

Arizona Capitol Times

Your Inside Source for Arizona Government, Politics and Business

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Parents take aim at school voucher handbook

See page 8 for more details

Anti-Robson election regulations?

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School boards targeted amid funding issues

See page 13 for more details

“This is an election bill designed to negate the voters’ voice at the ballot box.”

— Former Republican lawmaker Michelle Ugenti-Rita, on a bill allowing Axon’s construction of a new headquarters in Scottsdale despite zoning restrictions.

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Striker aims to bypass Scottsdale voters for Axon zoning

BY JAMAR YOUNGER
jyounger@stateaffairs.com

A Republican lawmaker has introduced a striker bill that would clear the path for Axon to build a new global headquarters in north Scottsdale and bypass a ballot initiative calling for voters to approve zoning for the project.

Rep. Tony Rivero, R-Peoria, introduced Senate Bill 1543, which would require cities with populations between 200,000 and 500,000 to allow hotels and multifamily residential housing to be built in areas zoned for light industrial use without needing an application that would require a public hearing.

The House International Trade Committee on Wednesday approved the bill 8-0 with two members absent.

The hotels and housing units would have to be constructed on the campus of an “international

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Governor’s Regulatory Review Council criticized for water rulemaking at sunset hearing



Sen. Jake Hoffman, R-Queen Creek, and Sen. Lauren Kuby, D-Tempe, speak on separate occasions in the Arizona State Senate at the Arizona State Capitol building. (Gage Skidmore / Flickr)

BY REAGAN PRIEST | rpriest@stateaffairs.com

A Republican lawmaker says the Governor’s Regulatory Review Council is not performing its statutory duties to review agency rulemakings for legal compliance and legislative intent, despite denials of wrongdoing by the council’s chair.

During a Senate Government Committee hearing on March 26, Sen. Jake Hoffman, R-Queen Creek,

questioned the chair of GRRC for nearly an hour about its processes for reviewing proposed rules from state agencies. The hearing was meant to serve as a review of a sunset audit conducted by the Auditor General’s Office, but the questioning focused on a particular rulemaking from the Department of Water Resources.

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Lea Márquez Peterson: Bringing southern Arizona to the Capitol

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CAPITOL QUOTES



“I don’t think that a few bad actors should take it out for everyone.”

— Sen. Kevin Payne, R-Peoria, on a bill to remove legislative immunity from lawmakers cited or traffic violations.



“This bill is a bill to siphon taxpayer money to our military industrial complex, make no mistake about it.”

— Rep. Alexander Kolodin, R-Scottsdale, on his opposition to a bill to create the Arizona Office of Defense Innovation.



“The falsification of financial records and the mismanagement of public funds are a betrayal of trust and must be investigated immediately.”

— House Speaker Steve Montenegro, R-Goodyear, on Isaac School District’s placement into receivership after overspending its budget by more than \$28 million and falsifying financial records.



“I am a testament of what happens when we invest in our young people and we just give them an opportunity ... to give back to Arizona, and now I’m living proof that I am giving back to my community.”

— Reyna Montoya, the founder of Aliento, on why she fights for private scholarships for undocumented students.

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LEA MÁRQUEZ PETERSON

BRINGING SOUTHERN ARIZONA TO THE CAPITOL



Lea Márquez Peterson (Reagan Priest / Arizona Capitol Times)

BY REAGAN PRIEST | rpriest@stateaffairs.com

Lea Márquez Peterson is the longest serving member of the Arizona Corporation Commission, having been appointed in 2019 and elected in 2020 and reelected in 2024. As the only statewide elected

official based in southern Arizona, she told the *Arizona Capitol Times* how she brings a different perspective to the ACC, and what she hopes to accomplish in her last four years.

What led you to become a corporation commissioner?

I had won the primary in my congressional race (in 2018), and worked really hard at it. So I ran a real campaign, raised like a million and a half dollars, was out talking to national media, really working hard to represent. I lost the general election ... So, after that, I decided to leave the chamber, and thought, Well, what should I do next? I wanted to stay in the Tucson area,

though I could work anywhere. So I was in that space where I was starting to think about taking on clients or doing consulting, and I got a call from Governor Ducey's office. He'd endorsed my race for Congress, so he knew me, and knew how hard I was working running for office, and his team reached out to me ... and I said, absolutely honored to serve, let me do some research. Because I knew the commissioners, but I don't think anyone fully understands the full scope of the work we do at the commission.

I basically called them back within 24 hours and said, I'm in. It's a very steep learning curve, I feel like now I've been at this six years that I have a master's degree in electricity, water, gas, nuclear, all these different things that we tackle at the commission. I'd say it took me probably about a year to really understand all the acronyms and the players and the lobbying groups and the utilities.

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LEGISLATION

Starter Homes Act one step closer to governor

BY JAKOB THORINGTON
jthorington@stateaffairs.com

A full version of this story is available at <https://azcapitoltimes.com/>

Political leaders in both parties at the legislature have identified affordable housing as one of their top issues, but one bipartisan bill aimed at lowering housing prices with smaller homes is close to approaching Gov. Katie Hobbs' desk.

After many stakeholder meetings and negotiations throughout the legislative session, the House Government Committee passed the "Arizona Starter Homes Act," SB1229, as several members on the committee expressed their problems with the bill.

SB1229 now needs to get through the House, and likely the Senate again for a final vote on amendments before Hobbs gets her say.

With the goal of building smaller and

cheaper homes, the measure would prohibit cities with a population of at least 70,000 from requiring specific home design and development standards.

The Government Committee's discussion of the measure opened with Rep. Janeen Connolly, D-Tempe, introducing a striker amendment that would replace its language with that of a similar measure backed by the League of Arizona Cities and Towns that municipal leaders say would ensure Arizona residents, not corporations, purchase the new homes.

The league has feuded with supporters of the Starter Homes Act for years. Nick Ponder, a lobbyist with HighGround Public Affairs Consultants who lobbies for the league,

said the league has been working on "starter home" legislation since back when former Sen. Steve Kaiser championed the issue.

Starter Act supporters argue the free market will ensure more affordable homes are built with the bill because there are developers who want to provide a product for first-time homebuyers.

The league's proposal would allow cities to require slightly larger homes than what SB1229 offers, with a residency requirement of 15 years from the owners of new starter homes and an area median income requirement to try and target working-class Arizona residents and families.

"I do hope that as the senator's bill

moves forward, we see a number of additional amendments that reflect these considerations," Connolly said.

Bolick said she still expects one additional floor amendment to SB1229 before it receives a full vote from the House floor and is sent to the governor's desk.

Jake Hinman, a lobbyist supporting SB1229 on behalf of the Arizona Neighborhood Project, said he believes the bill as currently written would allow people to buy homes at a price around \$250,000 to \$260,000, but concessions made with the bill have already increased the expected prices of the new homes.

Still, SB1229 may be the only opportunity this legislative session for lawmakers to get a significant housing bill aimed at lowering the cost of single-family homes this session.

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LEA MÁRQUEZ PETERSON: BRINGING SOUTHERN ARIZONA TO THE CAPITOL

Why did you decide to run for reelection in 2020 and again in 2024?

Running in 2020 was very challenging. I launched my campaign and COVID hit. Someday, I'm going to write a book about that, how to win office in a worldwide pandemic. So I ran then and thought, Gosh, that was interesting. It was challenging, but do I want to continue doing the work? And I ultimately decided, after talking to my family, my husband, my children, my parents and so on, that I really enjoyed the work. I liked the wonkiness, I guess, of the work that we do. I like the analysis. I like knowing that I'm there representing the ratepayers, and I'm very clear when I'm voting on issues that I'm not an electrical engineer or a nuclear engineer. My background is that I've been a ratepayer, I've been a small-business owner, and that's truly the opinion and the perspective I'm giving on all these very complex cases that we work on. And I really enjoyed that. I also liked being statewide, talking to folks in Morenci and Yuma and Lake Havasu and all these different places.

What have you learned from your time on the Corporation Commission?

This is my first elected position, so I knew about lobbyists and special interest groups. But I was surprised by how much lobbying happens when you're in a position like the commission. I was also surprised how little we heard from real people in the public writing me a letter with their own words saying, "please vote this way

or that way, Commissioner, because it'll impact my family or my business." I do a lot of public speaking now at rotaries and chambers and ... I tell them when I speak to them, we need to hear from you. Your elected officials across the state in every role are making decisions that impact your businesses and your lives and your roads and your trash cans, I mean, everything. So you need to weigh in and understand the role we have. And then I give them a little one on one on what the commission is and the key issues in front of us. So I think that was the biggest surprise, is how little people paid attention. I'm thankful when I get 1,000 emails on an issue, which we do now. It's a little discouraging to get 1,000 form letters. I always tell people, if someone's soliciting, you get the form letter and put it in your own terms, or attach your bill, or tell me your story. It'll have more impact than a whole bunch of form letters.

