

Arizona Capitol Times

Your inside source for Arizona government, politics, and business

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**Students protest over
ICE enforcement**

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lawsuit against AHCCCS**

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**GOP lawmakers
reintroduce 87 vetoed bills**

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Taylor Robson quits Arizona governor's race

BY REAGAN PRIEST
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Karrin Taylor Robson suspends her campaign for governor, citing her desire to avoid a “divisive Republican primary.”

In a statement, Taylor Robson said she is stepping back from the race to help the Republican Party win back the governorship from incumbent Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs.

“... we cannot afford a divisive Republican primary that drains resources and turns into months of intraparty attacks,” Taylor Robson said. “It only weakens our conservative cause and gives the left exactly what they want: a fractured Republican Party heading into November. With so much on the line in 2026, I am not willing to contribute to that outcome.”

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Karrin Taylor Robson speaks at a town hall event with former Republican New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, July 29, 2022, in Tempe, Ariz. Robson, a wealthy Republican businessperson, said Wednesday, February 12, 2026, that she is dropping her bid for Arizona governor. (AP Photo / Ross D. Franklin, File)

“It’s beyond frustrating to see Republicans recycling the same vetoed bills, fully aware they’ll be rejected again. Instead of working to improve the lives of Arizonans, they’re stuck performing political theater just to boost their numbers and blame the governor.”

— Liliana Soto, Gov. Katie Hobbs' press secretary, in a statement on bills introduced by lawmakers this session that were previously vetoed by the governor

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Mayes uses ‘public nuisance’ law to target Surprise ICE facility

BY KIERA RILEY
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Attorney General Kris Mayes is probing Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s proposed 1,500-bed detention facility in Surprise for potential violations of public nuisance law.

In a letter to Department of Homeland

Security Secretary Krisi Noem, Mayes asked for information on the facility’s potential impact on local schools, traffic, noise, water supply, waste disposal, medical care and workload for local first responders.

Mayes’ letter follows a line of information inquiries from members of Arizona’s

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**Cowboy
hats!**

*See page 3-4
for more details*



CAPITOL QUOTES



“Voter ID aligns with President Trump’s agenda for securing our elections, and to the Republicans in this body, it is non-negotiable. For two years, certain Republicans in the Senate have played a game of cat and mouse in bad faith, requesting everchanging lists of demands and begging us to chase the ball.”

— Rep. Alexander Kolodin, a Scottsdale Republican, on the House passing a proposal to make Arizona’s elections more closely resemble those of Florida



“The Republicans in control of JLBC appear by their actions, if not their words, to want this system to collapse. I have no other reasonable explanation for what’s happening here.”

— Democratic Secretary of State Adriane Fontes, on the lack of investment in Arizona’s election infrastructure, subsequent system outages, and what he alleges to be a Republican scheme to undermine the Secretary of State’s Office ahead of the 2026 election



“There’s a string of scandals over data being accessed by immigration authorities racing to fulfill Donald Trump’s deportation agenda. Why not safeguards that would prohibit that from being used by ICE or being used by anti-abortion states to track women who are coming to Arizona for a lawful abortion?”

— Sen. Lauren Kuby, D-Tempe, on Senate Bill 1111, which would put into law requirements for how license plate data collected by law enforcement must be stored, who can access it, and what penalties there are for unlawful disclosure



“In the course of his career, Andy has shown the temperament and commitment to fairness that Arizonans expect from their judges. With the skills and expertise he has displayed as a practicing attorney, I am confident he will be a great asset to the Court of Appeals.”

— Gov. Katie Hobbs, on approving her longtime go-to counsel D. Andrew “Andy” Gaona to the Arizona Court of Appeals, Division One, filling the vacancy left by Judge Paul McMurdie

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**COWBOY HATS
AND POLITICS**

The hats of Arizona's senators

BY JORDAN GERARD
jgerard@stateaffairs.com

What's in a hat? By any other name, it would still look just as cool.

For the *Arizona Capitol Times* this week, we decided to have a bit of fun during a tense and spicy legislative session. We asked four senators about their hats, either the ones in their official Senate photos or the ones they wear most often. Arizona is the American Southwest and there's no shortage of Western history and culture. It has spilled over into the Legislature and seeing anyone donning a cowboy hat on any given day is not uncommon. Here are the stories under the hats.

PS: Sens. T.J. Shope, David Gowan and Mark Finchem, happy to chat about your hats too! Just throw your hat in our ring.

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Sen. Janae Shamp, R-Surprise, adorns a white cowboy hat while speaking with attendees at the 2023 Annual Awards Celebration hosted by the Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry at Republic National Distributing Company in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

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Cowboy hats and politics: The hats of Arizona's senators



Sen T. J. Shope, R-Coolidge, rocks his signature cowboy hat while speaking with attendees at the 2025 Legislative Forecast Luncheon hosted by the Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

Sen. Janae Shamp

Shamp's blue-roan hat is only available from JW Brooks Custom Hats in Lipan, Texas (about an hour west of Fort Worth). A friend told her about it and she went out of

her way to find it. It's not custom made, but shaped in the classic cowboy cut, she said. Her husband buys her hats and for Shamp, that just adds an extra sense of love.



Sen. David Gowan, R-Sierra Vista, wears an off-white cowboy hat while speaking with attendees at the 2022 Annual Awards Luncheon at Republic National Distributing Company of Arizona in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

It's not just a shtick either, she said. She grew up riding horses and doing hunter-jumper events, a type of show jumping. Then she married her husband, a farmer and rancher who had roped all his life, and she switched to team roping. She sported a silver buckle won at an event in Montana.

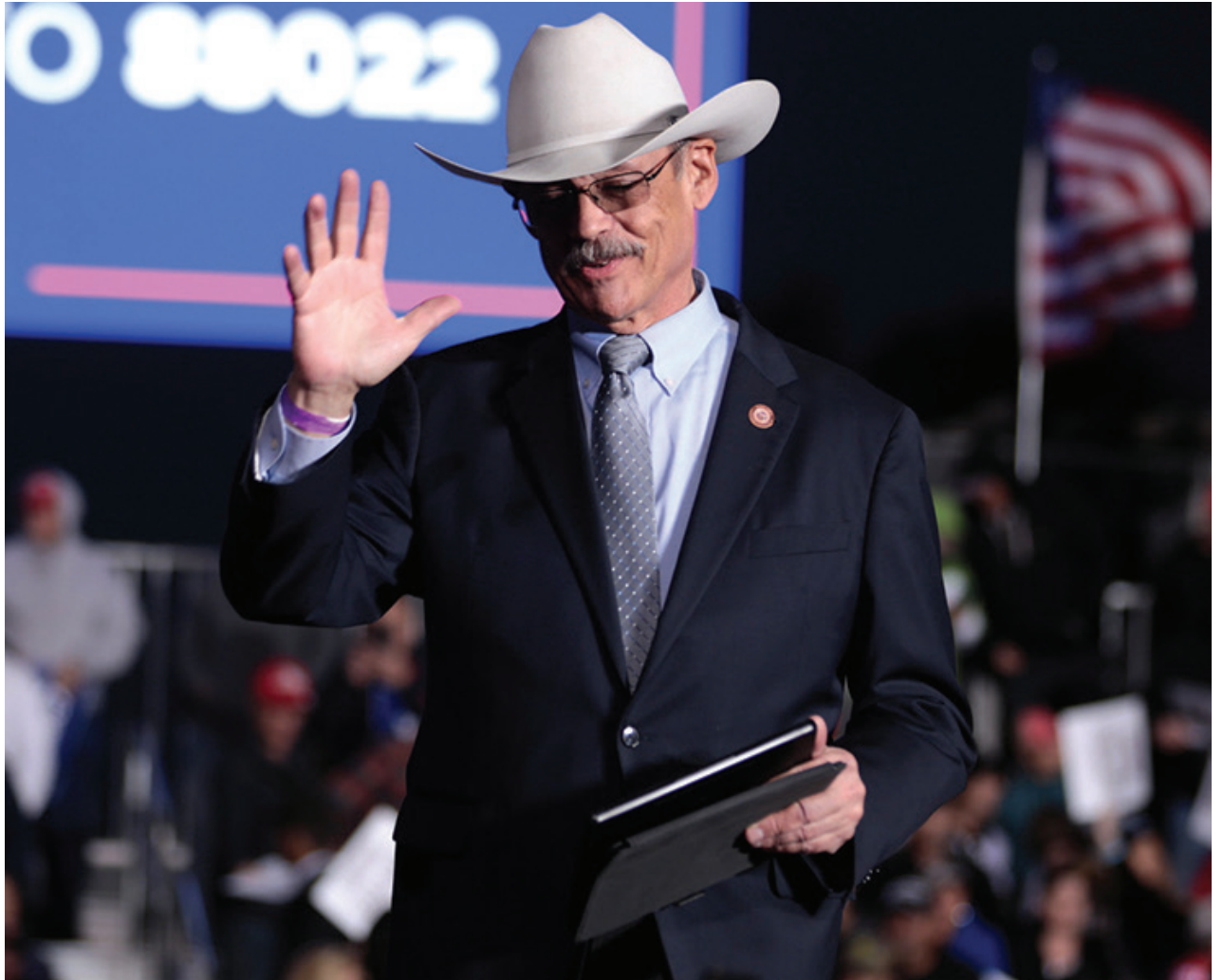
"It's a way of life for us," she said. "I like to have a sharp hat

because cowboys take a lot of pride in their hats."

