



ArkDem

Legislative Update

It's all but official, the 92nd General Assembly of the Arkansas Legislature is about to conclude its business at the state Capitol in Little Rock. The 24 Democrats in the House, and 9 Democrats in the Senate have done some good work, in the face of some tough odds.

DEMOCRATS PLAYED A CRITICAL ROLE IN DEFEATING SOME DANGEROUS LEGISLATION



THE MINIMUM WAGE: Democrats in the Legislature successfully beat back multiple attempts to virtually eliminate the state minimum wage for hundreds of thousands of

workers. Arkansas overwhelmingly voted to raise the minimum wage in 2018, but that didn't stop Republicans in the Arkansas Legislature from trying to undo the will of the people.

Arkansans know the value of hard work and that families ought to be able to support themselves. That's why a real minimum wage is so important.

VOUCHERS: A movement has been afoot to decimate our public school system by turning over your tax dollars to private schools. Democrats were out front and vocal about protecting students from this attack on the very idea of public schools. Rep. John Walker (Little Rock) lent a powerful voice to these battles.

Multiple efforts to erode public schools were held at bay because of Democrats in the Arkansas Legislature.



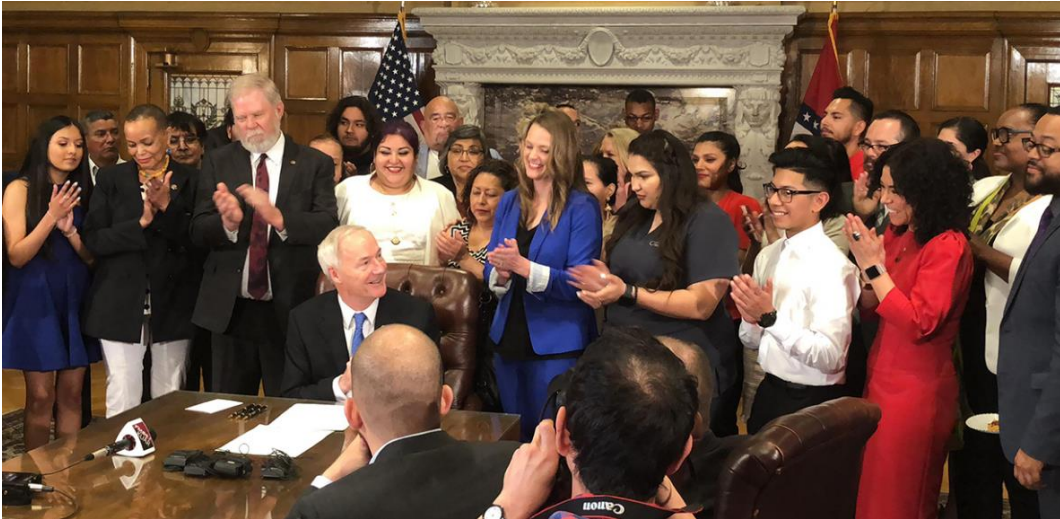
STAND YOUR GROUND: State Senator Stephanie Flowers (Pine Bluff) captured the goodwill of just about the entire nation for her passionate rebuke of a Stand Your Ground bill. Her passion flipped momentum in the state Capitol and helped stop a dangerous firearm bill from becoming law.

Arkansans support gun ownership, and also support common-sense gun laws.

BUFFALO RIVER POLLUTION: The Buffalo National River faced a dire threat because of a bill that would have stripped away protections that have made the Buffalo River one of the most wild and pristine waterways in the world. It could have turned the river into a dumping ground for industrial hog farms.

Arkansas Democrats stood up against the threat to Arkansas's waterways and the Buffalo National River. It's a Democratic tradition.

DEMOCRATS PASSED (LOTS OF) GOOD LAWS



DACA NURSING LICENCES & IN-STATE TUITION: Arkansas Democrats can dream big, and deliver.

- State Senator Joyce Elliott (Little Rock) started working on legislation for DACA recipients in 2003. This year, in this legislative session, the long battle to help Arkansas's immigrant communities paid off. Arkansas took some big steps forward with the passage of freshman state Rep. Megan Godfrey's (Springdale) bill to grant nursing licenses to DACA recipients.
- The nursing bill was signed into law alongside a monumental piece of legislation granting in-state tuition to DACA recipients. Thousands of young immigrants, and all of our communities, now have a brighter future, that rewards education and hardwork.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE: Democrats made strides in tackling the problems with Arkansas's criminal justice system, and standing up for people and families.