What do you wish people — ratepayers, lawmakers — knew about the commission?

I'd say for ratepayers throughout the state, what I'd like them to know is just how transparent we are. Most people are surprised when I'm speaking to them that you can watch our meetings, you can write an email ... you can testify, you can participate via WebEx or Zoom. We're very open, and we very much want to hear from ratepayers. On the legislative side or the elected side, I really wish they had a basic understanding of what the commission does. Every legislative cycle we will have hundreds of bills that impact the work we do at the commission, and

not a lot of understanding of the depth of the work we do or our constitutional role. We're trying to meet and speak with all the legislators, mayors and councils, and county board of supervisors, or whoever we can get to explain the role of the commission and how we want to work collaboratively. We can do so much more together than fighting over bills.

You're the only commissioner based in southern Arizona. What has that been like?

I'm proud to be, I think, the only statewide (elected) official in Arizona from southern Arizona. It does give me a different perspective. I live in Tucson. I drive up usually on a Tuesday, come back on a Thursday. I was lucky enough to get a little condo up there so that I don't have to drive back and forth every single night, which I did do at the beginning. And that's tough. We have a little office in Tucson, not a building like we do in Phoenix, but we have an office so that if you live in Graham County or Morenci or Nogales, you don't have to meet every commissioner in Phoenix. You can Zoom, certainly, now, but I could just meet you in Tucson. I tend to pay a lot of attention to our retail electric co-ops. We have seven of them that we regulate. They're based in rural parts of Arizona, and I pay a lot of attention to those. So much of the growth is happening in Maricopa County, I mean, there's so much happening whether it's data centers or semiconductor industry and other manufacturing, so much population growth. But I tend to spend a lot of time focused on coal impacted

communities in the future, and spreading the love. As we grow and see economic development, how do we reach the other counties across the state?

What do you listen to when you drive between Tucson and Phoenix?

I do audio books. So I got into those because I have several hours (to drive). I got tired very quickly listening to political talk shows and political podcasts. I do still listen to that periodically, or I'll catch up on the radio that I've missed. But I like to focus on audio books. Maybe a thriller, like Sandra Brown. She was just at the Tucson Festival of Books, actually, which is incredible.

You're term-limited at the ACC. Have you thought about what will come next for you when your current term is up?

I would be honored to continue to serve and be in a public service role, but I don't know where there'll be an opportunity or the right timing for something like that, so I'm just going to keep my options open. I have four years, not two years, like so many other offices. So probably, in two years, I'll start putting feelers out and understanding what other options there might be, or whether I do some other line of work. It's been a great education in this field. So I would like to, if I'm not going into a different public service role, continue in the work, not necessarily for a utility, but there are lots of other ways to engage in the energy and water and nuclear space.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

GOVERNOR'S REGULATORY REVIEW COUNCIL CRITICIZED FOR WATER RULEMAKING AT SUNSET HEARING

Hoffman said he heard that the Governor's Office and ADWR asked GRRC to speed up the rulemaking process for the Alternative Path to Assured Water Supply rules, known as ADAWS. The rules are currently the subject of several lawsuits filed by the Legislature and Republican-aligned groups.

GRRC reviewed the ADAWS rules and approved them in late 2024, but Hoffman accused the council of rushing the review, violating laws related to public comment periods, and scheduling a vote on the rulemaking during a study session when some council members were absent.

"We feel so strongly that you violated the law. We will be vindicated, and that rule will be thrown out," Hoffman told GRRC chair Jessica Klein during the hearing. "GRRC has to do a better job of ensuring statutory compliance. Right now, you're failing in that mission."

Klein vehemently denied the accusations made by Hoffman and at times expressed frustration with his questions. She noted that she was appearing before the committee to testify on an auditor general report of the agency, which did not include the ADAWS rulemaking.

"I'm a simple council member who follows

the statutes as they're written," Klein told Hoffman.

He pushed back on that, saying "that doesn't seem to be the case," before arguing that Klein's role as the general counsel of the Department of Administration — which houses GRRC — made her answer "disingenuous."

Hobbs' spokesperson, Christian Slater, denied allegations that the Governor's Office asked GRRC to rush the ADAWS rulemaking and criticized his characterization of the rules and the rulemaking process.

"Jake Hoffman has no idea what he's talking about," Slater said in a text message. "GRRC had three hearings on ADAWS, instead of the usual two ... His desperate attempts to undermine this common sense policy show how out of touch and radical he, and the entire caucus that follows him, have become."

Sen. Lauren Kuby, D-Tempe, said she was "appalled" by Hoffman's approach to questioning Klein and commended her for her testimony during the hearing.

"You're being asked the same question over and over and over again, and you've been answering it, and I appreciate your

patience with this committee," Kuby told Klein.

Klein was originally scheduled to appear before the Senate Government Committee in January, but had been unable to attend due to illness. She emphasized that when asked by Hoffman if she takes the sunset review process seriously.

"I take this process very seriously," Klein responded. "This is actually my first in-person meeting this year after some pretty serious medical issues. I'm very happy to be here today, and I was happy to speak on behalf of my role within the council."

Kuby also noted that five of the six members serving on the council currently were appointed by former Gov. Doug Ducey, despite Hoffman's implications that issues with GRRC have arisen under Hobbs.

GRRC is scheduled to sunset in July if it is not renewed by the Legislature, but the bill to continue the council for two more years contains several provisions that seem to be inspired by concerns over the ADAWS rulemaking. House Bill 2594 would prohibit GRRC from voting on rules during study sessions and would require meetings to include equal time for public comment opposing and supporting a rule.

Klein said the council received advice from staff during the ADAWS rulemaking process that voting on a rule at a study session would not be out of the norm. She also noted that the council added an additional meeting to discuss the rules to ensure there was ample time for public comment.

The bill also makes significant changes to the makeup of the council and would prohibit Klein from continuing to serve as chair. HB2594 would prohibit ADOA's general counsel from serving as chair of GRRC. Instead, it would require the director or deputy director to take Klein's place.

The bill also takes three of the council member appointments away from the governor and gives them to the Legislature. Rep. Walt Blackman, R-Snowflake, sponsored the bill and said the change in makeup is an attempt to give lawmakers a say on the council.

The Senate Government Committee voted 4-3 on party lines to pass HB2594, but Hoffman said he would ensure the bill is held in the Senate Rules Committee until GRRC can provide him more information about times the council voted on rules during a study session.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

STRIKER AIMS TO BYPASS SCOTTSDALE VOTERS FOR AXON ZONING

headquarters" that would employ more than 2,000 employees who make more than 125% of the median wage of the county where the complex is located.

The bill is the latest measure crafted to aid Axon in its quest to build the sprawling headquarters near Loop 101 and Hayden Road. The campus would include 1,900 apartments and condominiums, a hotel and retail integrated into the company's headquarters. About 20% of the apartments would be allocated for workers.

Axon officials say the campus would be an economic boon that could create 5,500 high-wage jobs and generate \$3.6 billion a year in economic activity. Company officials also warn that it would have to move to another state if the rezoning isn't approved for the site, which would result in the loss of 1,000 jobs in Arizona.

Those who oppose the project say the size of the proposed campus is not complementary with Scottsdale's quality of life. Opponents have also criticized the company and bill

sponsors for using the legislative process to circumvent the will of Scottsdale voters.

"This is an election bill designed to negate the voters' voice at the ballot box," said former Republican lawmaker Michelle Ugenti-Rita, who is now working with Taxpayers Against Awful Apartment Zoning Exemptions, a group that opposes the project. "It's one of the worst election bills I've ever seen in my entire life as a politician."

The Scottsdale City Council originally approved rezoning for the project in November, but the taxpayer group collected signatures to send the measure to the ballot after some residents expressed opposition to the headquarters.

Axon CEO Rick Smith told the committee the company had been planning the headquarters for a decade and has been working with Scottsdale officials for about six years. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the company to adjust its plans and its board of directors wanted

Smith to find a solution in an environment where more people were working remotely, he said.

"We looked at what makes sense in this new world," he said. "I don't have to order people to come back to the office, but a campus could be a major role in luring (workers)."

Scottsdale officials said Axon has been a "good partner" and they're open to growth, but the proposed apartment complex on its property is one of the main concerns of the city's residents.

"Nobody has any issues with those things but, my God, 1,900 apartments," said Scottsdale Vice Mayor Jan Dubauskas. "Please do not silence the voices of these people."

Earlier this session, Sen. David Gowan, R-Sierra Vista, and Rep. Michael Carbone, R-Buckeye, introduced twin bills, Senate Bill 1352 and House Bill 2925, that would prevent an application for rezoning from being subject to a referendum petition.

