's per-pupil school funding to cover private schooling, tutoring, specialized therapies and other approved education expenses. The law required families to release their school from its obligation to provide special education students with a free, appropriate public education. The judge said the Legislature did not correctly establish a funding process for the program. Opponents argue the plan would require families to waive educational rights in exchange for funding that would not meet basic needs.

## Nebraska

### 2 RAIL UNIONS OPPOSE UNION PACIFIC-NORFOLK SOUTHERN MERGER OVER SAFETY CONCERNS

*OMAHA* — The proposed \$85 billion merger of the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads has lost the support of two unions that represent more than half their workers. The unions representing engineers and maintenance workers worry the deal will jeopardize safety and jobs, and lead to higher shipping rates and consumer prices. They are now among the most prominent critics of this deal. But the deal does have the support of the nation's largest rail union which represents conductors and hundreds of individual shippers.

## New Mexico

### CANNABIS ENTREPRENEUR JOINS GOP RACE FOR GOVERNOR

*ALBUQUERQUE* — One of New Mexico's most successful cannabis entrepreneurs is entering the race for governor. Duke Rodriguez announced his run for the Republican nomination in a series of newspaper advertisements over the weekend. Rodriguez says he's not asking for money but rather for New Mexicans to be his running mates. He cited health care, education, fighting crime and the solvency of New Mexico's public retirement system as priorities. GOP competition includes Rio Rancho Mayor Gregg Hull and state Sen. Steve Lanier of Aztec. Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham terms out of office at the end of 2026. A three-way race for the Democratic nomination is underway.

## New York

### WARNER BROS ASKS INVESTORS TO REJECT TAKEOVER BID BY PARAMOUNT SKYDANCE

*NEW YORK* — Warner Bros. is telling shareholders to reject a takeover bid from Paramount Skydance, saying that a rival bid from Netflix will be better for customers. It said that it "strongly believes" a merger with Netflix will allow it to reach a broader audience. Paramount went hostile with its bid last week, asking shareholders to reject the deal with Netflix favored by the board of Warner Bros. Paramount's bid isn't off the table altogether. While the letter to shareholders means Paramount is not the offer favored by the board at Warner Bros., shareholders can still decide to tender their shares in favor of Paramount's offer for the entire company — including cable stalwarts CNN and Discovery.

## Rhode Island

### WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE SEARCH FOR BROWN UNIVERSITY SHOOTING SUSPECT

*PROVIDENCE* — With the Brown University shooter still on the loose, authorities released a video timeline of a suspect and police fanned out to Providence schools to reassure parents, kids and teachers as investigators push for new evidence that might help them crack the case. Police had previously released videos of the man suspected in the attack in an engineering classroom where two students were killed and nine others were wounded. None showed the man's face, which was either turned away or masked. The FBI has described the suspect as stocky and about 5 feet 8 inches tall.

## Texas

### WHEN MEASLES HIT WEST TEXAS, SCHOOL ABSENCES SOARED

When a measles outbreak hit West Texas this year, school absences surged far beyond the number of children who likely became sick. Students were excluded or kept home by their families to minimize the spread of the disease. That's according to a preliminary study from Stanford University. Student absences in Seminole Independent School District, a school system that served students at the heart of the outbreak, climbed 41% across all grade levels compared with the same period in the two previous years. The study offers a glimpse at the toll on student learning from the spread of measles.

INSIDER NEWS

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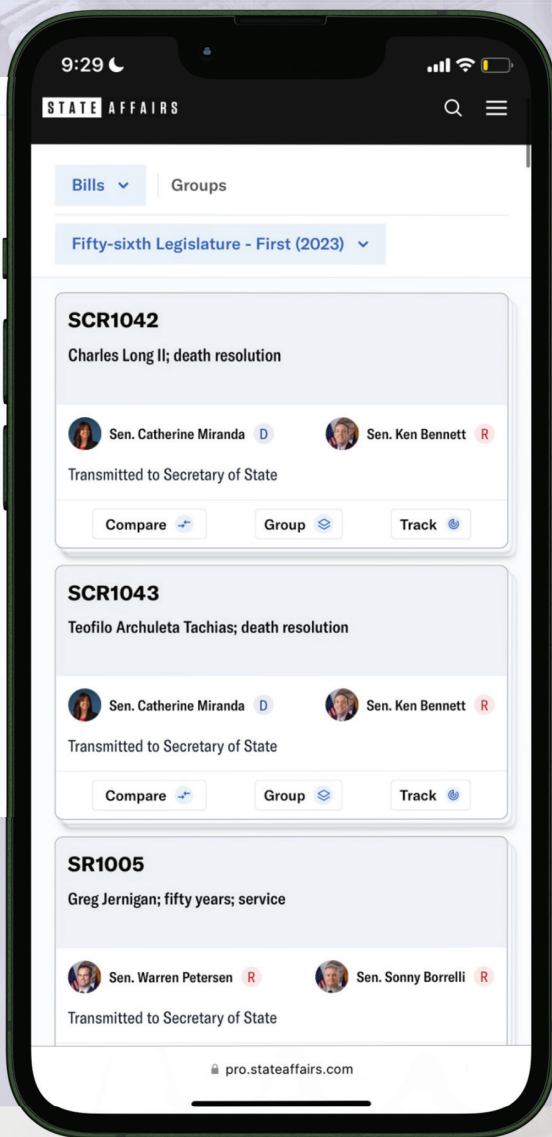
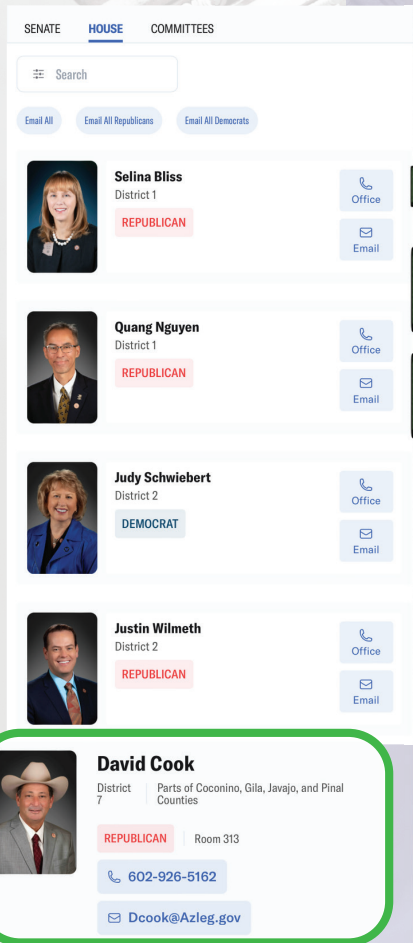
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