Do you have a hard and fast rule about when you wear your hat to the Senate?

I always wear my hat. I'm not allowed to wear it on the floor or in committee, even though women are usually allowed to wear a hat anywhere they go. I always take it off when I come inside. You take it off when you shake hands, although a girl doesn't have to. You take it off when the National Anthem is played or the Pledge of Allegiance, but as a girl, you don't have to. I would never wear it in church. That'd be completely inappropriate.

Have you ever lost your hat – either couldn't find it or blew off in the wind?



Sen. Mark Finchem, R-Flagstaff, wears a white cowboy hat while waving to attendees at a "Save America" rally at Country Thunder Arizona in Florence, Arizona, in 2022. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)



Sen. Janae Shamp, R-Surprise, speaking with attendees at a press conference hosted by Border 911 at the Arizona State Capitol building in Phoenix, Arizona. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

They come off in the wind, especially for me. I don't team rope in my cowboy hat. When I rope my steer and I dally and I turn left and I'm looking back, the wind will get underneath and flip my cowboy hat off and it'll head right for the heel horse's face and then they spook. When I team rope, I wear a ball cap.

How do you know when a cowboy hat is earned?

You know, in our world, I don't think anybody ever says that you have to earn the right to wear a cowboy hat. People who generally wear cowboy hats live under a certain kind of set of rules in life. I don't think I've ever seen anyone judged for wearing a hat.

Sen. TJ Shope, I gave him a hard time once. I'm like,

"How are you a cowboy?" And he's like, "I have cows. They're just packaged in the grocery store." I'm like, "Good point."

It's a culture, and it's a very accepting culture.

Has anyone ever called you out for wearing it?

People like to insult me on social media all the time, "Take off the stupid hat. You look dumb. It's just a shtick." No, it's not.

Which senator should wear a hat who does not currently wear one?

Sen. Flavio Bravo

Taylor Robson quits Arizona governor’s race

Taylor Robson’s exit leaves U.S. Reps. Andy Biggs and David Schweikert as the main contenders for the Republican nomination to lead the top of the ticket in Arizona. The state’s primary is set for July 28.

“I want to thank Karrin Taylor Robson for a well-run campaign and for her many contributions to keeping our state red,” Biggs wrote in a post on X. “This is a critical time for our party to unite and avoid a costly, divisive primary as the weak and ineffective Katie Hobbs continues to hurt Arizonans.”

Meanwhile, Hobbs’ campaign took a victory lap in a statement from her campaign manager Nicole DeMont.

“Karrin Taylor Robson saw the writing on the wall and knows that Gov. Katie Hobbs is going to win re-election because of her bipartisan record of lowering costs, securing the border, and protecting healthcare,” DeMont said. “No matter who emerges from this chaotic primary, we will stay focused on building a winning coalition of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents who believe in putting Arizona first.”

Taylor Robson ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination in 2022, losing to Kari Lake. She entered the Republican primary for the 2026 election in February 2025 after President Donald Trump endorsed her at Turning Point USA’s 2024 conference in Phoenix.

Trump’s endorsement of Robson drew ire from the more conservative members of the Arizona Republican Party, like Arizona Freedom Caucus Chair and Sen. Jake Hoffman. Eventually, Trump gave a second endorsement to Biggs when he launched his campaign in March.

Taylor Robson ran as a moderate, anti-Trump foil to the ultraconservative Lake in 2022, but attempted to court the president’s favor — and his voters — for her second gubernatorial run. However, many Republicans were wary of Taylor Robson’s shifting alliances and threw their support behind Biggs.

Known for self-funding her campaigns, Taylor Robson had the largest campaign war chest in the Republican primary, with \$1.2 million in cash on hand, according to campaign finance reports from January. Taylor Robson



Karrin Taylor Robson speaking with attendees at an event hosted by Arizona Talks at Greenwood Brewing in Phoenix, Arizona, in November 2024. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

pledged to continue supporting Republican candidates in 2026 and much of her campaign cash will likely be funnelled to other races.

Schweikert’s campaign did not release a statement or immediately respond to a request for comment.

Republican lawmakers and operatives took to social media to thank Taylor Robson for her work on the campaign and supporting Republican candidates and the party in Arizona.

“I look forward to continuing to work with you in the future to hold the line and expand our majorities in the Arizona Senate & House,” Sen. T.J. Shope said in a post on X. “Let’s unite our party behind (Biggs) so we can win the big battle in November!”

KEY POINTS

- **Karrin Taylor Robson ended her campaign for the Republican nomination for governor**
- **Taylor Robson warned Republicans must avoid a “divisive primary”**
- **U.S. Reps. Andy Biggs and David Schweikert are now the main contenders in the primary**

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GUEST COMMENTARIES

Survival demands smart policy

“You have breast cancer.” I was 35 years old when these words shook me to my core. My mind vacillating between fear, logistics, and disbelief. I could barely comprehend when I heard “chemotherapy for aggressive triple negative breast cancer had to begin before the new year.” Not quite the New Year’s Eve plan I had envisioned.

Nothing can prepare you for a cancer diagnosis. Everything feels overwhelming and comes at warp speed. In a matter of days, I was asked to make life-altering decisions, while grief and terror consumed nearly every thought. One word rose above the rest of the noise: Survival. I didn’t know yet the treatment necessary to target my cancer could also destroy my ability to conceive a child. Luckily, for future patients, there is a bill in Arizona this session that addresses this exact issue — giving hope for a future after cancer for young patients. SB1347 would ensure fighting cancer doesn’t mean giving up on having a family.

Many life-saving cancer treatments cause infertility. For women, chemotherapy can permanently damage ovarian function, for men, it can affect sperm production. Fertility preservation may protect the chance to have biological children later. But it must happen before treatment



By Lindsey Baker

begins. That makes timing critical and pressure immensely intense.

This is the reality for so many young adults diagnosed with cancer. The disease doesn’t just threaten your life, it tries to take control of your future. Cancer doesn’t care about your age, your plans, or whether you hoped to have children one day.

Fertility preservation is expensive and often not covered by insurance. Patients already facing mounting medical bills are asked to come up with thousands of dollars quickly, or risk losing the chance to have biological children. Some nonprofit organizations step in to help, but resources are extremely limited and

cannot meet every need. Access should not depend on timing, geography or personal finances.

At one of the darkest moments in a person’s life, the possibility of a future family can be a source of hope. It returns something valuable cancer tries to steal: a sense of direction, of continuity, of life beyond treatment. It restores a measure of control when everything else feels out of your hands.

That’s why legislation like SB1347 matters.

This bill would require insurance coverage for fertility preservation when cancer treatments threaten reproductive health. It is practical, targeted and compassionate. It gives women and men facing cancer the opportunity to protect their ability to build the families they dream of, after treatment.

We already recognize similar needs in cancer care. Insurance currently covers wigs and breast reconstruction because we understand healing is not purely clinical — it is physical, emotional and personal. Fertility preservation belongs in that same category. It is not a luxury.

The number of patients in this situation each year is small. In other states which have implemented such policies, the impact on premiums was less than a dime

a month. This minor cost is money well spent — thankfully, cancer survival rates continue to improve. More young adults are living long, productive lives after cancer. They deserve a chance to have children.