The Senate bill passed the Senate Regulatory Affairs and Government Efficiency and Rules committees but has not advanced further. A Senate Republican spokeswoman said earlier this month that the bill had support from the majority of Republican senators but not enough votes to overcome any opposition from Democrats.

The House legislation hasn't received a committee hearing.

Rivero's striker amendment was introduced on March 24. Sen. Frank Carroll, R-Sun City West, ran the original bill.

Although the House International Trade Committee voted unanimously to approve the bill, some members expressed hope that Axon and the city could work together for a compromise.

"Axon is an amazing organization, and I'm hoping from this committee that there will be room for compromise and negotiation, consensus," Rivero said.

GUEST COMMENTARIES

AZ Republicans showed why Puerto Rico statehood should be a GOP cause

Last November, Arizona's Latinos overwhelmingly swung to the right side of the aisle. We saw this trend across the country and many were surprised, but we weren't. While Democrats told Latinos what they should care about, Arizona Republicans listened to them, understood their values and demonstrated to them that conservatives share their priorities.

Now, it's time for Republicans in other parts of the country to take notice and follow our lead.

President Donald Trump won the state of Arizona comfortably, driven in part by significant gains with Latinos. In Santa Cruz County, which is 85% Hispanic, Trump received an 8-point increase in his vote share compared to his 2020 total. In Yuma County, which is 60% Hispanic, Trump gained a 13-point bump. These numbers are unprecedented for modern Republican presidential candidates.

Latinos' rightward shift in Arizona should be a case study for the Republican Party. Trump won big among Latinos in Arizona because he spoke about their concerns like inflation, crime and traditional family



By Jaime Molera

values, not identity politics or wokeness. And yes, he focused on immigration too, which clearly resonated with Latino voters in Arizona who agree on the need to prioritize safety along the border. Arizona Republicans and President Trump listened and focused on the issues Latinos care about, winning them over in historic numbers.

We've seen this shift across the country and across the diverse Latino community. In the recent election, Puerto Ricans made

it explicitly clear that they are ready to vote for Republicans, and they are ready for statehood.

In 2024, Puerto Rico elected Jenniffer González-Colón, an ally of President Trump, as governor. Her party also won legislative majorities in Puerto Rico's House and Senate, which elected Republicans to lead each body. That success coincided with Republican gains among Puerto Ricans in places like Osceola County, Florida, and Berks County, Pennsylvania. On top of that, the island's most recent "shadow" senator, Zoraida Buxó Santiago, is a Republican who endorsed President Trump last year. The trend is clear. Puerto Ricans want to support Republicans. And at the same time that Puerto Ricans were turning out for President Trump and Republicans, they were also making their voices heard on the issue of statehood.

In the recent election, Puerto Ricans voted overwhelmingly once again in favor of statehood. That follows previous elections in 2020, 2017 and 2012 when Puerto Ricans voted for statehood. Time after time, they have made their wishes clear, but politicians in Washington haven't

listened... yet.

Republicans in Washington D.C. and across the country must respond to Puerto Ricans' support for their party and statehood. Listening to them and advocating for their cause is exactly how Republicans won over Latinos in Arizona. It's largely how President Trump won our state. And while Republicans have not always listened to what Puerto Ricans want when it comes to statehood out of fear that the island would only send Democrats to Washington, it's time for Republicans to flip that misguided conventional wisdom on its head because it's simply not the case. In fact, recent evidence shows the very opposite is true.

President Trump famously said, "We're one people, one family and one glorious nation under God." It's time we live up to those words by embracing Puerto Rico as a full member of our American family. Republicans in Arizona and across the country should champion statehood because it's in the best interest of our party and our nation.

Jaime Molera is a former Arizona superintendent of public instruction.

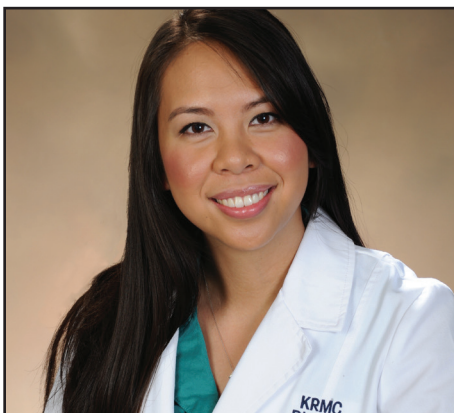
Lawmakers can enable pharmacists to fill health care need

Arizona ranks 42nd in the country for access to health care services. Nearly two-thirds of the state (65%) is considered medically underserved, and large portions have no primary care physician at all. A mere 35% of primary care needs are being met in Arizona, and according to projections, the state's health care workforce shortage will worsen.

How often have you or a loved one been sick with the flu, Covid, or strep throat, only to be told there aren't appointments available? Your options are likely to either head to an urgent care center, where you could wait for hours, or go to the emergency room, where bills can easily exceed \$1,000. What if I told you there was a better option?

Pharmacists can help.

That is why I am asking legislators to support Senate Bill 1214, which would allow licensed pharmacists to administer FDA-approved tests that are waived under the federal Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988 (CLIA) and initiate the treatments



By Linda P. Williams

necessary to treat these common conditions. These tests cover common illnesses like the flu, Covid, and strep throat, and if positive, the pharmacists can prescribe the right medication.

As a founder of the Kingman Regional Medical Center Disease Management Clinic in Kingman, I've seen how difficult it is for patients to access even the most basic health care. As one of the few health care resources available to patients in

Mohave County, my clinic sees an average of 450 patients each month. We assist with chronic disease management, and since opening in 2015, established an initiative to eliminate Hepatitis C and increase screening rates to get timely treatment to patients. Collectively we've helped to cure 175 patients of Hepatitis C.

Yet despite our robust training and experience, current Arizona law prevents pharmacists from initiating treatments for common, non-chronic conditions from test results on the same equipment doctors would use. For example, patients frequently show up to my clinic displaying flu-like symptoms that I am trained and capable of testing for and treating. However, I'm forced to tell the patient I can't do anything for them and can only direct them somewhere else. If urgent care is full, same day visits with local primary care providers are limited, and new patient appointment wait times can be as long as six months.

SB1214 would remove these barriers to ensure pharmacists can provide the care they are already trained and educated to provide. It isn't about making pharmacists

physicians. I don't want to be a physician. I want to help patients in my community by using my education and training to the fullest extent.

These changes aren't unfounded or untested. To date, 30 states authorize pharmacists to administer CLIA-waived tests, and 13 states allow pharmacists to prescribe treatment based on those tests. In these states, patient safety hasn't been diminished and quality of care hasn't been hindered.

I love being able to serve the Kingman community because I care so deeply for my patients. But the truth is there is more that we as pharmacists can do — changes that can only be made by those elected to represent Arizonians.

We urge legislators to support SB1214 so that we can collectively improve patient outcomes and access to high-quality healthcare.

Linda P. Williams has been an Arizona pharmacist for 13 years and currently serves as the pharmacy clinical manager for ambulatory care at Kingman Regional Medical Center.



ENERGIZING ARIZONA BUSINESSES

SRP's Business Demand Response Program helps prevent power outages during the busiest time of year and lowers operating costs for Arizona businesses

BY ERIN THORBURN

There is a reason the saying "When one of us wins, we all win," has withstood the test of time. In most cases it's true, and Salt River Project's (SRP) Business Demand Response Program was designed with this adage in mind. This initiative endeavors to simultaneously prevent power outages during the busiest time of year and lower operating costs for Arizona businesses. The result of organizations enrolling? A win-win (for everyone!), and no one knows this more than Grace Klawitter, strategic business account manager for SRP.



GRACE KLAWITTER,
SRP Strategic Business Account Manager

NO COST WITH CUSTOMIZABLE OPTIONS

A major plus of the SRP Business Demand Response Program — besides being cost-free — is its eligibility versatility. Commercial, institutional, industrial, educational, and municipal organizations are all eligible to sign up.

"The program essentially coordinates with these large customers across the Valley to curtail their load during the summer months when we have exceptionally high load on our grid," Klawitter says.

Klawitter explains that notifications go out to all enrolled in the Business Demand Response Program from SRP's partner Enel. Correspondence comes through via email, phone or SMS, depending on company preferences.

Once companies receive word it's a good time to reduce their energy use, they can do so by eliminating areas such as nonessential lighting, modifying manufacturing processes, adjusting HVAC equipment and more. Another benefit of the program; it's not a one-size-fits-all option.

"We have different options like partial enrollment, full summer enrollment, or even testing the program out for one or two months," Klawitter says, adding, "We continue to evolve programs to fit our customers' needs."

