

Minutes of the June 7, 2021, Meeting
Indivisible Tucson Action Alliance

The meeting was called to order by Chair, Dana Offerman, at 3:34 p.m.

Dana called on Karen Harris to introduce State Representative Dr. Randy Friese, our first speaker. Dr. Friese represents District 9 in the Arizona legislature, where he serves on the Health and the Judiciary committees. Dr. Friese first commented on what he considered some successes in the legislature:

- a. Proposition 300 was passed in 2006 and prevents state funds from being used for non-residents. Among other things, this means that DREAMERS must pay out-of-state tuition at Arizona's universities, which is approximately 4 times the amount that residents pay. The legislature has placed a measure on the ballot in 2022 which will repeal the part of Proposition 300 that requires DREAMERS to pay out-of-state tuition.
- b. Rep. Friese was able to get a measure to the floor for a vote which would have cancelled concealed weapons permits for convicted felons. He was able to get gun rights advocates to remain neutral on the proposition. While the measure did not get enacted, just getting it to the floor was progress.

He then discussed the proposed flat tax which is part of the budget package. This proposal is an attempt to work around the voter approved proposition which would require a surcharge on the earnings of very rich taxpayers to fund public education. The surcharge only applies to the portion of their income which is over a threshold amount. By adopting the flat tax, those high earners would pay at most 4.5% in income taxes rather than what would be a higher amount if current rates were kept in place. Since the surcharge still has to go to education under the voter approved proposition, the general fund will receive a lot less money. The flat tax will hurt cities and towns as they are allocated a portion of income taxes received, based on their population. Cities and towns were able to raise this percentage from 15% to 17%, but still with general fund money decreasing, the amount allocated to cities and towns will also go down. The current proposal also would take money out of the general fund to make up any shortfall in what cities and towns get for the next two years as compared to 2020-21 fiscal year, but it does not address any period of time after that.

Rep. Friese noted that there are other things that get tucked into the budget bill that may not be part of the budget itself. As an example, he noted that the proposed budget bill now would affect open enrollment. Presently, if you live in a school district, the school district must guarantee that you can go to your neighborhood school before allowing students in other districts to enroll in that school. The present bill on the budget would erase that protection.

Although we have a surplus in the state and have federal money, rather than using this money to fund schools, improve roads and help other social needs, the Republicans want to cut taxes via the flat tax. The proposed budget cuts Arizona revenues by \$1.9 Billion dollars. While the argument is made that when gaming centers open up these revenues will be restored, there is

no way to predict whether this will happen. At present, one Republican representative, Donald Cook, (LD 8, Gila and Pinal counties) has joined the Democrats to refuse to pass this budget.

The House and Senate will go back into session on June 10 to discuss the budget.

Rep. Friese was asked about the audit of the Maricopa County election results ordered by the Republican Senators. He noted that the Senate started it and the Senate can end it. He also mentioned the legislation that specifically keeps Secretary of State Katie Hobbs from being a party in any litigation over the audit, thus keeping her from defending the election results. The legislation will expire as soon as Secretary of State Hobbs' term is up.

In conclusion Rep. Friese thanks Indivisible for all it does.

Dana then asked for new members to introduce themselves. Sharon Miller who has been in Arizona for about 8 years introduced herself.

Karen Harris then introduced Laiken Jordahl from the Center for Biological Diversity who gave a presentation on the impact of the Border Wall on the wildlife and habitat of the border region in Southwest Arizona. There are 200 miles of Border Wall in Arizona. Mr. Jordahl originally worked with the Park Service in Organ Pipe National Monument but moved to the Center so he could more freely express opinions as to the Border Wall's impact on the Organ Pipe area. He gave a slide presentation which showed the impact of the Wall on the land and wildlife in Organ Pipe. Prior to the building of the wall, there were blocks to prevent motorized vehicles from transitioning over the landscape, but wildlife could freely move throughout the area. The wall prevents such movement, thus keeping wildlife from accessing old habitats and from moving in between Mexico and the United States. In addition, many birds cannot fly over the wall. While humans could walk through the previous barriers, they also can easily use rope ladders to climb the wall or can simply knock out parts of the wall to move. The building of the wall also scared some of the pristine landscape, and in building the wall many organ pipe cacti and saguaro were destroyed. The Department of Homeland Security waived all environmental protections to build the wall.

Mr. Jordahl indicated that the destruction of the landscape by the wall construction also disturbs land that is sacred to indigenous people such as the Tohono O'Odham.