This issue touches every corner of our state. It could affect your granddaughter, neighbor, nephew, your best friend. Disease does not discriminate, and neither should access to solutions. When we have a medically proven and a financially reasonable way to prevent avoidable loss of fertility, the path forward should be clear.

As a community, we can fix this. We can give more Arizonans the chance to grow their families after cancer. Survivorship stories should include first days of school, graduations, and the hope that becoming a biological parent isn’t one of the many things taken away from you just because you hear the unimaginable words of “you have cancer.”

Whether you have personally been impacted by cancer, or someone you care about has, please join me in encouraging your Arizona state legislators to support SB1347.

Lindsey Baker is a Tucson native, nonprofit consultant, and patient advocate dedicated to strengthening nonprofits and community organizations.

Legislation to stop smugglers in AZ deserves to be heard

Law enforcement officers across Arizona are confronting a troubling and familiar reality: illegal vaping devices are flooding our communities, bypassing federal oversight, evading state enforcement, and ending up in the hands of middle and high school students. These are not lawful, regulated products. They are unauthorized disposable vapes — often smuggled into the United States from overseas — designed to appeal to children with flavors like Watermelon Bubble Gum, Cotton Candy, California Cherry, and White Gummy Bear.

This is not an accident. It is the result of a supply chain problem — one driven by illicit wholesalers and smugglers who exploit regulatory loopholes to move unapproved nicotine products into Arizona.

That is why SB1367, introduced by Sen. Shawna Bolick, is a necessary and measured response. The bill focuses where enforcement belongs: upstream, at the point where illegal products enter commerce. It would require wholesalers to



By Joe Clure

prove the federal authorization and lawful origin of vaping products sold in Arizona, giving regulators and law enforcement the tools needed to identify, seize, and stop illegal shipments before they spread into neighborhoods and schools.

From a law-enforcement perspective, this is about accountability. Smuggling networks operate because they face little risk. When illegal products flow

freely across borders and into wholesale distribution, everyone downstream — communities, parents, schools, and officers — bears the consequences. SB1367 helps close that gap by creating transparency and oversight of manufacturers and wholesale distribution by requiring documentation that vaping products sold in Arizona have entered the United States legally.

The public-safety implications are serious. These unauthorized vapes are engineered to attract young users, often disguised with colorful packaging and candy-like flavors. Officers and school resource personnel routinely report confiscating these devices from students who barely understand what they’re inhaling — highly concentrated nicotine from products that have never been approved for sale in the United States. Nicotine addiction at an early age carries lifelong consequences, and the proliferation of these products makes enforcement increasingly difficult.

Importantly, SB1367 is not aimed at

lawful businesses that follow the rules. It does not ban legal products, nor does it criminalize responsible commerce. Instead, it establishes guardrails to ensure that only authorized, traceable vaping products are allowed into Arizona’s marketplace. That distinction matters. Law enforcement supports regulation that separates legitimate businesses from bad actors who profit by ignoring the law.

At the time of this writing, SB1367 has been introduced but has not yet been assigned to a Senate committee. That step is essential. Public-safety legislation deserves a full hearing — transparency, testimony, and a thorough review of how illegal vapes are entering our state. We respectfully urge Senate President Warren Petersen to assign SB1367 to a committee so it can receive that consideration and move through the legislative process.

This bill deserves to be heard — and Arizona deserves action.

Joe Clure is executive director of the Arizona Police Association.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Cities can't fix Arizona's broken E-Bike laws alone

Electric bikes and scooters were once fringe transportation options. In Arizona's urban cores, they are now everyday fixtures and increasingly a source of serious safety concern. Cities across Arizona are responding the only way they can, by writing their own rules. Tempe is the latest to do so. That should be the moment Arizona steps in.

The problem starts with state law.

According to Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) § 28-819, electric bicycles and electric standup scooters are regulated together and treated largely like traditional bicycles. Riders need no license, registration or insurance. These devices may operate on streets and in bike lanes by default, and on bike paths unless a local authority restricts them. But the statute leaves nearly every meaningful safety decision, including age limits, helmet requirements, sidewalk rules, penalties, and enforcement, to cities. That structure may have worked when micromobility was rare. Today, it shifts responsibility to cities without giving them a common baseline, ensuring inconsistent rules, uneven enforcement and confusion for riders, parents and police.

Tempe illustrates the consequences of that gap. From 2021 through 2024, the city recorded 116 serious injury or fatal collisions involving pedestrians or bicycle units, including "micro mobility devices," according to AZFamily. In two-thirds of those cases, the rider was the primary



By Marc Lamber

cause of the accident. Fox 10 also reported more than 1,100 EMS responses tied to e-scooters over four years, including more than 300 injuries and numerous cases involving loss of consciousness.

Faced with those numbers, and operating under a code that relies largely on general bicycle and traffic rules, Tempe has convened a City Council subcommittee to recommend age limits, speed restrictions, helmet requirements, and clearer enforcement. In effect, the city is rebuilding a safety framework that state law never required.

Tempe is not alone. Glendale recently adopted one of the state's most comprehensive ordinances, with age thresholds by device type, helmet requirements for minors, mandatory lighting, and fines starting at \$50 and

escalating to \$500 for repeat violations, enforced by city police. Scottsdale has banned riders under 16 from operating faster, Class 3 e-bikes on city property. Phoenix prohibits e-bike riding on sidewalks and enforces violations as civil traffic offenses.

Each city is responding rationally. The problem is that they are responding alone.

A teenager riding legally in Tempe may be cited with a violation minutes later in Scottsdale. Parents trying to set clear rules for their children and protect their family's financial assets must currently decipher multiple municipal codes. Police officers are asked to enforce different standards depending on city boundaries. When safety rules change block by block, compliance drops, and enforcement becomes harder, not easier.

Lawmakers have acknowledged growing concern with the introduction of Senate Bill 1008 this session, which would impose speed limits on shared-use paths. But SB1008 is not a solution. It layers a narrow rule onto an outdated statute and leaves the underlying problem untouched.

SB1008 does not clarify where e-bikes and scooters should operate, who should be allowed to ride them, what safety equipment should be required, or how violations should be enforced statewide. It preserves the underlying outdated that has produced today's regulatory patchwork.

Arizona does not need another patch. It

needs to rewrite A.R.S. § 28-819. The statute should establish clear, statewide safety rules, including minimum age requirements by device class, helmet standards for minors, default rules for where e-bikes and scooters may operate, and consistent enforcement and penalties. Cities should retain the ability to go further, but public safety should not hinge on which side of a city limit someone is riding on.

Given how much these vehicles have permeated our culture and the risks they pose, Arizona should also consider requiring that Class 3 e-bikes, which can reach 28 mph, be classified as motor vehicles within A.R.S. § 28-819. If we are going to allow vehicles capable of nearly 30 mph to share lanes with cars, we must treat them with the seriousness they demand.

Reclassification would involve registration and licensing. Crucially, it would require riders to carry liability insurance, just like any other motorist on the road. When a high-speed collision happens, victims should not be left without recourse. It would ensure manufacturer compliance with federal and state safety standards.

E-bikes and scooters are here to stay. The injuries are already happening. Cities are acting because they feel they must. It's time our state's motor vehicle laws caught up with reality.

Marc Lamber is a Martindale-Hubbell AV Preeminent-rated trial attorney.

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CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Mayes uses ‘public nuisance’ law to target Surprise ICE facility

congressional delegation. By adding to the pile, she equips her own inquiry with some legal teeth.

Unlike her predecessors, Mayes has taken a broad interpretation with public nuisance law, and has led the legal charge on a variety of public issues like excessive groundwater pumping, a proposed aluminum plant and now the “seven football field sized prison” ICE plans to “plop down in the middle of the city of Surprise.”

“Kristi Noem, in her own communications, noted that they work within state and federal regulations and laws, so she intends to work within state laws,” Mayes said. “And I would assume she’s not going to have a problem abiding by our nuisance law.”

Mayes’ letter, sent Feb. 9, begins by noting that the proposed processing and detention facility, located at Sweetwater Avenue and Dysart Road in Surprise, is in the middle of a residential area.

And, despite being located in Surprise, Mayes pointed out the department had kept city officials and residents in the dark about the project.

In a statement, Surprise city officials said, “The City was not aware that there were efforts underway to purchase the building, was not notified of the transaction by any of the parties involved and has not been contacted by DHS or any federal agency about the intended use of the building.”