- Rep. Tippi McCullough (Little Rock) passed not one, not two, but *three* critical bills addressing **domestic violence**. HB1379 strengthens penalties for attacks that cause disfigurement and strengthens other penalties based on age; HB1380 requires communication between a victim of domestic violence and an advocate to be privileged communication; and HB1403 adds an enhanced sentence when certain crimes are committed in the presence of a child.

- Rep. Jamie Scott (North Little Rock) passed legislation to protect minors forced into **human trafficking** and prostitution from facing criminal charges.
- Sen. Joyce Elliott (Little Rock) and Rep. Scott teamed up to limit **solitary confinement for juveniles** to 24 hours.
- Sen. Greg Leding (Fayetteville) and Rep. Nicole Clowney (Fayetteville) increased **penalties for violating an order of protection**;
- Rep. Vivian Flowers (Pine Bluff) passed legislation to help end **child marriages**, by increasing the age to 17 and getting rid of exceptions for pregnancy that had been used as a shield for criminal behavior.
- Rep. Fred Love (Little Rock) **increased penalties for crimes committed in an area of worship**.
- House Minority Whip LeAnne Burch (Monticello) created “**Jacob’s Law**,” related to DWI’s and all-terrain vehicles. The retired Brigadier General also successfully championed several laws related to foster care and the well being of children.
- Rep. Milton Nicks, a retired state State Police officer, helped call-out a bill that would have cut \$1.4 million from **the State Police training academy**. The loss of revenue, later replaced, was the result of a bill reducing concealed carry fees.
- Rep. Andrew Collins (Little Rock) successfully passed a bill that requires all new law enforcement hires to go through **training to recognize overdoses and administer Narcan**.

EDUCATION & CHILDREN: Democrats fought hard for public schools during this session, beat back back some bad bills, and made some real strides

- Sen. Linda Chesterfield (Little Rock) guaranteed continued funding for **Historically Black Colleges and Universities**;
- A new law by Sen. Joyce Elliott (Little Rock) **bans corporal punishment for special needs children**.
- Democrats supported **increased teacher salaries**, though they need to be even higher.
- Freshman lawmaker Don Glover (Dermott) helped pass legislation to ensure that the state continues to provide access to **educational opportunities for expelled students**.

- Sen. Elliott, along with state Rep. Jamie Scott (North Little Rock), passed a pair of bills to address **dyslexia**. SB664 requires dyslexia screening and reading assessment within 30 days of commitment to the Department of Corrections, while SB677 requires the same of the Division of Youth Services educational system.
- Rep. Fred Allen (Little Rock) created the **Academic Support Scholarship**, a \$250 award for support with college preparation costs such as tutoring, assessment fees, educational materials, and technology fees.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Democrats pushed hard on economic development – with an emphasis on making sure all of our 75 counties prosper, not just the same dozen or so that seem to always benefit.

- Several bills helped push the envelope on **solar energy** in Arkansas. Democrats joined together to pass SB145, which allows a person or a business to lease a solar-energy system, rather than having to own it. The new law also will increase the size limit of solar arrays, and adds protections for customers against future rate increases. Rep. Fred Love (Little Rock) led the charge on HB1728, which adds solar energy generation equipment to the public improvements procurement procedure for a municipality or associated water system.
- **Agriculture** dominates Arkansas’s economy, and is the lifeblood of most of our counties. Access to **veterinary care for livestock** is a top concern for many Arkansans, and the state of access is getting to a critical level. Thankfully, state Senator Bruce Maloch (Magnolia) successfully herded HB1124 into law. The new act will create vet tech specialist and vet technologist certifications, creating a position similar to an advanced practice nurse for veterinary services.
- Senate Minority Leader Keith Ingram (West Memphis) sponsored legislation to expand **opportunity zones** throughout Arkansas.
- Rep. Vivian Flowers (Pine Bluff) and Sen. Eddie Cheatham (Crossett) created the **Delta Music Commission** and **Delta Music Trail** to foster tourism and cultural enrichment.
- Sen. Larry Teague (Nashville) passed a law to designate Washington, Arkansas as the Birthplace of the Bowie Knife, and to commemorate it as an Arkansas Heritage Site.
- Rep. Jay Richardson (Fort Smith) provided an important jolt to **commercial barge traffic along Arkansas’s waterways**. SB453 was signed into law; it directs a portion of taxes and penalties collected from water transportation companies to the Arkansas Waterways Commission to develop, improve, and expand water transportation resources on Arkansas’ portion of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System.