VALUABLE ENERGY USAGE INSIGHTS

To ensure business consumers are getting the most out of the Business Demand Response Program, SRP and Enel collaborate to deliver helpful and insightful tools.

"Depending on the program that [customers] are involved in, they get free, real-time energy use analytics," Klawitter notes. "This allows them to dive in hour by hour to understand how machines or processes are working and how this equates to what energy is being used."

SUSTAINABILITY AND SAVINGS

Ultimately, this knowledge empowers businesses to make smarter decisions and further work toward their sustainability goals. "Customers that may feel like there are not a lot of avenues for them to engage in sustainability initiatives, find that this (program) is fantastic because everybody uses Electricity — the greenest energy is the energy you don't used," Klawitter explains. Additionally, each participating business is assigned a dedicated, strategic energy manager (SEM).

"They are such a fantastic resource and can really help, especially if you have any sort of doubts or obstacles that you might see your facility facing," Klawitter says.

To learn more about how the **SRP Business Demand Response Program** works and benefits business customers, visit SRP.NET/BDR

EDUCATION

PARENT CRITICISM SENDS NEW ESA HANDBOOK BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

BY KIERA RILEY | kriley@stateaffairs.com



Tom Horne is the Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction.

A motion to adopt a new draft of the Empowerment Scholarship Account handbook went without a second or a vote in a meeting of the State Board of Education Monday after a string of speakers and written comments opposed the implementation of price caps on certain purchases.

The decision to effectively table adoption of the ESA handbook leaves board members, the Department of Education, a parent handbook committee, and program participants to sift through issues raised by parents and propose another round of revisions.

The State Board of Education must adopt a handbook by May 1. However, the process for drafting a new handbook remains unclear after the recent opposition.

“I fully expected the handbook to be adopted today,” John Ward, executive director of the ESA program said. “So, I don’t know what feedback we will get from the state board about what they want to see changed before the next meeting.”

The ESA handbook functions as a user manual for ESA account holders, detailing everything from the documentation needed to apply to the criteria for program purchases. State Board of Education administrative rules require yearly updates to the handbook.

Tensions over another edition of the ESA handbook started simmering early, especially as the board declined to adopt a handbook for 2024 and continued under the existing manual after parents and Republican lawmakers claimed inadequate input from ESA account holders.

After the draft manual fell through, the Department of Education convened an ESA parent committee to promulgate their

own handbook, with subsequent review by the department and eventual presentation to the state board.

The department issued an initial draft of the 2025-26 handbook on March 3 and solicited comments from account holders on March 4. It was met with near immediate critiques – with a key contention being price caps.

If adopted, ESA account holders would have been barred from spending more than \$500 annually on home economic equipment, \$4,000 on instruments, \$2,500 on physical education equipment, \$1,500 on tools for vocational education every three years, \$2,500 on a playground, more than \$2,000 on personal laptops and computers every two years, and \$3,000 on a SmartBoard for the entire duration of program participation.

Ward deemed the issue a “lightning rod,” and said written comments submitted to the department “almost exclusively” dealt with the price caps. Monday’s meeting resulted in more than 40 requests to speak and just shy of 170 pages of public comment, with the issue of the price caps dominating again.

The position of Arizona State Superintendent of Schools Tom Horne, as previously expressed in an email to parents and emphasized in his superintendent’s report, is rooted in the department’s authority to ensure the program stays in compliance with state law.

“Somebody has to decide what is and what is not a valid educational expense, and the legislature gave that (authority) to the Department of Education,” Horne said in his report to the board.

Though the department is backing the price caps, the idea to implement limits started

with the ESA Parent Handbook committee.

Janelle Wood, chair of the committee, said members wanted to provide more clarity on what a “reasonable” purchase would be under the program and sought to speed up the reimbursement process by eliminating research on market value and the reasonableness of purchases on the department’s end.

But she noted that the department’s final version lowered some price caps and placed time limits on purchases. For instance, the department initially set a \$1,500 limit per item on vocational tools, then the department changed it to \$1,500 total over three years.

Ward confirmed the department had changed how certain caps operated, but he clarified they did not implement a price cap where none existed before.

Still, account holders took issue, with particular concern on how such caps could stand to impact students with disabilities.

Stacey Brown, a member of the committee, advocating against adopting the handbook she helped develop. She said the committee had initially intended to exempt students with disabilities from price caps entirely, though she claimed the asterisks never made it into the final draft. Monday, Brown called it a “direct attack on special education students.”

However, Ward pointed out that the department added language to exempt students with disabilities, so long as they provided a letter from a specialist justifying the expense. Beyond that, Ward said the maximums would be a “hard and fast rule” for students enrolled under universal eligibility.

Board members asked for more specificity

in the text of the handbook on how the price caps would operate and apply to different students.

“I think we need to be really explicit on how this process works,” board member Karla Krivickas said.

When it came to a vote, Superintendent Tom Horne made a motion to adopt the handbook. No board member seconded the motion.

Though the initial motion failed, Horne said he was confident the board would approve a handbook at the next meeting.

The state board meets again on April 28, and in the coming weeks, plans to work with the department on changes to the handbook.

Sean Ross, executive director of the State Board of Education, said in a statement, board members are looking for the department to seek more stakeholder feedback and clarify how newly added restrictions apply to students with disabilities.

Ross confirmed the handbook will come before the board again at next month’s meeting and said the board plans to “communicate its wishes regarding the handbook to the department in the coming days so that they can be considered and potentially implemented.”

Janelle Wood, chair of the ESA Parent Handbook Committee said she was not sure whether the parent committee would reconvene or work with the department as part of the second round of revisions. But she expects changes to primarily revolve around making spending caps clearer.

“We got some great feedback from people that the rest of the book read well,” Wood said.

ELECTIONS

MEASURE THAT COULD AFFECT GOP 2026 RACE FOR GOVERNOR ADVANCES



LEFT: Karrin Taylor Robson attending the State of the State address in January. (Howard Fischer / Capitol Media Services). **RIGHT:** Sen. Jake Hoffman, R-Queen Creek, created legislation which would ban recent lobbyists, including Karrin Taylor Robson, from being candidates for office. (HowardFischer / Capitol Media Services)

BY HOWARD FISCHER
Capitol Media Services

The GOP head of the Arizona Freedom Caucus is advancing legislation that would bar fellow Republican Karrin Taylor Robson from becoming the next governor — even if she were to win the election.

Strictly speaking, HCR 2037 which was approved by the Senate Government Committee on March 26, says nothing about the attorney and business consultant who formally jumped in the 2026 gubernatorial race earlier this year.

But what the measure crafted by Sen. Jake Hoffman, R-Queen Creek, does say is that no person is eligible to become a state elected official who, for two years prior to the primary, has been required to register as a paid lobbyist.

And that happens to include Robson who as recently as January registered with the city of Phoenix that she is a lobbyist with AZ Strategies LLC. Robson is listed as the founder and president. That same city registration also lists Arizona Public Service, the state's largest electric utility, as one of her clients. But a spokesman for APS said she ceased doing work for the utility in the fourth quarter of last year. And Resolution Copper Co., in its own filing with the Secretary of State's Office, said Robson served as a lobbyist until this week.

Hoffman never mentioned Robson's name when he first explained his measure to other members of the Government Committee, which he chairs.

"This one seems very straightforward," he told colleagues. "We have the prohibition on lobbying following

office."

That refers to a state statute making it illegal for any former lawmakers to take a paid job lobbying the Legislature for one year after they leave office.

"We think that also should apply prior to office," Hoffman said. "So it seems like a common-sense measure in line with what we have."

But Hoffman conceded to Capitol Media Services this isn't occurring in a vacuum.

He is a vocal supporter of a bid by current U.S. Rep. Andy Biggs who also wants to be the Republican nominee for governor. And Hoffman, while denying that his measure is aimed strictly at Robson, acknowledged he crafted it with her in mind.

"The public has an overwhelming distrust of paid lobbyists because their job includes the potential hazard of selling themselves and their influence to the highest bidder," he said.

"This legislation seeks to prevent the poisoning of the public's trust in government that would come from allowing someone in that profession to be able to immediately serve in a position of key influence such as the governorship," Hoffman continued. "Karrin Taylor Robson is certainly a valid example as to why legislation is needed given her recent moonlighting as a paid lobbyist."

Robson, in her own prepared response, made no mention of her registration as a lobbyist. Instead she said that Hoffman's "desperate political tactic fails basic legal scrutiny."

What makes HCR 2037 potentially dangerous for Robson's political future is the way it is worded.

Hoffman's proposal, if approved by the Legislature, would have to be ratified by voters at the Nov. 3, 2026, election.