There has been a grassroots movement in Arizona to oppose the wall with a number of groups cooperating in these efforts. Some Tohono O'Odham were arrested for protesting. Now that President Biden has come into office, all contracts to construct the wall have been canceled although staging areas for construction remain. A coalition of 70 groups is asking that the land be repaired and restored, that the wall be taken down, and the area be returned to its pre-wall state. They are hoping to get a bill through Congress for these efforts. The coalition wants the Department of the Interior to be in charge of the restoration, rather than the Department of Homeland Security.

Mr. Jordahl was asked about the position of Arizona's Congressional delegation on these issues. He noted that Rep. Grijalva and Rep. Kirkpatrick have been very helpful. Rep. O'Halloran, Senator Kelly and Senator Sinema have not taken positions.

Mr. Jordahl may be reached at ljordahl@biologicaldiversity.org or you can follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/LaikenJordahl>

After thanking Mr. Jordahl for his presentation, the remainder of the meeting proceeded.

Dana announced that there would be an in-person New Members Orientation at 10 a.m. on June 26 at Beth Smith's house. An email will go out to new members. Please contact Sally Simmons if you would like to attend: sallybob75@comcast.net.

Dana then turned to Misty to discuss the DC statehood project. Misty reported that we will get 100 postcards printed by Indivisible which support DC statehood. We can distribute these to US Senators to ask they support DC as the 51st state. The postcards should be taken to the local offices of our Senators during the next recess for Congress which starts June 28. Members should contact Misty to help (mistymellor@gmail.com).

Eileen then talked about a new statewide project, the Accountability Project. The focus of the project is to unseat at least 2 current members of the legislature who are supporting bad legislation. Our group will concentrate on Vince Leach and Bret Roberts. There are four other Accountability Project groups in Arizona.

Each group has four main functions. The first is research, which will research how the representatives have voted on issues, what issues are important to Arizonans (education and mental health are two examples) and how the representatives have voted on those issues. The second function is social media, and the members working on this function will follow the representatives on Face Book and Twitter. The third function is to follow the representative in person, showing up at events at which the representative is appearing and asking question where possible. The last function is to write letters to the editor and op ed pieces.

The Signal texting app will be used statewide as it can be encrypted, and Google docs with information on research and other matters will be shared.

The goal of the project is to reach voters who did not vote last time or who otherwise might be persuaded to vote against Leach and Roberts.

If you want to participate you can contact Eileen at locar3@gmail.com

Jackie reported for the Letters to the Editor team. They will now meet twice a month by Zoom: the second Wednesday of each month from 4-5 and the third Saturday of each month from 10-11. She invited all to join this group, to write letters, edit letters, sign letters others have drafted and to draft comments that can be posted on the Face Book pages and Twitter accounts of selected sites.

Eileen thanked the members of the State Team who have continued to do great work in a trying time. The members continue to make calls to legislators about the budget.

Karen reported that there were about 150 people from various groups at a rally to support the abolition of the filibuster in Congress. Pressure should continue to be placed on Senator Sinema.

Dana called for announcements. Karen noted that she follows Sinema on Twitter and Face Book. Sinema is getting a lot of negative comments because of her stance on the filibuster but does not seem to be changing her mind.

Dana reported that the Finchem recall is getting down to the wire, but at present is short of the signatures it needs. Elizabeth Packard reported that she was able to get a list of neighbors from the Rural Arizona office and this made it easy to collect signatures.

Dana also noted that we have plenty of money in the restricted account. Margo reported that we have around \$26 in the unrestricted account.

Margo asked for authority to open up a checking account for the organization.

Eileen Hollowell moved that Indivisible Tucson Action Alliance authorize the treasurer, Margaret (Margo) Nichols to open up a checking account for the organization. The motion was seconded by Jan Counts. After Dana Offerman called for discussion, there was none. Dana Offerman then called for a vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

Dana then described the Flat Tax postcard project. For this project, members are asked to write a postcard to state Senator David Gowan and to state Representative Regina Cobb, chairs of the legislative appropriations committees, opposing the flat tax. (Sen Gowan, AZ State Senate, 1700 W Washington St., Phoenix Az 85007. Rep Regina Cobb, House of Representatives, AZ Legislature 1700 West Washington St.,Phoenix AZ 85007.)

The postcards are to be mailed on June 8. There are examples of what might be said on our website and Face Book page. You may tell the legislators that the postcard is intended for Governor Ducey as well. In addition, phone calls to legislators opposing the flat tax may be made.

Dana thanked everyone for their continued support.

Dana announced that we normally skip a meeting in July and will do so this year. At present, she has not found a venue that is allowing in-person meetings, so we will continue to meet by Zoom. Our next meeting will be August 2, 2021, at 3:30 p.m. She will communicate by email as to anything important before then.

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The meeting adjourned at 5:02 pm.