Mayes referenced a Surprise City Council meeting on Feb. 3 where more than 80 residents “spoke at length of the project’s harm to their community,” with overlapping concerns about potential impacts on schools, water, waste, trash, medical services, property values and economic development.

She then framed the same concerns within the constructs of public nuisance law and sent a list of demands for more information.

Within the letter, Mayes asked for more details on how the federal agency plans to ensure that the construction and operations of the center do not interfere with the functions of nearby schools like Dysart High School.

She also raised questions about the number of vehicles, associated traffic, pollutants, dust and noise, complying with lighting requirements inside and outside the facility under city and county laws, the amount of water needed for construction and operations, and the plan for waste disposal.

Finally, she inquired about the presence of adequate medical care and the impacts to local municipal services, like fire, law enforcement and emergency response services.



Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes speaks to reporters as Oregon Attorney General Dan Rayfield listens outside the Supreme Court on Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2025, in Washington. (AP Photo / Mark Schiefelbein)

KEY POINTS

- **Attorney general probes ICE facility under state public nuisance law**
- **Joins federal lawmakers in concerns over impact to community**
- **Federal compliance with state law still an open question**

The state’s public nuisance law empowers the attorney general to sue to enjoin or prevent any activity found to be “injurious to health, indecent, offensive to the senses or an obstruction to the free use of property that interferes with the comfortable enjoyment of life or property by an entire community or neighborhood or by a considerable number of persons.”

Mayes has relied on public nuisance law throughout her tenure, but only one claim remains alive in court.

The attorney general is currently in litigation with Fondomonte Arizona, a Saudi Arabian-affiliated alfalfa farm, for what she is calling excessive groundwater pumping.

A Maricopa County Superior Court judge is also now considering whether the implementation of an active management area for water regulation in the area negates or amplifies the need for public nuisance litigation, with a final ruling on Mayes’ claim still coming down the line.

Prior to Fondomonte, Mayes sued two companies planning to build a mine near

a residential area under public nuisance law, claiming potential structural damage, excessive dust and noise and increased traffic. The suit was voluntarily dismissed after a neighbor purchased the disputed land.

Mayes also threatened to sue Riverview Dairy, LLC, a dairy farm, under the law for excessive groundwater pumping.

Though the issue never went to court, the attorney general and the company entered into a settlement in which Riverview agreed to pay \$11 million to remedy lost and strained groundwater access.

Though Mayes said the ICE facility may well fit into state public nuisance law, whether the federal government will bow to state law remains a key concern.

In Surprise’s statement, officials said the federal government was not subject to local zoning regulations.

Mayes anticipated the same pushback, though she noted a statement on the DHS website in which it would comply with “federal, state, and local laws and regulations, in operation of DHS facilities.”

“We’ll see what they have to say,” Mayes said.

Mayes also asked for copies of responses to questions posed by U.S. Reps. Paul Gosar, Yassamin Ansar, Greg Stanton and Adelita Grijalva, Arizona members of Congress.

Gosar, a Republican, sent the first letter on Feb. 4. He started by clarifying he “strongly” supported ICE operations but noted that the impacts of immigration policy are “most acutely felt at the local level.”

“A detention facility of the reported size raises legitimate and reasonable

questions for nearby residents, schools, first responders, and local governments. Concerns regarding infrastructure capacity, traffic, emergency services, environmental impacts, and public safety deserve serious consideration,” Gosar wrote. “These are not anti-illegal immigration concerns; they are common-sense expectations of transparency, planning, and accountability.”

Gosar and Mayes overlapped on inquiries about consultation with local governments, schools, law enforcement, traffic impacts and adequate medical services.

However Gosar did add his own questions to the mix concerning the facility’s population, oversight on operations, security measures, timelines for development and expansion, contingency plans for growth and future plans for communication and local consultation.

Mayes identified Gosar’s letter as the catalyst for her own.

“Quite frankly, when I read Congressman Gosar’s letter, it struck me that he was asking the kinds of questions that go into a possible nuisance lawsuit,” Mayes said.

In a Feb. 6 letter, Democrats Ansari, Stanton and Grijalva similarly asked about community impact, operational footprints and the department’s authority to purchase, acquire and convert the property. And most recently, U.S. Sens. Mark Kelly and Ruben Gallego added another letter to the pile on Feb. 10, with similar questions.

Mayes set a response deadline for Feb. 17, as did Gallego and Kelly. Gosar asked for a response by Feb. 18 and Ansari, Stanton and Grijalva set a Feb. 20 deadline.

The Department of Homeland Security and ICE did not respond to a request for comment.

EDUCATION

Can students and teachers protest during school hours?

BY JORDAN GERARD

jgerard@stateaffairs.com

In the past few weeks, students and teachers have walked out of school to protest the actions of immigration authorities and the federal government.

On Jan. 30, thousands of Tucson Unified School District employees called out sick, according to the Arizona Luminaria. As a result, 21 schools closed due to lack of staff. While peaceful protest is protected under the First Amendment, several legislators and state officials have questioned whether it should be allowed during school hours.

After the protests, state Rep. Matt Gress, R-Phoenix, and state Sen. Hildy Angius, R-Bullhead City, said in a news release they'll introduce legislation to limit when public school students and teachers can protest. Angius said the closures highlighted a lack of accountability in school district systems and a troubling willingness to disrupt students' education for political purposes.

"Parents send their children to school expecting stability and instruction, not sudden closures driven by organized protests," Angius said in a news release. She chairs the Senate Education Committee. "Using sick leave to shut down campuses crosses a line and undermines trust in public schools."

They weren't the only ones concerned with protesting during school hours. Sen. John Kavanagh, R-Fountain Hills, pointed out the number of schools that had to shut down and added, "Time to revoke some teacher licenses" in a post on X.

The Arizona State Board of Education said they have not been contacted by any legislator regarding that topic and didn't have a comment, per Executive Director Sean Ross. All decisions related to student attendance and behavior are addressed at the local level by the school or district, he added.

However, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne said in a statement on the Arizona Department of Education's X page that students have the First Amendment right to peacefully protest but "it should be done after school hours. Teachers and other school personnel should not be a part of a protest during class time."

Speaking up in opposition to potential legislation, Sen. Catherine Miranda, D-Laveen, said the threat is another



A protester waves an upside down U.S. flag, a symbol of distress, as others begin to line the Garces Footbridge for the ICE OUT demonstration, Jan. 30, 2026, part of the thousands that shut down downtown Tucson. (Kelly Presnell/Arizona Daily Star)

KEY POINTS

- **Anti-immigration protests over the past few weeks have included students and teachers walking out of class**
- **Legislators and some state officials have questioned if they should be using class time to exercise their First Amendment rights**
- **Two First Amendment experts said if legislators did write such a law, it would have to be content-neutral and narrowly tailored**

example of the Republican Party claiming to stand for freedom and the Constitution while criticizing educators for exercising their constitutional right to speak out.

"Educators are human beings and Americans first. They have the same rights as anyone else to raise their voices when they believe their students and communities are being harmed," she said in a news release.

She acknowledged parents' frustration and said it's understandable, but the focus should be on addressing the root cause affecting school communities. She added, "You cannot demand stability in schools while ignoring the conditions that are creating fear and instability for students and staff."

Meanwhile, organizations like the nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy group Secular AZ have a form on their website that serves as an excused absence for students who are protesting. The group

frames protesting during school hours as an important exercise of civic engagement. It also cites several court cases, including *Tinker v. Des Moines*, one of the most famous student free speech cases.

The case determined that schools may regulate conduct that materially interferes with school operations, but it does not require punishment when school officials determine that student demonstrations serve legitimate educational and civic purposes. The court ruled students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

If such a law was written that told students and educators when they could protest, it would need to be narrowly tailored and content-neutral, two First Amendment law experts at Arizona State University said. Neither speaks on behalf of the university.

The First Amendment is broad and it doesn't cover any specific time frame on

when people can protest, Gregg Leslie, Executive Director of the First Amendment Clinic at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, said.

"The biggest thing is if someone's trying to make a law to make this illegal and they're doing it based on the content of their speech, then it's subject to a higher level of scrutiny," he said.

As for addressing potential absenteeism, if lawmakers make a special rule regarding being absent because people are exercising their freedom of speech rights, then it would be a content-based regulation and it should be struck down, he said. If there's a broader policy on absenteeism that's very strict, but it applies to all situations, then it would likely be upheld.