But the measure does not say that people who have been lobbyists in the affected two-year period are ineligible to run. Such a wording could be interpreted to mean that, if approved, it would be effective proactively, affecting only those who choose to run in future years.

Instead, Hoffman crafted his measure to make anyone who has been a lobbyist for the two years before the 2026 primary — meaning Aug. 4, 2024 — legally unqualified to be sworn in.

If the measure is approved, it would become part of the Arizona Constitution when the 2026 election results are formally certified, something that is set to occur on Nov. 23, 2026.

But whoever is elected in 2026 would not take office until the first day in January 2027 — after the provision becomes effective.

Yet Hoffman called it "laughable" that he was advancing the measure in a way to convince Republicans to nominate Biggs, who is not a lobbyist and therefore would be unaffected even if voters approve his ballot measure.

"There is no need to target her given my confidence that her primary opponent will be elected as our state's next governor," Hoffman said, predicting he will win not only the GOP primary but defeat incumbent Democrat Katie Hobbs, who already has made it clear

she wants another term.

There is no guarantee that Hoffman's proposal will make it through the Legislature given there are many Republicans who already have announced their support for Robson. And, even if it does make it onto the ballot, voter approval is not guaranteed.

But despite his disavowals that HCR 2037 is all about Robson, Hoffman also left no doubt that he is using the measure to try to undermine voter support for her.

"A public conversation is warranted about what traps and entanglements might be present with a candidate for governor so closely aligned with, not to mention financially tied to, the largest monopoly utility in the state," he told Capitol Media Services.

Legally speaking, there is no way for Biggs to benefit if the measure is approved: If Robson wins the GOP primary, defeats Hobbs but is unable to be sworn in, Biggs would not become governor.

So who would?

In 2022, Arizona voters agreed to create the position of lieutenant governor, beginning with the 2026 race.

Under that system, the nominees of each party after the primary will select a running mate, with the two of them running as a ticket. That is similar to what happens in presidential races where the nominee selects a running mate.

Hoffman said he reads the constitutional provision as meaning if the successful gubernatorial candidate can't take office, the post goes to the lieutenant governor.

Sponsored Content

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT INVESTIGATES EGG INDUSTRY PRICE FIXING AS FIGHT AGAINST CAGE-FREE PROGRESS BEGINS IN ARIZONA

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has launched an investigation into potential price fixing in the egg industry. Since the announcement of the investigation, egg producers have lowered the price of eggs to consumers to half of what the cost was last month.

Adding to the egg controversy, Arizona interest groups are attempting to further delay the implementation of—or completely eliminate—the state's cage-free law, which was set to take effect this year.



Price fixing occurs when companies collude to artificially control prices, rather than allowing natural market forces to determine them. This anti-competitive practice directly harms consumers by forcing them to pay inflated prices for essential goods. In the case of eggs, which can be found in most American households, such practices can significantly impact family budgets and food security.

The allegation is particularly concerning given the egg industry's concentrated nature. This concentration of market power can make it easier for companies to coordinate pricing strategies at the expense of consumers.

The timing of the DOJ investigation is particularly noteworthy as it coincides with Arizona egg industry attempts to roll back its food safety and farmed animal welfare standards.

At Animal Outlook, we're no strangers to challenging anti-competitive practices in the food industry. In 2016, we achieved a landmark victory in a class-action lawsuit against the dairy industry, exposing a price-fixing scheme that had artificially inflated milk prices for years. Through this case, we helped secure a \$52 million settlement for consumers and exposed how industry consolidation can lead to market manipulation.

The dairy case revealed how industry players had conspired to reduce the nation's dairy cow herd to drive up prices, even going so far as to kill half a million young cows prematurely. This victory not only provided justice for consumers but also highlighted the interconnection between animal welfare and consumer protection.

The current Department of Justice investigation into the egg industry raises many of the same concerns we exposed in the dairy case. With egg prices having reached historic highs in recent months, it's crucial to ensure that these increases reflect genuine market conditions rather than illegal coordination among producers.

For Arizona residents, we encourage you to reach out to Animal Outlook at ArizonaEggs@animaloutlook.org if you regularly purchase eggs. Your experience as consumers could be valuable in potentially supporting future legal actions.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Williamson".

BEN WILLIAMSON
Animal Outlook, Executive Director

LEGISLATION

LAWMAKERS HOME IN ON 'REVENGE PORN' LOOPHOLE

BY HOWARD FISCHER
Capitol Media Services

State lawmakers are moving to close a loophole in a law designed to prevent victims against “revenge porn.”

But the measure, approved by an 8-1 margin on March 26 by the House Judiciary Committee, has raised concerns that, in an effort to plug that loophole, it subjects more people to possible felony charges.

A 2016 Arizona law already makes it a felony to distribute nude or sexually explicit photos of others without their consent. These often arise from situations when a relationship ends and the jilted partner decides to make public the naked photos of the other person — photos that may have been made with that person’s consent, but clearly were not meant to be shared.

And what made it more problematic, according to Sen. J.D. Mesnard, who crafted the original law, had the ability to not just create the images with smart phones, but be able to share them widely on the internet.

But at the committee meeting, the Chandler Republican said yet another advancement has created a new problem: the “exciting and frightening technology” of artificial intelligence.

Put simply, Mesnard said, that scientific leap now allows someone to “generate ... very realistic nude pictures that are then shared for the purpose of hurting somebody.” But he said since what’s being shared online isn’t an actual photo of someone that isn’t forbidden under the existing law.

His SB1462 is designed to close that gap.

“A very realistic-looking nude picture, but that’s not technically of the person but is used to harass and hurt the person, generally a woman, could be captured in this statute,” Mesnard explained to lawmakers in explaining the need for the change.

Mesnard could not get the measure approved as originally crafted after it raised concerns from the Arizona chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

“I think the bill violates the First Amendment without some sort of protection for persons who are engaged in parody, artistic expression, political speech” said lobbyist Marilyn Rodriguez. She said courts have concluded that these are protected — even if it is “a

vulgar image of a politician.”

“Those images may harm a politician or a famous person but can also be protected speech,” she said. And Rodriguez said she doubts that is what Mesnard is trying to prevent.

Mesnard agreed to alter the measure to create exceptions for “an image made in the public interest, including scientific or education activities, a newsworthy or on (an) issue of public concern.”

But Rodriguez made it clear that her organization still has concerns about the breadth of the measure — especially the possibility of someone being subject to a prison term of 2 1/2 years.

She said that it is so broad that it applies to someone who takes a picture of someone else who the person sees or knows and digitally alters it.

“It’s far less intimate,” Rodriguez said, than the original law that involves sending out photos that someone has shared in a relationship.

“I certainly wonder if it deserves a Class 4 felony designation,” she said. “It certainly seems like it’s criminalizing far more conduct than just the original revenge porn statute.”

And there’s something else.

“We are really concerned that young people who are prone to mistakes and lack access to sexual education and education about the internet could be facing Class 4 felonies for jokes,” she said.

*Sen. J.D. Mesnard,
R-Chandler, the
sponsor of SB1462.
(Howard Fischer /
Capitol Media
Services).*



*Rep. Alexander Kolodin, R-Scottsdale, who cast the only dissenting vote.
(Howard Fischer / Capitol Media Services).*

The ACLU isn’t the only one worried about the breadth of the bill.

Kathryn Krejci, a volunteer attorney with Arizona Attorney for Criminal Justice, pointed out that the original revenge porn law required prosecutors to prove that the person in the image had “a reasonable expectation of privacy.” But Krejci, whose organization is composed of lawyers who defend people accused of crimes, told lawmakers that SB1462 removes that requirement — and in a way that would allow charges to be brought against people who distribute images where the person in the photo had no such expectation.

Mesnard, however, said that change applies only to digitally created images. He said that, since those depicted had no way of knowing someone was crafting the photo, there would be no way for them to have a reasonable expectation of privacy.

Not everyone on the House Judiciary Committee was buying that explanation — or is convinced that what Mesnard is proposing is just a minor change in the law.

Rep. Alexander Kolodin said he agrees with Krejci’s interpretation that the legislation would make criminals out of those who share images where the person depicted has no expectation of privacy.

Consider, said the Scottsdale Republican, a scenario where he might decide to “tear naked through the floor of the House” and the act was captured by a news reporter on camera.

“That would then be a crime even though I had no reasonable expectation of privacy because I was on the floor of the House?” Kolodin asked as he cast the lone dissenting vote on the measure.

The measure, which already has been approved by the Senate, now goes to the full House.