- Rep. David Fielding (Magnolia) along with Sen. Bruce Maloch (Magnolia) created the **Camden Expedition Scenic Highway** to help tourism related to Civil War history. The Camden Expedition Scenic Highway guides a Civil War tourist through southern and central Arkansas connecting five battlefields and other Civil War historic sites.

ETHICS: More than a half-dozen former lawmakers have been the subject of federal investigations in the past few years. Creating the rules for a more ethical government, that is held accountable is a top priority for Democratic lawmakers.

- Sen. Keith Ingram (West Memphis) sponsored a prohibition on state officials serving as **lobbyists**.
- Sen. Will Bond (Little Rock) passed legislation to increase penalties for using **campaign funds as personal income**.

CIVIL RIGHTS: Arkansas history is defined by the struggles – and great accomplishments – of our Civil Rights heroes. Arkansas lawmakers honored that legacy.

- Rep. Fred Allen (Little Rock) passed a new law to make sure our children learn, and can be inspired by, Arkansas's Civil Rights icons. Allen's bill specifies that materials and resources required for **teaching African-American history in public schools** include Arkansas civil rights leaders and events during the civil rights era. The bill originally included a nod to Rep. Walker, who has been a titan for Civil Rights in Arkansas since graduating Yale Law School in the 1960s. Walker declined the honor, feeling it out of place for a sitting state Representative to be explicitly named.
- Rep. Monte Hodges (Blytheville) brought attention to a tragedy that has long gone overlooked in Arkansas. He passed a resolution in remembrance of the **fatal fire in 1959 at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School in Wrightsville**, outside of Little Rock. The fire killed 21 boys who were locked in a dormitory, many of them were buried in a mass grave.
- Nearly every Arkansan knows about the heroism of the Little Rock Nine, but just across the river in North Little Rock, six young African-American students underwent a similar trial. Rep. Jamie Scott (North Little Rock) honored the **North Little Rock Six** with a resolution. This brave group of students attempted to integrate North Little Rock High School in September of 1957, just days after the Little Rock Nine began their historic struggle.

HEALTHCARE: Healthcare continues to be a top concern across the board, and a lot of good work was accomplished.

- Rep. Nicole Clowney (Fayetteville) passed powerful legislation to provide meaningful **cancer sick leave benefits for firefighters, called “Crump’s Law.”**
- Rep. Deborah Ferguson (West Memphis) established a **maternal mortality review commission.**
- Democratic members helped back legislation for the **UAMS National Cancer Institute Designation Trust Fund.**
- Rep. Andrew Collins (Little Rock) expanded **access to tobacco cessation treatments.**
- Rep. Steve Magie (Conway) passed a bill **authorizing pharmacists to substitute interchangeable biological products**, provided that doing so will be a cost savings for the patient.
- Rep. David Whitaker (Fayetteville) passed legislation giving a person obtaining a hunting or fishing license online the option of indicating an interest in **organ donation** to receive related information.
- Rep. Mark Perry (Jacksonville) established a **requirement that EMT’s maintain national certification.**

WE STARTED SOME IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS



Without the presence of Democrats in the Legislature, a multitude of voices would not have been represented at the state Capitol or in the media. While not everything we wanted became law, Democrats forced some powerful conversations that will pay dividends in the years to come.