It could also have a chilling effect on people exercising their First Amendment rights, or it might do the opposite and encourage more protesting, Leslie said.

Any law restricting when students and teachers could protest would have to be narrowly tailored and content-neutral, Erin Coyle, Associate Professor of Media Law and the First Amendment at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, said.

Content-neutral essentially means that restrictions or punishments for engaging in free expression and freedom of assembly would have to be applied in ways that do not single out or target particular messages, she said, and they would also have to be narrowly tailored.

"If they are limiting any expressive activity, they are limiting the least amount possible. It's possible that a law could be written that appears entirely neutral, and that it is not written in a way that it is specifically targeting protesting, or protesting on specific topics. It also would need to be in a neutral way," she said.

What about private school employees?

Leslie said there have been a lot of attempts in Arizona to apply everything to all school teachers, but it depends on the authority and the state laws that govern private schools.

"If they found a justification, if they found a cause or even if, you know, there's often some level of state funding of private schools," he said, "and so they could certainly threaten to withhold money. A creative legislator could try to find a way to make it apply to private schools."

2nd lawsuit filed against AHCCCS over autism therapy contract dispute



Michele Trivedi, left, works with her daughter Ellie, 11, on the applied behavior analysis exercises used to treat autism in their Carmel, Ind., home. (AP Photo/Michael Conroy)

BY REAGAN PRIEST
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Another lawsuit has been filed against the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System over contract disputes between insurance companies and two autism therapy centers.

Parents of 11 children with autism spectrum disorder filed a class action lawsuit against AHCCCS on Feb. 6, alleging the agency unlawfully approved changes to provider networks for two insurers: Mercy Care and Arizona Complete Health. The complaint follows another lawsuit filed by families and Centria Autism Center on Dec. 15 against AHCCCS, Mercy Care and the Department of Economic Security.

"AHCCCS' decision to allow these private insurers to place their own profits over the treatment of low-income kids with autism is shocking," said Tim Nelson, attorney for the 11 families, in a statement. "These companies have never retained enough autism providers for Medicaid beneficiaries, and waiting lists for families with autistic children were already way too long."

The lawsuits were sparked by Mercy Care and Arizona Complete Health terminating contracts with Centria Autism and Action Behavior Centers (ABC), forcing many families to switch providers for their children's applied behavioral analysis therapy. Centria and ABC allege Mercy Care terminated their contracts after the insurer attempted to reduce reimbursement rates for services without negotiating in good faith.

Arizona Complete Health terminated its contract with ABC around the same time Mercy Care began terminating contracts, though ABC staff allege that

KEY POINTS

- **Parents of 11 children filed a class action lawsuit against the state's Medicaid agency**
- **The complaint accuses AHCCCS of unlawfully approving changes to provider networks**
- **The dispute impacts children with autism spectrum disorder receiving applied behavioral analysis therapy**

Arizona Complete Health terminated the contract without cause. The class action suit also alleges the insurer has not been assisting patients in finding new therapy providers.

Applied behavioral analysis, known as ABA, is an increasingly popular form of therapy for children on the autism spectrum and is currently covered by the state's Medicaid system. Parents of children who receive services from Centria and ABC are afraid that moving their children to unfamiliar therapy centers will cause their children to regress.

Children with autism spectrum disorder are incredibly sensitive to change and parents of children attending Centria told the *Arizona Capitol Times* in November that their children have experienced regression as a result of disruptions to their ABA therapy.

In court filings in the first lawsuit, AHCCCS argued that

Mercy Care has openings for clinic-based and in-home ABA services for more than 1,000 of its members, more than the number of members losing access to Centria and ABC.

"Plaintiffs' declarations speak of their emotionally charged preferences and the worries they have about changing ABA providers ..." attorneys for AHCCCS wrote on Jan. 9. "... the individual Plaintiffs' concerns and attachment to Centria's services (even if understandable) do not rise to the level of irreparable injury."

However, the class action suit filed on Feb. 6 argues that the parents' resistance to switching ABA providers is not just about "emotionally charged preferences" but also about logistical issues such as transportation, a lack of providers with openings in rural areas and reduced hours for services.

Attorneys for AHCCCS said the families and Centria had no dispute with the agency, but with Mercy Care, and a lawsuit against AHCCCS would not "achieve Plaintiffs' desired outcome" because the agency cannot reinstate the contracts.

Attorneys for the 11 families represented in the class action suit argue that allowing the insurers to terminate contracts with ABA providers not only violates state and federal law, but it could result in a wave of other insurers terminating contracts with ABA providers in Arizona.

The contract terminations are set to take effect in March, leaving families little time to find new providers or a new insurer to cover their children's ABA therapy. Both lawsuits ask the court to temporarily stay the effective dates while the cases play out, but a ruling on those requests has not yet been issued in either case.

EDUCATION

Public schools push back against ESA program



Students work on classwork during the last week of classes at Frye Elementary School in Chandler, Arizona Tuesday, May 23, 2023. (AP Photo / Darryl Webb)

BY KIERA RILEY
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With little success at the Legislature, public school advocates and the state's teachers union are now turning to the ballot to usher in reforms to the Empowerment Scholarship Program.

But the road ahead is, admittedly, an uphill battle with a pro-school choice group already forming a political action committee and mobilizing ESA families to obstruct its path.

Still, proponents see the fight as well worth it given the need to ensure student safety, fiscal responsibility, academic accountability and stronger reporting and enforcement mechanisms.

"The Legislature has had bills in front of them to reform this program for years upon years and haven't done anything," Beth Lewis, executive director of Save Our Schools Arizona, said. "In the meantime, it's skyrocketed to a billion dollar program. We've seen many, many instances of fraud, waste, abuse and scandal, and our public schools are closing en masse. It's time to right-size this thing and get some reforms in place that make sense for everybody, for taxpayers, for ESA families, for public school families, for everybody."

On Feb. 6, Save Our Schools Arizona and the Arizona Education Association filed the Protect Education, Accountability Now Act, which proposes a sweeping list of changes.

On the enrollment front, the measure enacts a \$150,000 income cap on families whose students qualified under universal expansion, not the prior program categories, like disability, failing schools, juvenile wards or military families.

Marisol Garcia, president of the Arizona Education Association, said the income cap was based on a rough doubling of the state's median income, which is just shy of \$80,000.

As for program vendors, private schools

KEY POINTS

- **Public school groups introduced ballot measure to regulate ESA program**
- **School choice proponents form political action committee to oppose attempt**
- **Match-up creates race to gather signatures, or dissuade ESA families and voters**

and tutors receiving ESA dollars would be required to adhere to local fire and safety codes, conduct background checks on educators and staff, maintain safe storage of heavy machinery and weapons, and prohibit drugs and alcohol on school campuses.

Private schools, microschools and tutors would also be required to maintain fingerprint clearance cards for anyone with unsupervised contact with children and to investigate misconduct allegations and require all tutors to be at least 18 years old.

The proposal would also require all ESA funding schools to either have students take statewide assessments at public schools to track academic success or secure a national accreditation.

Garcia noted the current lack of transparency into the curriculum or academic standing of students in the ESA program.

"We have no idea what is being taught. We have no idea what kind of growth, graduation rates, none of that. And if we're paying for it," Garcia said, "there should be some level of assurance that students are learning."

On the fraud front, the ballot measure would ban the use of ESA funds on non-

educational and luxury items.

The measure specifically lists household appliances, home or property improvements, jewelry, lingerie, admission to water or amusement parks, swimming pools, hot tubs, saunas, gift cards, out-of-state or international travel, museums or excursions, child care, restaurants, hotels, bounce houses, water slides or motor operated land or water vehicles as unallowable expenses. However, much of the list is already out-of-line with the ESA handbook.

And a provision addresses an ongoing lawsuit between an ESA parent, represented by the Goldwater Institute, and the attorney general over whether supplemental materials must be documented in the curriculum to be allowable items.

Per the language, and in line with the current legal position by the attorney general, all supplementary materials would have to be "directly and substantially related to curricular content that are used to teach or enhance approved curriculum."

And finally, all ESA funds not spent by a student each quarter would also be swept back by the state into the classroom site fund, which supports teacher compensation, development and student support services.

Lewis said the measure is aimed at placing most of the work on the Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and private entities that take state dollars, rather than on families in the program.

But, school choice proponents expect impact across the board.

