

Winston Churchill once said, “I never worry about action, but only inaction.” Arizona legislative leaders may understand this sentiment, as they work to fill long days with action on a small number of remaining legislative proposals. With only about 100 bills left to consider this year, floor debates on a handful of issues in the House consumed long hours and highlighted partisan divides. The Senate debates were more limited, but with few bills to consider the senators frequently adjourned early in the day.

The House debates were a dramatic start for the newest state legislator, [Ben Toma](#), who was appointed by the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors this week to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of former Representative Phil Lovas. Representative Toma is a real estate broker and former Peoria City Councilman.



Much of the most passionate debate centered on [SB 1042](#), a proposal that would [alter the requirements for teacher certification](#) to allow individuals that have experience in specific areas to teach in Arizona public schools. Supporters – including Governor Doug Ducey – say the bill will allow experts to teach and reduce the teacher shortage across the state; opponents believe the bill will weaken teaching standards, and argue only more funding can attract teachers to address the shortage. The bill passed the House and Senate and the Governor is expected to sign the bill.

Governor Ducey did sign an authorization for [students to use sunscreen](#) products, a [ban on texting](#) for teenage drivers, a restriction on [surprise medical bills](#), a change to the process and requirements for [health regulatory oversight boards](#), and an effort to create more [guidance on dyslexia](#) for parents and teachers. The Superintendent of Public Instruction acted even before the legislation was signed, though, and this week the Arizona Department of Education released a new [Dyslexia Handbook](#).

The Senate voted for the creation of a program to provide grants for schools in rural areas of the state that provide science, technology, engineer, or mathematics ([STEM](#)) education. (The bill does not provide funding for the grants.) Legislators also approved [more billboards](#) in Mohave County, gave preliminary approval to free speech protections for [student journalists](#), and revived [a proposal](#) that would establish a [legislative committee](#) to oversee the actions of the Department of Child Safety, but failed bills to expand [landlord powers](#) over tenants and [reduce the fleet of vehicles](#) for state employees.

It is not yet clear whether the legislature will successfully reach a budget agreement next week, but a Senate committee is scheduled to consider Governor Ducey’s [nominees to the State Board of Education](#) and other education oversight entities.

The dwindling number of bills mean that once a budget deal is approved, the legislative session will quickly adjourn for the year.

Budget Update

House and Senate budget leaders have worked late into the night several times this week as they negotiate the details behind a budget proposal they can send to the Governor. It is not evident how the negotiations are progressing, or when a proposal may be released to the public.

In the absence of a new proposal, legislators, observers, and the media continue to debate existing options. Governor Ducey's proposed investment in high-performing schools drew attention this week when [The Arizona Republic](#) analyzed which schools would qualify for the \$38 million in new funding. Legislators of both parties continued to debate a proposed investment in [state universities](#). And the Superintendent of Public Instruction stirred renewed discussions of education funding this week with her call for [an increase and extension of the state's sales tax](#) for education and teacher raises.

Federal action continues to cast doubt on state programs and resources, as well, as Congress again works on [changes to federal health care policies](#) and debates national budget priorities.

This week, AHCCCS released public responses it received to the state's application for a waiver to exempt Arizona Medicaid programs from federal restrictions on time limits and work requirements for those enrolled in the programs. A [majority](#) of the individuals who responded to AHCCCS' outreach for public opinion on the waiver were critical of the proposed changes. (The public responses are [here](#).)

Governor Shares His Views on Texting Bans

This week, Governor Ducey [signed a ban on texting while driving](#) into law...but don't expect him to extend the ban to all drivers.

The Governor [announced](#) his enactment of [SB 1080](#), which bans texting for newly-licensed drivers, and said there is more that should be done to protect young drivers. His announcement called for a ban that applied to *all* drivers under the age of 18. The Governor warned, however, that he did not support a statutory ban for all drivers in Arizona. "I generally believe that public awareness and education campaigns are a more effective remedy to prevent accidents and save lives than blanket laws," the Governor said. "I am skeptical of large-scale bans on texting while driving – I just don't think they work."

Senator Karen Fann (R-Prescott), who sponsored SB 1080, rejoiced in the enactment of the bill. The legislature has failed to advance texting bans for years, and this year's progress on the issue occurred only after the resignation of a committee chairman who had blocked the bill.

On the Bright Side...

The Department of Public Safety held an event to celebrate Arizona Special Olympics last week, and it was [a huge success](#).