

## Arizona State Visit

On February 28, CSG West Director, Edgar Ruiz, and accompanying staff visited the Arizona Legislature to meet with legislative leaders, hear about policy challenges facing the state, and discuss CSG West programming for the year. During the visit, CSG West staff met with the Senate President, Speaker of the House, convened meetings with the legislative majority and minority floor leadership, the Legislative Council Director, Western Legislative Academy (WLA) alumni, and legislators who represent U.S. – Mexico border districts.

The 2019 regular session convened on January 14 and is scheduled to last 100 days. The 54<sup>th</sup> Arizona Legislative session has kept the Capitol occupied until late hours of the day, especially in the House. The final week in February is known as “crossover week,” where bills successfully voted out of their chamber of origin are referred to committees in the opposite chamber. The Arizona House, where Republicans have a two-vote majority (31-29), reviewed over 500 bills, keeping the doors open until 9 p.m. There are many issues facing lawmakers this session. Among them, expanding [vaccine exemptions](#), [death penalty eligibility](#), and an [increase in teacher's salary](#) are being considered. But tax conformity, Tribal Affairs and water took center stage during the week of our state visit.

Arizona Governor Ducey's [tax conformity plan](#) has lawmakers in the House and Senate proposing bills to protect Arizona taxpayers. Either through a tax break reducing tax rates for income brackets by 0.11 percentage points or through “partial conformity,” which offers state and local tax deductions and other measures. With state tax laws in limbo, the Senate voted to give Arizonans an extra two months to file their [income tax returns](#).

The 1922 Colorado River compact granted states legal allocations to water supplies from the river. River flows have been steadily declining since 2000. As a result, federal intervention and a [Drought Contingency Plan](#) have been at the forefront in the legislative agenda. Arizona and California missed the first deadline to join Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Nevada on the Drought Contingency Plan to boost Lake Mead. State lawmakers had passed legislation authorizing Arizona to enter this agreement, followed by Governor Ducey signing the bills for the plan in late January. Still, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman announced, the next day, that California and Arizona did not complete the work by the deadline. It was reported that Arizona has fifteen related agreements and contracts between tribes, water districts, cities and others that need to be finalized. Commissioner Burman stated the plan should come from the states. In the meantime, a parallel federal

process is moving forward which would give full authority to the federal government.

Meanwhile, [House Bill 2476](#) was introduced that would repeal a “[use it or lose it](#)” provision in state law to force a water-right holder to forfeit those rights if they do not use the water for five consecutive years. Subsequently, Tribal Governor Stephen Roe Lewis of the Gila River Indian Community warned lawmakers it would pull out of the Arizona Drought Contingency Plan, claiming it threatened their water rights. Later, the Gila River Indian Community claimed it would provide the promised 500,000 acre-feet of water for the state’s [Drought Contingency Plan](#) after being assured this bill would not pass.

Twenty-two sovereign [American Indian communities](#) currently reside in Arizona. Laws, like the one previously mentioned that directly impact these communities are being considered. The Navajo Nation is the only tribe supporting legislation approved by members of the Senate Appropriation Committee that would allow most tribes to take bets on professional and amateur sporting events at tribal casinos and at [multiple off-site locations](#). Also, the House and Senate have introduced legislation ([HB 2570](#), [SB 1253](#)) to form a study committee that will research [violence against native women](#). Research done by the Urban Indian Health Institute, based out of Seattle, released a comprehensive report in 2018 illustrating Arizona with the third highest number of missing and murdered indigenous women and girl cases.



Addy Jimenez, Sen. Juan Mendez, Sen. Martín Quezada & Edgar Ruiz