Jenny Clark, founder of school choice advocacy group Love Your School, has already formed a political action committee, AZ Loves ESA, to oppose the measure every step of the way, calling it a "really clear attack on all choice in Arizona."

"We have over 100,000 students on the program," Clark said. "They've really

overstepped by throwing private school regulations and also regulating all these education service providers that are just trying to serve kids."

The last time Save Our Schools Arizona attempted to pass a ballot measure to stop universal expansion of the ESA program in 2022, ESA families mobilized a "Decline to Sign" campaign, in which ESA families would show up to protest signature gatherers.

Their efforts ultimately blocked the measure from the ballot.

"I anticipate all of that and more this time," Clark said.

The Goldwater Institute also came out in early opposition, as did the Arizona Christian Education Coalition.

Matt Beineburg, director of education policy, called the policy proposals "disingenuous" and "phony," claiming the regulations on private schools and families will prove burdensome and ultimately "smother private and homebased education in this state and force families into schools that aren't meeting their needs."

Lewis said she expected school choice proponents to claim an impact on tens of thousands of families, though she challenged the claim, noting that only families at the top of the income scale would truly be affected.

"That is not true, that it's going to hurt families with kids with disabilities, that is not true, that it's going to hurt homeschoolers – unless you're buying luxury items – that's not true," Lewis said. "It's really important to get the truth out there about who this will impact and who it won't."

Lewis and Garcia said the next steps lay in voter education, awaiting review from the Legislative Council and then, starting signature gathering.

To get on the ballot, the groups need to turn in 255,949 valid signatures by July 2.

LEGISLATION

GOP lawmakers resurrect 87 bills previously vetoed by Hobbs

BY REAGAN PRIEST
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Arizona's lawmakers introduced a record number of bills this session, but several of those bills have already met Gov. Katie Hobbs' veto pen in past legislative sessions.

Eighty-seven bills introduced by lawmakers this session were previously vetoed by the governor, according to an *Arizona Capitol Times* analysis. Hobbs, a Democrat, has long accused Republican lawmakers of intentionally sending her bills they know she does not support in order to run up the score on her veto record.

"It's beyond frustrating to see Republicans recycling the same vetoed bills, fully aware they'll be rejected again," said Liliana Soto, Hobbs' press secretary, in a statement. "Instead of working to improve the lives of Arizonans, they're stuck performing political theater just to boost their numbers and blame the governor."

Hobbs has broken the state's veto record twice, once in 2023 with 143 vetoes and again in 2025 with 174 vetoes. The governor has already vetoed one bill this session, a Republican-backed tax conformity plan, and no other bills were on her desk as of publication.

For their part, lawmakers have introduced a record-breaking 2,116 bills, resolutions and memorials this session. Republican lawmakers have defended reintroducing bills previously vetoed by Hobbs, saying they advance policies supported by Arizona voters.

Many of the previously vetoed bills were reintroduced without any changes, meaning they are almost certain to be shot down again if they reach Hobbs' desk. Those include "veto bait" bills that the governor has pledged repeatedly to block, like policies targeting LGBTQ+ individuals, restricting access to voting and increasing immigration enforcement actions.

Some proposed policies are already on their second veto, like House Speaker Steve Montenegro's House Bill 2902 which affirms the Legislature's support for the electoral college and was already vetoed in 2023 and 2025. Four other bills introduced this session have also received vetoes in two previous sessions.

Lawmakers are also bringing back vetoed bills as concurrent resolutions that could be sent to the ballot this year to bypass the governor's approval. Sen. Wendy Rogers, R-Flagstaff, is once again hoping to get a



Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs signs the repeal of the Civil War-era near-total abortion ban, Thursday, May 2, 2024, at the Capitol in Phoenix. (AP Photo/Matt York)

KEY POINTS

- **Republican lawmakers have reintroduced 87 previously vetoed bills this session**
- **Hobbs' office said the resurrected bills are "frustrating" and "political theater"**
- **The resurrected bills are among the record-breaking 2,116 proposals introduced this year**

red light camera ban sent to voters this year, while Sen. John Kavanagh, R-Fountain Hills, combined two of his previously vetoed bills into one ballot referral.

Kavanagh's Senate Concurrent Resolution 1006 would require schools to provide "reasonable accommodations" instead of allowing transgender students to use gendered bathrooms and would prohibit teachers from using a student's preferred pronouns without parental consent.

"The two concepts ... were run as separate bills vetoed by the governor, which is why they're going as a ballot initiative," Kavanagh told the Senate Government Committee on Jan. 28. "I have no doubt

that this will pass by high-60% of the voters because these are positions that almost everybody believes in."

Four concurrent resolutions featuring previously vetoed provisions will have to jostle with over 100 referrals for space on the ballot this year. Republicans sent 11 ballot measures to voters in 2024, but only four were approved.

Rogers is the most prolific sponsor of resurrected bills this session, having introduced 13 bills that were previously vetoed. Sen. Mark Finchem, R-Prescott, introduced 12 previously vetoed bills, while Rep. Gail Griffin, R-Hereford, introduced eight.

Some lawmakers reintroduce their own vetoed bills, while others have introduced vetoed bills that were sponsored by a different lawmaker in a previous session. And many of the resurrected bills have been introduced in both chambers, only increasing the number of previously vetoed proposals for lawmakers to consider.

Not all of the resurrected bills are completely partisan though. Republican Sen. Shawnna Bolick's Senate Bill 1431 includes several provisions of the previously vetoed bill known as the Starter Homes Act. It is co-sponsored by Republicans and Democrats in both chambers of the Legislature.

The 2026 bill differs slightly from the one vetoed in 2024 as lawmakers have worked with stakeholders to address their concerns, but it is unclear whether those changes will make it palatable to the governor.

Several of the resurrected bills are being heard in committees or on the House and Senate floors in the next few weeks. Whether they make it to Hobbs' desk for another veto stamp remains to be seen.

ELECTIONS

Republicans bring back Florida-style election measure

Rep. Alexander Kolodin, R-Scottsdale, speaking with attendees at a campaign rally for Andy Biggs for Governor at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix, Arizona, in May 2025. Kolodin is the sponsor of the Arizona Secure Elections Act, which seeks to place Florida-style elections on the 2026 ballot.

BY JAKOB THORINGTON
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House Republicans have approved a returning measure intended to reshape Arizona's election process in the form of Florida's.

The Arizona Secure Elections Act, known formally as House Concurrent Resolution 2001, passed Feb. 9, with the express purpose of speeding up the ballot counting process by moving the state's early voting deadline to 7 p.m. on the Friday before an election.

Arizona's Republican officials have wanted to speed up election results for years, and this isn't their first attempt at moving up the early voting deadline. Their reason? Election results across the state, most prominently in Maricopa County, have come in late — sometimes nearly two weeks after Election Day — for years.

In 2020, the county needed 10 days to complete its election count. In 2022, it needed 13 days. Now, Republicans are proposing their solution to a problem they claim has frustrated the many voters and politicians whose parties, livelihoods and policy measures depend on speedy results.

"Arizona voters deserve elections that are free, fair, and transparent. It shouldn't take weeks to count ballots," said House Speaker Steve Montenegro, R-Goodyear.

Election officials such as former Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer have cited "late early ballots," or early ballots that are turned in at a voting location on Election Day, as the most significant factor causing the delayed results.

By moving the deadline to return an early ballot to the Friday before an election, proponents seek to eliminate the problem

KEY POINTS

- **House sponsor says measure would speed up election results**
- **It includes a voter ID provision**
- **Governor vetoed a similar proposal last year**

of late early ballots by giving election workers more time to process and verify signatures. The move would effectively align Arizona's election system more closely with Florida's, and that isn't a coincidence.

The sponsor of HCR2001, Rep. Alexander Kolodin, R-Scottsdale, has credited Florida's election system for the idea and has made its adoption a personal goal for the last two years.

On the House floor, Kolodin blamed "bad faith" negotiations from some Senate Republicans for blocking his measure in the past. This year's version of the measure includes a requirement for an individual to show a government-issued identification card in order to return a mail ballot, which Kolodin said some Senate GOP members weren't happy with.

"Voter ID aligns with President Trump's agenda for securing our elections. And to the Republicans in this body, it is nonnegotiable," Kolodin said. "For two years, certain Republicans in the Senate have played a game of cat and mouse in bad faith, requesting ever-changing lists of demands and begging us to chase the ball."

