

Both the weather and the electoral dynamics are heating up in Arizona, though it is early in the year and the election cycle. Three Democrats have announced their run for Governor in 2018: Senator [Steve Farley](#) (D-Tucson), [David Garcia](#), and [Noah Dyer](#). January Contreras, who served as an aide to former Governor Janet Napolitano, plans to run against Attorney General Mark Brnovich.

Though the legislature is adjourned, changes to Arizona policy continue. Governor Ducey used his executive order authority to call for additional action against [wrong-way drivers](#) – a growing problem that has caused numerous deaths on Arizona freeways. The action fast-tracked an Arizona Department of Transportation project that will implement a \$3.7 million [thermal-detection system](#) on I-17, designed to detect wrong-way drivers and enhance alerts to authorities and other drivers.

Attorney General Brnovich continues his legal action against a group of attorneys that filed numerous lawsuits regarding compliance with the Arizonans with Disabilities Act, and [a judge recently said](#) those attorneys will be required to testify under oath as the case advances.

Legislators are also signaling the policies they plan to work on throughout the summer. House and Senate leaders [created a new committee](#) to evaluate how digital goods and services are taxed in Arizona. Several members of the committee said state laws on digital taxation are inconsistent and a deterrent to businesses in the state.

A coalition of business leaders have [pledged their support](#) for an extension and expansion of Arizona's sales tax for education. Proposition 301, which set a one-sixth of a cent sales tax rate to generate funding for education, will expire in 2021. These leaders say Arizona needs more revenue to enhance education success. Their proposal would raise the rate to 1.5 cents. Diane Douglas has previously [expressed support](#) for the tax increase, but while Governor Ducey once [signaled](#) he may be interested in *extending* the tax, his office has expressed doubts about the proposal to expand the rate.

Child welfare advocates are calling for state leaders to consider funding for other programs, as well, after a recent report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation said that Arizona [ranks low in child well-being](#). Several factors determined the critical rating, including the number of children in high-poverty areas, access to healthcare, and limited enrollment in early-childhood education.

### **Nation Awaits Details of Federal Healthcare Proposal**

Healthcare changes are, of course, not limited to Arizona. The U.S. Senate Republicans appear poised to move toward approval of [their own changes](#) to federal healthcare funding and policies in the near future, but without details it is unclear how it will impact Arizona's own Medicaid services.

While a healthcare proposal is shaped, state leaders and a wide range of advocacy groups continue to ask U.S. senators to avoid policy changes that will increase state costs or reduce Medicaid services for the millions of Arizonans who rely on them. Medical experts say the rumored provisions of the Senate proposal could drastically cut funding for programs that help low-income Arizonans, children, individuals with disabilities, and those living [outside the urban areas](#) of the state.

### **Governor Makes Changes to Cabinet Positions**

Governor Ducey appointed [Michael Traylor](#) to serve as the new director of the Department of Economic Security. Traylor has led the Department of Housing since 2009. Governor Ducey also named Ty Gray as Director of the Game and Fish Department; Gray will replace Larry Voyles, who is retiring after 43 years at the Department.

### **Fight Against Opioid Abuse Expands**

This summer, the Governor used executive action to make significant changes to the [fight against opioid abuse](#), designating the problem as a public health emergency that broadened the authority he and his agencies have at their disposal. The Governor's action came shortly after the Arizona Department of Health Services (DHS) [released a report](#) highlighting the significance of Arizonans' opioid addictions: there were almost 800 opioid-related deaths in 2016 – up more than 16% over similar deaths in 2015. Heroin-related deaths have also increased. Using the additional authority given by the Governor's order, DHS opened an [operations center](#) to design and coordinate new programs and actions against opioid abuse, and one of Ducey's top aides met with public policy leaders in DC to urge changes to opioid regulations.

The DHS Director also issued including [a standing order](#) for any licensed pharmacist to provide naloxone to any individual who requests it, and established a [new requirement that physicians](#) provide daily reporting on suspected opioid overdoses and deaths, as well as cases of neonatal abstinence syndrome. Ducey and DHS believe it will create better tracking of the problem – a step that officials concede will not solve the problem, but could help inform a solution. The policy change is significant but may not require legislative approval since the Governor believes existing laws on epidemics permit it. As Arizona collects more information, leaders are working closely with other states who also seek solutions through things like new time-release [caps on prescription bottles](#), [alternative pain management options](#), and maybe even [legal action](#) against drug makers.

[Click here](#) for information and resources from DHS.

### **State Rules Change for Stroke Education**

Last week, the Governor's Regulatory Review Council (GRR) signed off on [a proposal](#) to change the way the Arizona Department of Health Services cooperates with other medical entities to offer care and education on how to help individuals who have a stroke. The change was [requested](#) by the legislature in 2015, and both Representative Heather Carter (R-Cave Creek) and Senator Nancy Barto (R-Phoenix) registered support for the rule change. It becomes effective July 1.

Despite the longstanding [moratorium on state rule changes](#), GRR plans to change its own rules for state agency rulemaking to meet state leaders' desire for streamlined and reduced regulations. It will also consider changes to rules that govern the Arizona Department of Economic Security's programs for individuals with developmental disabilities.