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CSA Briefs Rural Legislators

At the request of House Majority Leader Andy Tobin, CSA briefed several rural legislators regarding issues they will be facing this upcoming session.

Issues mentioned included the total cost of shifts to date, concerns regarding the FY2012 budget deficit, and the inability to shoulder the burden of programs that could possibly be transferred to the counties. Two of these major concerns include possible shifts in ALTCS and state prison responsibilities.

Joining Representative Tobin were Sen. Allen (R-5), Representative-Elect Fann, Representative-Elect Hale (D-2), Representative-Elect Judd (R-25), Representative-Elect Barton (R-5), Senator-Elect Shooter (R-23), Representative Jones (R-24), Representative Pancrazi (D-24), and Representative Pratt (R-23).

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Senate and House Assign Committee Chairs

Senate President-Elect Russell Pearce and House Speaker Kirk Adams have released the committee chairs for the 50th legislature. There will be 17 House committees and 15 Senate committees, resulting in a slight increase from previous years and includes three new Appropriations subcommittees for the Senate.

To view the full list of committees, click [here](#).



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House Sentencing Committee Discusses Reform; Senate Judiciary Chair Promises Block

The House Study Committee On Sentencing met this week to discuss the September 2010 Auditor General Report on the growth of Arizona's prison population.

The report, which detailed four different options to combat the escalating costs of the state prison system, was met with mixed reactions. Additionally, alternatives to imprisonment were given. They included:

- Expanding diversion
- Expanding early-release
- Use of non-prison alternatives such as drug treatment, home arrest, and day reporting centers
- Reducing parole revocation violations

The report goes on to give four options that the state could consider in regards to the burgeoning costs:

- Expand the system at the current rate and ask the Department of Corrections to study state costs when building and operating new prisons compared to privately run prisons.
- Divert nonviolent, low-risk offenders from the prison system and/or reduce time served
- Direct the Department of Corrections to study use and costs of non-prison alternatives for nonviolent, low-risk offenders.
- Expand non-prison alternatives for parole violators.

Representative Ash, who discussed the difficult financial crisis Arizona is facing, highlighted that evaluating the criminal justice system would be beneficial in bringing down costs. As the Auditor General's report stated, mandatory sentencing requirements are one of the reasons for the high prison costs. Reducing sentences, or implementing any of the options in the report, would help control costs.

However, Senator Gould, who was appointed to chair the Senate Judiciary Committee next legislative session, has stated that he would block all sentencing reform bills that go through his committee.

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General Fund Revenue Growth

State general fund revenue grew by 4.1 percent for the first quarter of this fiscal year. Although modest, this was the highest quarterly increase since the third quarter of fiscal year 2007. Most of the growth was associated with strong income tax collections, particularly from corporate tax collections. Corporate income tax collections were up 73 percent compared to this same time last year. Although Sales tax collections declined, this decline was more than offset by the growth in income tax collections.

Because sales tax collections account for almost half of all general fund revenues, the state fiscal condition, barring major public policy changes, will not improve until spending at the retail level increases and construction contracting begins to pick up. Retail and construction contracting account for the majority of sales tax collections.

At this point in the fiscal year, general fund revenues are \$29 million under the state's revenue forecast, which is one of the factors contributing to the estimated \$825 million shortfall for the current fiscal year. Correcting this shortfall is expected to be one of the first priorities of the incoming legislature.

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Calendar

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