Two other House Republicans on the

House Federalism, Military Affairs and Elections Committee also publicly said they wouldn't budge on a voter ID requirement. The committee's chairman, Rep. John Gillette, R-Kingman, said any bill he receives from the Senate in his committee that doesn't include voter ID is "dead on arrival."

"In regards to voter ID, this is not something that we should even be discussing, especially with our friends over in the Senate," said Rep. Rachel Keshel, R-Tucson.

In a text to the *Arizona Capitol Times*, Senate President Warren Petersen, R-Queen Creek, wrote that he wasn't sure why some Republicans were critical of the Senate and reaffirmed his caucus' support for voter ID.

"I believe we have the support to get it on the ballot," Peterson wrote.

In the 2025 legislative session, the Senate failed to pass the predecessor of this year's measure, HCR2013, after a marathon session abruptly ended following the Senate's attempt to adjourn without consent of the House. The final result? A failed 11-18 vote at nearly 1 a.m. on June 20.

Sen. Shawna Bolick, R-Phoenix, said during that vote that a floor amendment added that night which removed all provisions relating to the new Friday early ballot deadline from the measure, was made without her agreement, so she voted against it. Sens. Janae Shamp, R-Surprise; David Gowan, R-Sierra Vista; and Hildy Anguis, R-Bullhead City, also voted against it.

In addition to moving the early voting deadline, this year's measure would require voters to confirm their address with their county recorder each biennial general

election if they want to stay on the Active Early Voting List.

No Democrat in the House voted for the measure.

In context, about 80% of Arizonans vote by mail, according to the Arizona Clean Elections Commission, and Democrats did not want to implement a policy that would make it more difficult for that population of voters.

"This should be called the bill to kill vote by mail," said House Minority Leader Oscar De Los Santos, D-Laveen.

De Los Santos also said he believes the measure is unnecessary as a constitutional amendment because the Arizona Constitution already requires citizenship to vote.

Kolodin disagrees with the idea that he's trying to end voting by mail.

"It doesn't change really anything about vote by mail other than making sure that there's some form of government issue ID provided with it," he said.

If the Florida-style election system were adopted as a constitutional amendment, it would make the law much more difficult to change or update in the future. That's because Arizona law requires a supermajority vote from the Legislature to change constitutional measures that are placed on the ballot and approved by voters.

The first bill that Hobbs vetoed in the 2025 session was a version of a Florida-style elections measure — House Bill 2703. The governor wrote in her veto letter that she believed the measure would disenfranchise voters, and she would not support a bill that makes it less convenient for people to vote.

FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION



Alabama

GOP-LED STATES SEEK TO BRING BACK DEATH PENALTY FOR CHILD RAPE CONVICTIONS

MONTGOMERY — A growing number of Republican-led states are seeking to revive the death penalty for child rape. Alabama lawmakers approved legislation that would allow child rapists to be sentenced to death. The measure comes as some Republican-led states hope to entice the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit the decision banning capital punishment for such crimes. The bill would allow prosecutors to pursue the death penalty when an adult is convicted of rape or sodomy of a child under 12. Such sentences are now considered unconstitutional.



Teachers, students and supporters picket outside of Mission High School in San Francisco, Monday, Feb. 9, 2026. (AP Photo / Jeff Chiu)

California

PARENTS SCRAMBLE AS TEACHERS STRIKE LEAVES 50,000 STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL

SAN FRANCISCO — Connor Haught is juggling work and child care as San Francisco faces a teachers strike with no end in sight. The strike has left nearly 50,000 students out of school. The San Francisco Unified School District's 120 schools remained closed for a second day. About 6,000 teachers are striking over wages, health benefits and resources for special needs students. Parents like Haught are scrambling to plan activities for their children. Negotiations have been ongoing for nearly a year, with teachers demanding better pay and health care. No agreement has yet been reached.

Colorado

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION PLANS TO HOLD MONEY FOR SOME DEMOCRATIC-LED STATES

President Donald Trump’s administration plans to withhold public health and transportation funds from several Democratic-led states. The administration cites concerns over fraud and mismanagement but hasn't provided evidence. The targeted states include California, Colorado, Illinois and Minnesota. An official confirmed the cuts would affect over \$1.5 billion in grants. Programs impacted include electric vehicle chargers and health research projects. The governors of the affected states say they haven't been notified. Courts have previously blocked similar funding restrictions by the administration. The targeted states have Democratic governors and have faced federal cuts before.

Florida

CLOSE MADURO ALLY PARDONED BY BIDEN IS TARGET OF US CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

MIAMI — The U.S. Justice Department is targeting Alex Saab, a businessman linked to Nicolás Maduro, in an investigation that could impact the U.S. prosecution of the deposed Venezuelan leader. That's according to two former U.S. officials and another person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. Saab was pardoned by President Biden in 2023 but is under scrutiny again for his involvement in Venezuela's CLAP program, which provided food staples to the poor. His whereabouts are currently unknown. Saab's attorney insists he committed no crimes and should be shielded by the pardon.

Georgia

FBI SEARCH OF ELECTION OFFICES RELIED ON YEARS-OLD CLAIMS OF FRAUD

ATLANTA — The FBI relied on years-old claims of fraud, many of them thoroughly investigated, to obtain a search warrant to seize ballots from election offices in Fulton County, Georgia. That's according to an affidavit unsealed Feb. 10 that shows the investigation began with a referral from an administration official who tried to help President Donald Trump overturn his 2020 election loss. The affidavit provides the first public justification for an FBI search last month that targeted a county that Trump and allies have long seen as central to their claim that the 2020 election was stolen. Audits, state officials, courts and Trump’s own former attorney general have all rejected the idea of widespread problems that could have altered the outcome.

Idaho

CITIZENS AND LEGAL RESIDENTS SUE OVER IMMIGRATION RAID AT HORSE TRACK

BOISE — Three Idaho families are suing over an immigration raid at a horse racing track last year. They claim state and federal law enforcement used unconstitutional tactics, detaining people because they appeared to be Latino and keeping them in zip ties for hours. The raid involved 200 officers and targeted a family-friendly event popular with the Latino community. The October raid came as part of an FBI-led investigation into allegations of illegal gambling, but only five people at the event were arrested in connection with the gambling investigation. More than 100 others were arrested on suspicion of immigration violations. The families, all U.S. citizens or lawful residents, are seeking class-action status and damages.

Massachusetts

IMMIGRATION COURT BLOCKS DEPORTATION OF TUFTS GRADUATE STUDENT FROM TURKEY

An immigration court has blocked the deportation of a Turkish Tufts University student who was detained by immigration officials near her Massachusetts home last year. Rümeyşa Öztürk's attorneys and court documents say the immigration court found on Jan. 29 that the Department of Homeland Security hasn't proved that she should be removed from the U.S. and the court terminated her removal proceedings. The attorneys included the information in a notice filed with the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which has been reviewing her case. Her attorneys say the department has the option to appeal the immigration court’s decision.

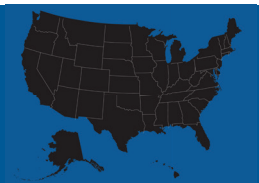
Michigan

FEDERAL JUDGE DISMISSES ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN VOTER DATA

LANSING — A federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit brought by the Department of Justice that sought to obtain access to Michigan's voter rolls, marking the latest setback to President Donald Trump's administration as it seeks voter data from a variety of states. The Department of Justice has sued at least 23 states and the District of Columbia in an effort to collect data on voters. The judge, a Trump nominee in the Western District of Michigan, issued a ruling that concluded that the laws cited by the Justice Department do not require the disclosure of the records sought. A department spokesperson declined to comment when reached by email.

FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION



Minnesota

GOVERNOR SAYS IMMIGRATION CRACKDOWN COULD END SOON

MINNEAPOLIS — Gov. Tim Walz says the federal immigration crackdown in Minnesota could end soon. He spoke with top Trump administration officials, including border czar Tom Homan and White House chief of staff Susie Wiles. Walz said that he anticipates hearing more from the administration soon about the operation's future. Walz emphasized a "trust but verify" approach, as the situation could change. Walz also hopes for cooperation on joint investigations into the shooting deaths of two Minnesotans by federal officers. The crackdown has impacted local businesses, with employees and customers staying away out of fear.