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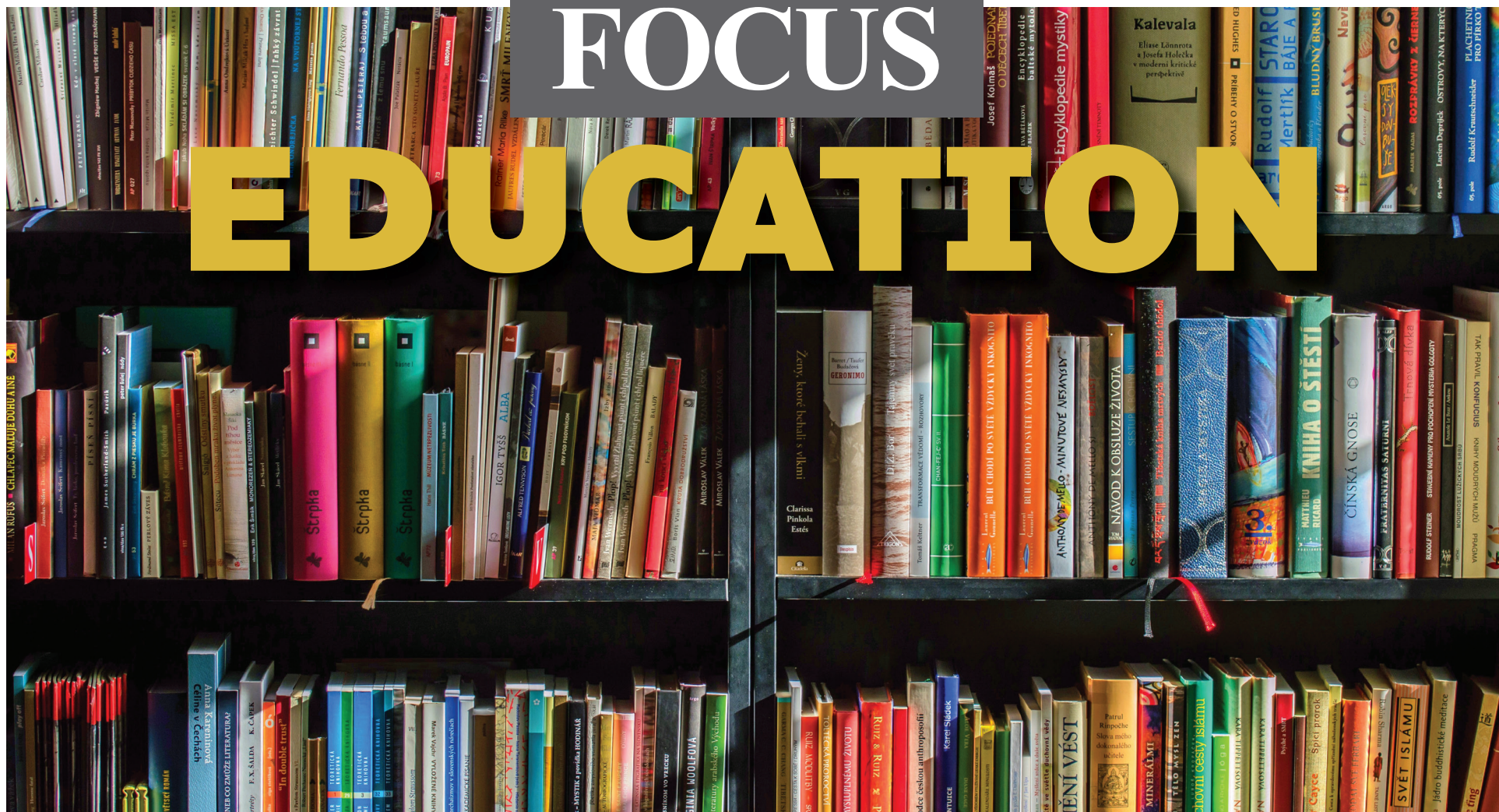
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FOCUS

EDUCATION



School board legislation sparks opposition after financially troubled district faces closure

BY JAKOB THORINGTON
jthorington@stateaffairs.com

Following nearly 5,000 west Phoenix students being at risk of seeing their school district close amid financial turmoil, lawmakers at the state Capitol are attempting to exert their influence over school boards across the state.

One of the main priorities for Republicans is House Bill 2610. The GOP proposal from Rep. Matt Gress, R-Phoenix, is a direct response to the Isaac School District's placement into receivership after overspending its budget by more than \$28 million and falsifying financial records.

HB2610 originally proposed requiring the superintendent and school board members of any district to be removed from their positions if their district is placed into receivership, but it has been amended to remove the required resignation of school board members.

After House Republicans called for an investigation into the matter, House Speaker Steve Montenegro, R-Goodyear, said in a press release, "The falsification of financial records and the mismanagement of public funds are a betrayal of trust and must be investigated immediately. The people of Arizona deserve to know how this happened, and those responsible must be held accountable."

Sen. Flavio Bravo, D-Phoenix, represents the district where Isaac is located. He said while he's concerned about how leadership at the district allowed its financial crisis, he voted against the measure because he said he's skeptical the bill would prevent similar behavior at other school districts from happening.

Democrats, too, have called on the school board's leadership to resign, but would rather see the issue be handled by Attorney General Kris Mayes' ongoing investigation of the district.

"House Bill 2610 is absolutely overbroad," said House Minority Leader Oscar De Los Santos, D-Laveen. "The only reason that we are aware of this problem is because of the transparency requirements that public schools have that the ESA program does not have."

There is a bill that some Democrats support intended to prevent a situation like Isaac's from happening again, but the measure has been halted in the House after lawmakers became aware of a potential conflict of interest from the bill's sponsor with an amendment to the bill.

House Bill 2883 from Rep. Lydia Hernandez, D-Phoenix, would establish biennial training requirements for school board members related to school finance.

That measure failed on the House floor on March

10 after drawing up controversy with an amendment that would allow immediate family members to serve on the same school board if they live in the same household and the younger family member is under 20 years old.

Hernandez and her daughter are members of the Cartwright School District and are being sued for serving on the board together.

Several Republicans and nearly all Democrats voted against Hernandez's bill, defeating it 21-35. Rep. Junelle Cavero, D-Phoenix, said she supported the training requirements of the bill but could not support the measure with the amendment.

The House has since removed the amendment language from the bill, but it has not yet received another floor vote.

Another school board measure from Sen. Carine Werner, R-Scottsdale, would make school district governing board elections partisan, listing candidates' political party affiliation on the ballot.

"The voters deserve transparency to know which party the candidate aligns with," Werner said.

Werner's measure, Senate Bill 1441, is waiting for a vote on the House floor, and has faced opposition from Democrats.

FOCUS EDUCATION

Private scholarships fill the gap for Arizona ‘Dreamers’

BY KIERA RILEY

kriley@stateaffairs.com

After the passage of Proposition 308 in 2022, students without citizenship, including so-called dreamers — those brought to the U.S. as children and granted legal status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA — pay in-state tuition, so long as they attended and graduated from an Arizona high school

But financial aid creates another, sometimes insurmountable hurdle, as federal assistance through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, and Pell Grant is not available to any student who is not a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen. What’s more, the Arizona Promise Scholarship, tuition coverage for in-state students, requires a FAFSA application or Pell Grant eligibility to apply.

The lack of state and federal funded aid leaves private scholarships to fill in the gaps. And amid increasing anxiety, one organization providing financial assistance has had to extend mental health support to respond to a barrage of existential threats to students without legal status, or from mixed status families, all while speaking from personal experience.

José Patiño, vice president of education and external affairs for Aliento, a support organization for undocumented, DACA, and mixed immigration status families, planned to attend Arizona State University in fall 2006.

The university initially offered Patiño in-state tuition with a full-ride scholarship. But after Proposition 300 — a ballot measure barring students who fail to show proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful immigration status from receiving in-state tuition and state financial aid — passed in November 2006, Patiño could not afford to attend.

But both Patiño and Reyna Montoya, the founder of Aliento, became scholars of the American Dream Fund, a scholarship program by Helios Education Fund to support undocumented students. Through Aliento, Patiño and Montoya carry on the same work to support students who are now walking a parallel path.

Most recently, the organization wrapped applications to the Adelante Scholarship, a partnership with Helios Education Foundation and Education Forward, to



The Helios Education Campus in Phoenix. (Photo courtesy of Helios Education Foundation)

provide up to \$5,000 per academic year to students pursuing a bachelor’s degree and \$2,500 to students enrolled in an associate’s degree program.

“We’re talking about students, dreamers, who came here at a very young age — their parents, most likely are undocumented, they’re not working within the formal economy, they don’t have a lot of wealth,” Montoya said. “Being able to provide access to scholarships based on their merit or their economic need, I think it’s really critical to do.”

Patiño said there’s been a need to expand and bend the scope of support, too, given mounting anxiety for students without legal immigration status attending or seeking higher education.