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT & EQUAL PAY:

- Sen. Joyce Elliott (Little Rock) galvanized Democrats by standing up for the adoption of the **Equal Rights Amendment**. If it had passed, Arkansas would have played the historic role of being the final needed state to ratify the ERA and enshrine women's rights in the U.S. Constitution.
- Freshman Rep. Tippi McCullough (Little Rock) championed the cause of **equal pay**. She introduced legislation highlighting disparities in pay on National Equal Pay Day.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE//FIREARMS//CRIMINAL JUSTICE:

- Rep. Nicole Clowney (Fayetteville) championed a pair of bills to protect victims of domestic violence. One bill would have allowed **victims of domestic violence to break a lease** shared with their abuser, while another would have **restricted an abuser from possessing a firearm**. Both garnered some bi-partisan support.
- Fellow freshman Rep. Denise Garner (Fayetteville) introduced a trio of powerful bills to bring about real gun-sense legislation in Arkansas, including a strong measure to **repeal the new campus carry law**. Garner's other bills would have introduced **holstering requirements** and expanded **background checks**.
- Rep. Monte Hodges (Blytheville) began work on several efforts, likely to appear again during interim committee meetings and studies. Hodges launched efforts to reduce certain **sentencing classifications related to drug possession**, and began important conversations about **"banning the box"** for people who have previously committed felonies who are looking for work.
- Rep. Jay Richardson (Fort Smith) is getting the ball rolling on **eliminating fees associated with court fines** being paid in installments. How much money someone has shouldn't determine the type of justice they receive. Rep. Richardson is leading on this issue, and has legislation (HB1749) pending in interim study during the next several months.
- A bill by House Minority Leader Charles Blake (Little Rock) started a conversation that has been absent in Arkansas, but is growing traction across the nation, to **decriminalize small amounts of marijuana**.

CIVIL RIGHTS:

- There are very few places in the world where a human being can be forced to labor without any compensation, Arkansas prisons are one of those few remaining places. Rep. Vivian Flowers (Pine Bluff) launched a bold campaign to end **prison slavery** in Arkansas.
- Rep. Charles Blake (Little Rock) displayed leadership throughout the session. The House Minority Leader introduced legislation to **remove the symbolic commemoration of the Confederacy in the Arkansas state flag**. It would have re-designated the meaning of one of the four blue stars on the flag, to instead commemorate the role of Native Americans in the state. The bill gained national acclaim, but ultimately stalled in committee, However, it promises to have new life in the next legislative session. Rep. Blake's proposal has since gained steam with the governor and several members of the other party.

TAXES & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Arkansans value work, and our tax relief should value working people. Republicans supported a \$97 million tax give away to the richest one percent. Democrats presented a better option, in the form of an **Earned Income Tax Credit** for working people. Rep. Tippi McCullough (Little Rock) along with Rep. Charles Blake (Little Rock) introduced legislation for an EITC, rather than supporting a tax giveaway to those making more than \$456k a year.

The choice for voters in 2020 is clear: Democrats want to give working people tax relief, Republicans want to give your tax dollars to the wealthy.

- Rep. Kenneth Ferguson (Pine Bluff) has started work on creating a multi-county economic development grant program. The funds would be directed toward **rural economic development**, through the Rural Services Division of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. The legislation is headed to interim study.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

- The state Board of Education doesn't have a plan for **school districts under state control**, and children and parents are suffering as a result. Parents should never lose their voice in their children's schools, but four years ago the State Board of Education took away the say of parents in the Little Rock School District, dissolved the democratically elected school board, and began closing down public schools while expanding charter schools.

Democrats presented a real plan to return local control, and engaged grassroots community activism. That work is continuing to shape the ongoing battle over public schools.

HEALTHCARE:

- More than **18,000 Arkansans were thrown off their healthcare** because of a Medicaid reporting requirement that has been thrown out by a federal judge. Arkansas Democrats, led by Rep. Reginald Murdock (Marianna) and Rep. Andrew Collins (Little Rock) took charge immediately, and filed legislation to restore coverage to these Arkansans.

The governor wanted to sweep this under the rug, but Democrats successfully brought the issue to the top of the conversation. This issue continues to play out as backers of the illegal reporting requirement seek appeal in court.

- Rep. Chris Richey (Helena-West Helena) introduced a bill to create the Community Health Worker Act, to certify **community health workers** to provide services in literacy, research initiatives, environmental assessments, and basic health care services.

These are just a few of the many, many good bills – and good votes – cast by Democratic lawmakers during the 92nd General Assembly. There is also a long list of harmful bills that passed despite Democratic votes.

It's critical that voters and potential candidates get informed about the actions and votes that occurred during the Legislative session at the State Capitol in Little Rock. Arkansas Democrats have an impressive track record of valuing work and putting people and families first. Let's make sure voters know it!

Make sure to stay engaged, be active on social media, write a letter to the editor, and support your Democratic Party!