Montana

RECORD SNOW DROUGHT RAISES CONCERN FOR WATER SHORTAGES AND WILDFIRES

Except for California, most Western states are experiencing the worst snow drought in decades, not because of dry conditions but really warm temperatures that change snow to rain. The snow cover is about one-third of normal, and snow depth in places like Oregon is far below the old record. More than 8,500 daily heat records have been tied or broken in the West this winter. The snow drought is raising concerns about an increased threat of wildfires this spring and summer, as well as less water for agriculture and other needs.

Nevada

LOMBARDO’S CAMPAIGN FUNDRAISING RELIANT ON DONORS USING LEGAL LOOPHOLE

Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo’s 2025 campaign fundraising has reached \$4.3 million, heavily relying on a legal loophole that allows donors to skirt contribution limits. About \$1.9 million of his total came from donations through connected entities, making up 44% of his campaign haul. This practice is legal in Nevada, allowing corporations to contribute directly to candidates. Critics argue it undermines public confidence in elected officials. Lombardo’s campaign, however, states there is nothing improper about its donor base. The gaming and real estate industries dominate his donations, with significant contributions from well-known Nevada donors. Calls for campaign finance reform in Nevada remain limited.

New Mexico

LAWSUIT ACCUSES META OF FAILING TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

SANTA FE — Meta is on trial in New Mexico to answer allegations that its social media platforms enable predators to target children for sexual exploitation. The case is one of a series of lawsuits nationwide accusing social media companies of not doing enough to protect children online. New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez sued Meta in 2023 alleging its platforms enable predators to target children for sexual exploitation. Meta denies the allegation and accuses prosecutors of taking a “sensationalist” approach. The trial is expected to highlight explicit online content and its effects on young people.

New York

PANDEMIC DISRUPTIONS TO HEALTH CARE WORSENER CANCER

NEW YORK — A new study reveals that cancer patients diagnosed during the early Covid pandemic had worse short-term survival rates than a similar group before the pandemic. Published by the medical journal JAMA Oncology, the study shows that people diagnosed in 2020 and 2021 had lower survival rates than those diagnosed between 2015 and 2019. Researchers found this trend across various cancers, regardless of the stage at diagnosis. The study suggests that disruptions to the health care system likely contributed to these outcomes. Covid forced many to postpone cancer screenings, affecting early detection and treatment. One expert says the study highlights the importance of understanding Covid’s impact to prepare for future pandemics.

Tennessee

LARGEST US UTILITY DOESN'T WANT TO CLOSE 2 COAL-FIRED PLANTS

NASHVILLE — The nation’s largest public utility says it now would prefer to keep operating two coal-fired power plants it had planned to shutter. The shifting priority by the Tennessee Valley Authority comes before a meeting this week of its board, which has a majority of members picked by the coal-friendly Trump administration. The proposal would ditch closure dates for the Kingston Fossil Plant and Cumberland Fossil Plant in Tennessee, though that would require further action from its board. The new plan would still include introducing natural gas-fired plants at both locations. Several clean energy groups say extending the coal plants would raise serious questions about TVA’s decision-making process.

Texas

DEVELOPER REACHES \$68 MILLION SETTLEMENT WITH STATE, FEDS

The owners of Colony Ridge, a Houston-area developer, have agreed to a \$68 million legal settlement over accusations of a predatory lending scheme targeting Latinos. Allegations included selling land to undocumented people, leading to crime-ridden subdivisions. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sued the developers for deceptive practices. A federal case accused Colony Ridge of misrepresenting guarantees of water, electricity and sewer hook-ups and charging high interest rates that led to many foreclosures. Under the settlement, buyers must present a Texas ID, driver’s license, passport or visa. The developers also must invest in law enforcement and infrastructure. Spokespeople for Colony Ridge did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Virginia

DEMOCRATS SHARE PROPOSED HOUSE MAP DESPITE COURT RULING

RICHMOND — Virginia Democrats have unveiled a new U.S. House map that aims to give the party four more seats in Congress. The boundaries were revealed even as an ongoing legal challenge makes use of that map for the midterm elections far from certain. The map released Feb. 10 would dilute Republicans’ hold in Virginia’s conservative areas while giving Democrats a better footing in the districts they would like to flip. And it could give Democrats nationwide an edge in the redistricting battle with President Donald Trump that began when he pushed to redraw districts in Republican-controlled states such as Texas.

Wisconsin

US JUDGES DISMISS LAWSUITS ACCUSING FANTASY AUTHOR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

MADISON — Federal judges have dismissed three lawsuits accusing British author Neil Gaiman of sexually assaulting his children's nanny in New Zealand. Scarlett Pavlovich filed lawsuits against Gaiman and his wife, Amanda Palmer, in February 2025. She accused Gaiman of multiple assaults while she worked as their nanny in 2022. Judges in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and New York dismissed the cases, stating Pavlovich needed to pursue them in New Zealand. Gaiman denied the allegations, calling them meritless. His attorneys argued the claims were part of a plan to smear him. Pavlovich alleged violations of federal human trafficking laws.

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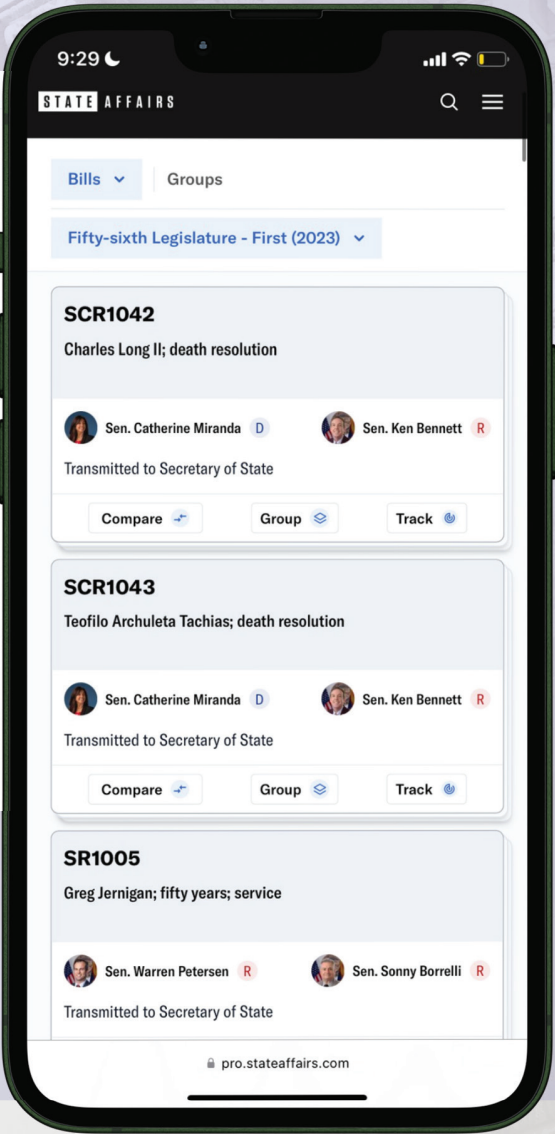
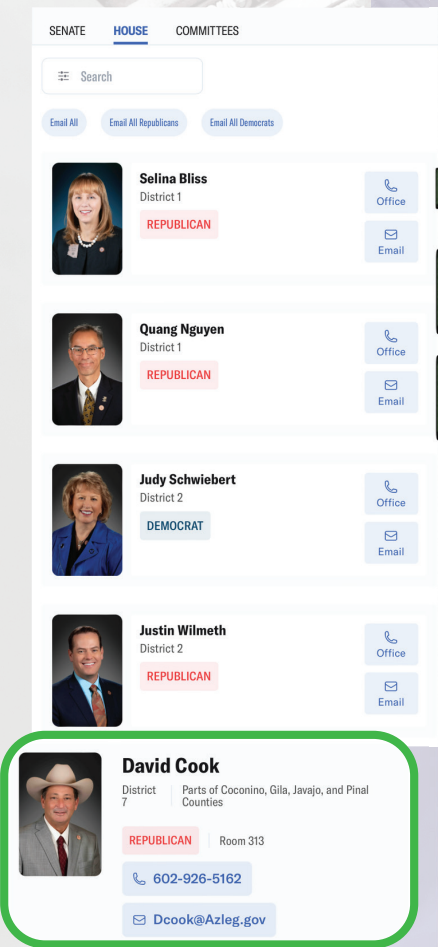
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