He noted the loss of college campuses as protected areas, a fear of family members being detained or deported, and the subsequent interruption to education, and fears about their own immigration status giving way to a pause on pursuing post-secondary education at all.

“It is just a constant barrage,” Patiño said.

It’s also shifted how Aliento operates, with a pivot to a less public presence.

“Now, we have to keep it more word of mouth,” Patiño said. “Because a lot of folks fear that potentially we could have some individual or individuals who are not part of the community, who could potentially start harassing individuals, or potentially start reporting individuals.”

In looking to the future, Montoya said she would like to see the Arizona Promise

that I am giving back to my community.”

Rich Nickel, president and CEO of Education Forward, a partner in the Adelante scholarship and an advocate for the passage of Prop. 308, also added the importance of protecting Prop. 308 and continuing external support, again making the connection to the value to the state.

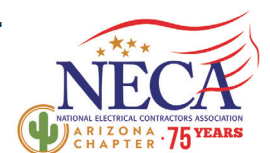
He noted the organization’s Achieve60AZ, an ongoing plan to reach 60% higher education attainment in the state, which Education Forward and Helios Education Foundation said could lead to \$5 billion in economic gains for the state.

“The only way we can get there is if everyone in our state has an opportunity,” Nickel said. “What we’ve been able to do since (Prop. 308) is really include those students in our pipeline ... students who have, you know, went to high school here and graduated here, have lived here their entire lives, but previously, really couldn’t afford to go.”

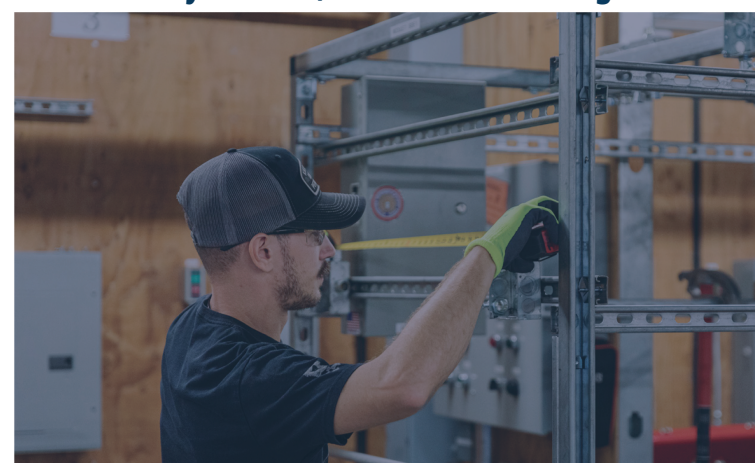
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FOCUS EDUCATION

ASU school with conservative backing touts broad civic education goals

BY JAMAR YOUNGER | jyounger@stateaffairs.com

When former Gov. Doug Ducey and the state Legislature directed Arizona State University to set up an academic department devoted to civic education almost a decade ago, Paul Carrese viewed the move as an unprecedented step toward expanding academic perspectives on campus.

Carrese was a professor at the U.S. Air Force Academy when ASU officials recruited him to become the founding director of the department, which became the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership (SCETL).

Although the program still faces criticism for its alleged conservative bias, prompted by its inception by GOP legislation and initial funding from the Charles G. Koch Foundation of two centers at ASU that merged to form SCETL, Carrese and other faculty and students have credited the school with filling a gap in civic education at the university level while helping to spawn a larger movement of programs teaching similar principles.

“There were centers ... at other state universities, private universities, (and) public universities, but there was no separate academic department mandated and funded in this way,” said Carrese, who stepped down as director in 2023 but remains a professor at the school. “So they did an unprecedented thing, and I think the record shows they were right.”

Launched in 2017, the school merged ASU’s Center for the Study of Economic Liberty and its Center for Political Thought and Leadership, with courses emphasizing the country’s political and constitutional history, political philosophies, economic thought, capitalism and free markets.

Class discussions follow the socratic method of teaching where professors ask probing questions to facilitate conversations and challenge ideas. The school also launched its “Civil Discourse”

project, a speaker series featuring guests from different sides of the intellectual and political spectrum to discuss a variety of topics ranging from ideological conformity on campus to race, justice and leadership in America.

“We don’t bring in just conservative, intellectually conservative, constitutionalist speakers,” Carrese said. “We bring in a range of speakers, left and right and center. I do think people who would be seen as conservative ... have come to campus because we’re around. So that’s bringing some intellectual diversity to campus.”

Some have questioned whether the school has actually promoted intellectual diversity or if it’s only pushing a singular viewpoint.

In 2018, former ASU faculty member Matthew Garcia, who served as director of the university’s School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, wrote an op-ed published in The Washington Post that criticized the process that led to the creation of the school and developing a program that would serve as an “alternative” to similar departments while maintaining a conservative bias.

Carrese acknowledged that the criticism still exists, although it’s not as intense as it was when the school opened.

“I think there might be some residual presence of the view back from 2016, 2017 that ... SCETL is not legitimate. It’s a political project. It’s only for conservative thinking, it’s not for healthy intellectual discourse,” he said.

Carrese pointed to increased bipartisan support from lawmakers throughout the years, crediting Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, with continuing funding for the school when she took office. The school has also continued to add degree programs and one of its courses, American Institutions, meets ASU’s general studies requirement.



Professor Will Hay speaks at a Civic Discourse Project lecture to an auditorium of attendees. (Photo courtesy of the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University)

In addition, several universities across the country have launched similar schools in recent years, including the University of Texas at Austin School of Civic Leadership and the University of Florida Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education.

“I think that it really addresses one of the greatest needs in our society today,” said SCETL student Hannah Falvey.

Falvey is set to graduate in May with a bachelor’s degree of Civic and Economic

Thought and Leadership, and received a certificate in philosophy, politics and economics. She credited SCETL with teaching her to respectfully debate and challenge ideas, which she says is a lost skill in society.

“I think if we don’t learn how to have these conversations again, what’s going to happen is ... these questions won’t be asked and the conversations won’t be had,” she said.

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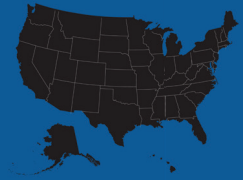
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FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION



Arkansas

TRUMP PICK FOR ISRAEL AMBASSADOR TRIES TO DISTANCE SELF FROM PALESTINIAN RHETORIC

President Donald Trump's nominee to be ambassador to Israel attempted to distance himself from past controversial statements about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people. Mike Huckabee pledged on Capitol Hill to "carry out the president's priorities, not mine." He appeared before a Senate committee as U.S. and Arab mediators struggled to get a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas back on track after Israeli forces resumed the war in Gaza last week with a surprise wave of deadly airstrikes. The Republican former Arkansas governor and self-described Zionist has taken stances on the conflict that sharply contradict long-standing U.S. policy in the region. Democrats and centrist Jewish groups oppose Huckabee's nomination.

California

STATE COULD LOSE A LOT IF TRUMP SLASHES MEDICAID

Almost 15 million Californians have health care coverage through Medi-Cal, a program that stands to lose billions of dollars if Republicans follow through on proposed cuts. Perhaps no state has more to lose than California in the federal budget proposal House Republicans passed this week. That spending plan sets up significant cuts to Medicaid, the health insurance program for low-income people. California has taken just about every route and opportunity to expand the Medicaid program. Today, 14.9 million Californians are enrolled in it, and federal funding cuts would almost certainly roll back services and coverage for some of them.

Florida

DOGE CUTS TESTING SOME CONSERVATIVE VOTERS' FAITH IN SPECIAL ELECTION

PENSACOLA – As the Trump administration forges ahead with its dramatic reshaping of the federal government, voters in a northwest Florida district will be among the first to put the president's agenda to an electoral test. Voters in the state's 1st District are set to decide on April 1 who should take former Rep. Matt Gaetz's seat in Congress. The state's Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis, a Republican endorsed by President Donald Trump, is widely expected to win the special election. But in a long shot bid, Democrat Gay Valimont is seeking to make Trump's push to dismantle the federal government a central focus of her campaign.

Georgia

DEM SENATOR VOWS DEFIANCE TO TRUMP AHEAD OF 2026 ELECTION

ATLANTA – U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff is seeking to rally Democrats desperate for effective action now against President Donald Trump's administration. In a speech before 2,000 people in Atlanta, Ossoff pledged that "Georgia will bow to no king!" Ossoff's campaign tried to play down the idea that Saturday's event was the launch of his 2026 reelection push. But others, including fellow Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock, made that explicit. Ossoff could be the Republicans' No. 1 Democratic target in the 2026 midterm elections.

Idaho

COURT FILINGS OFFER NEW DETAILS IN QUADRUPLE MURDER CASE

A flurry of court documents have been filed this week in the case of Bryan Kohberger, the man charged in the killings of four University of Idaho students in late 2022. New details from the documents show prosecutors intend to introduce evidence of Kohberger's "click history" at Amazon.com showing he purchased a military-style, fixed-blade knife, along with a sheath and sharpener eight months before the killings. A knife sheath of that style was found next to one of the victims. Kohberger's defense has sought to exclude some of the evidence, arguing that certain details could be taken out of context or prejudice the jury.

Kentucky

GOP BILL TO DISMANTLE DEI EFFORTS AT UNIVERSITIES VETOED

FRANKFORT — Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear has vetoed a GOP-backed bill to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at the state's public universities. Beshear said that diversity should be embraced as a strength, and he branded the legislation as being "about hate." Beshear is seen as a potential presidential candidate in 2028. He announced his veto in a social media video. His defense of diversity initiatives comes as Republican President Donald Trump seeks to end government support for programs promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. Kentucky's Republican-supermajority legislature will have a chance to override Beshear's veto.

Colorado

TRUMP'S PORTRAIT COMING DOWN AT STATE CAPITOL AFTER PRESIDENT CALLS IT 'DISTORTED'

DENVER — State officials say a portrait of President Donald Trump hanging at the Colorado state Capitol will be taken down after Trump claimed it was "purposefully distorted." House Democrats said in a statement that the oil painting would be taken down at the request of Republican leaders in the Legislature. Colorado Republicans raised more than \$10,000 to commission the oil painting. In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said he would prefer no picture at all over that one.



A portrait of President Donald Trump hangs on a wall in the rotunda on the third floor of the Colorado Capitol, Monday, March 24, 2025, in Denver. (Helen H. Richardson/The Denver Post via AP)

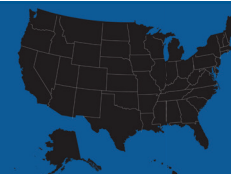
Louisiana

U.S. SUPREME COURT SEEMS DIVIDED OVER CONGRESSIONAL MAP

The Supreme Court seems closely divided over a challenge to Louisiana's congressional map, which added a second Black majority district. Several of the court's conservative justices suggested they could vote to throw out the map and make it harder, if not impossible, to bring redistricting lawsuits under the federal Voting Rights Act. The case involves the interplay between race and politics in drawing political boundaries before a conservative-led court that's been skeptical of considerations of race in public life. Two years ago, the court's 5-4 decision in an Alabama case led to new districts in both states that sent two more Black Democrats to Congress.

FROM OTHER STATES

NEWS OF INTEREST FROM ACROSS THE NATION



Missouri

SOME PUSH BACK ON EFFORTS TO OVERTURN CITIZEN BALLOT INITIATIVES

JEFFERSON CITY – Some state lawmakers are engaged in a tug-of-war for power with the people who elected them. In several states, lawmakers want to undo voter-approved ballot initiatives or make it harder to pass constitutional amendments. Some citizen activists in Missouri are pushing back. They're attempting to build support for a proposed constitutional amendment that would limit lawmakers' ability to limit citizen initiatives. Their efforts come as lawmakers seek to repeal a paid sick leave law approved by voters last fall and reverse parts of an abortion rights amendment that voters also approved. Republican state Rep. Mitch Bogg says businesses must be protected.

Montana

SENATE CAN'T MUSTER VOTES TO PUNISH FORMER PRESIDENT

The Montana Senate has reached a stalemate over whether to expel former leader Jason Ellsworth for ethics violations. Lawmakers failed twice to get the two-thirds majority needed to expel him. They were also unsuccessful at censuring the Hamilton Republican. The Senate Ethics Committee found credible evidence that Ellsworth contracted \$170,100 in government work to a longtime business associate without disclosing their relationship. Ellsworth apologized for the appearance of impropriety, but said he did not violate any rules or laws. The stalemate means a scandal that's dominated Senate politics since the middle of January will continue unresolved, and there's no limit on how many times they can vote on taking possible disciplinary action.

Nebraska

GOP CONGRESSMAN FACES ANGRY CROWD BACK HOME

COLUMBUS – U.S. Rep. Mike Flood of Nebraska appeared at a town hall in eastern Nebraska to hear from constituents. He got an earful. More than 200 people converged on the event, many of them unleashing a chorus of jeers and angry demands for answers over his support for President Donald Trump's policies early into the president's second term. Flood was the latest Republican member of Congress to face backlash at home over actions by Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency to slash government spending. Those actions have sparked fear among the public that popular programs like Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security services and benefits could be cut.

Nevada

HIGH COURT TURNS BACK CASINO MOGUL'S APPEAL IN DEFAMATION LAWSUIT

The U.S. Supreme Court has turned back an appeal from casino mogul Steve Wynn, who had challenged a landmark libel ruling as part of a lawsuit against The Associated Press. The court declined to hear the case without comment. Wynn had sued over a story about sexual misconduct allegations that he has consistently denied. His attorneys had asked the high court to reconsider a 1964 ruling known as *New York Times v. Sullivan*. Wynn said the AP story that cited police documents didn't include details that would have cast doubt on the allegations. The Nevada Supreme Court tossed out the suit, finding the AP had published in good faith.

New Mexico

DEADLY HIT-AND-RUN BRINGS JUVENILE JUSTICE INTO FOCUS

ALBUQUERQUE – Prosecutors in New Mexico's busiest judicial district have been pleading with state lawmakers to amend the children's code to address what they call an unbelievable spike in juvenile crime in Albuquerque. The latest example includes the arrest of an 11-year-old boy in what authorities allege was a deliberate hit-and-run. Authorities say three boys ages 11, 12 and 15 were in a stolen car in May when they killed a man who was biking to work. A video posted on social media led to the arrests. Prosecutors say the youngest boy will face a murder charge. New Mexico is among many states without a minimum age for trying juveniles for serious crimes.

North Dakota

GREENPEACE MUST PAY \$660M OVER PIPELINE PROTESTS, JURY FINDS

MANDAN – A North Dakota jury has found Greenpeace liable for defamation and other claims in connection with protests against an oil pipeline's construction. The jury said that the environmental advocacy group must pay over \$660 million in damages to Dallas-based Energy Transfer and its subsidiary Dakota Access. The companies had alleged defamation, trespass, nuisance, civil conspiracy and other claims against Greenpeace International, Greenpeace USA and Greenpeace Fund Inc. Attorneys for Greenpeace had denied the claims. The case reaches back to protests in 2016 and 2017 against the Dakota Access Pipeline and its Missouri River crossing upstream of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's reservation.

Oregon

DECADELONG CLIMATE LAWSUIT FINALLY ENDS

PORTLAND – The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to hear a petition filed by young climate activists who argued that the federal government's role in climate change violated their constitutional rights. The high court's move effectively ends a yearslong legal battle. The landmark case was filed in Oregon in 2015 by 21 youth plaintiffs. The suit was challenged repeatedly by the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations, whose lawyers argued it sought to direct federal policies through the courts instead of the political process. The plaintiffs were represented by Our Children's Trust, a nonprofit law firm that has filed climate legal actions in every state on behalf of young plaintiffs.

South Dakota

GOVERNOR SIGNS ANTI-TRANS-GENDER BATHROOM BILL

SIOUX FALLS – Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a bill into law that restricts transgender people's use of communal facilities that align with their gender identity in schools and state buildings. The bill also allows people who encounter transgender people in these facilities to seek civil causes of action against the school or state if it did not try to prevent the transgender person from using the facility. This is the first state law in South Dakota restricting transgender people's bathroom access, which was produced by the overwhelmingly conservative state legislature this session. The law goes into effect on July 1.

Texas

JUDGE ALLOWS DRAG SHOW AT UNIVERSITY DESPITE BAN

A federal judge has ruled that a drag show at Texas A & M University can go on as scheduled despite a Board of Regents' effort to ban it. Over the past few years, judges have mostly struck down bans on drag performances across the country, saying policies to bar them violate free speech rights. One exception is a previous case dealing with an A & M branch campus where another judge said two years ago that a university official could stop a performance. This case was different because the university argued that it could lose federal funding by letting the show happen. The judge said it shouldn't.

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Arizona is Now OPEN FOR CHAOS

Arizona politicians have proposed a new law that would give corporate mega-stores millions, while creating headaches for small businesses and customers. How? By fundamentally changing the way credit and debit cards work. This law could:

- Require cash payments for sales tax
- Create costly and confusing operational nightmares and paperwork burdens for small businesses
- Target local banks and credit unions with penalties and compliance challenges their national competitors will not face
- Force the state to use scarce resources to defend legislation that legal experts have declared is preempted by federal law

This untested mandate would create chaos, removing credit cards as the safe, secure and hassle-free way to pay in Arizona.

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