



GRAND
Democrats

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GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

May 28, 2025

6:15 – 8:05 pm

Call to Order

President Bob Walling called the meeting to order with the recitation of *The Pledge of Allegiance*.

Business Meeting

- The *Minutes* of the April General Meeting were approved as posted on the website.
- The *Treasurer's Report* for April was approved as emailed to members.
- See Bob if you would like to volunteer as a partner for the CHAPS Vacation Watch of vacant houses or the Evening Patrol. This is a two-hour commitment in a CAM vehicle.
- LD29 is hoping to raise \$2500 selling tickets to a private showing of *Mission Impossible: The Final Reckoning* at Harkins: Estrella Falls, Goodyear on June 12th at 5:30 pm. There are 100 seats at \$25 each. Tickets can be purchased on Act Blue.
- LD29 will continue to meet this summer on the 3rd Wednesday of the month.
- The Banned Books Club is reading *1984* for the June 5th meeting. There are still spots available so see Suzi Walling or sign up on the website.
- There is online training for PC's on Thursday, May 29 at 6 pm. We still need PC's for Granite Falls and Grand precincts.
- Petitions
 - ▶ Visit the table in the back to pick up ROAR *Petitions for the Recall of Arizona Representative Steve Montenegro* as well as to return and get notarized any that are already complete.
 - ▶ *A Government That Works for the Good of All Americans* is a Change.org petition authored by our own Grand Dems member Teresa Peters.
 - ▶ Bernadette Green Placentia, Candidate for Congress in CD8, will have nominating petitions available to sign for the opportunity to run against Abe Hamadeh. Remember, you can only sign one candidate petition per individual office in an election cycle.
- Bob paid tribute to Sherry Douglas who led the Elections Committee through 2024 and has issued weekly Advocacy Calls to over 100 volunteers since the Inauguration. She

gave thanks to the wonderful people who have supported her efforts here and who will continue this important work.

Program

Jen Senatore is the Community Action Coordinator for Save Our Schools.

Founded by just six teachers in 2018, it has grown into a movement of 20,000 advocates for public education. They are local groups organized around issues that matter to them locally...quality, well-resourced classrooms, neighborhood schools, adequate salaries, security and staffing. In spite of the statistics that show Arizona is 49th in its per-pupil support of education, good things are happening in our public schools every day. Superior schools enhance property values, their sports and performance events boost civic morale, their graduates make good citizens and productive workers.

The **Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA) Voucher** program began as support for children with developmental disabilities who needed therapies and services not provided by the public schools. In 2022, Arizona legislators turned it into a universal program that would give any student 90% of the per-pupil amount that would have been given to a public or charter school. The state keeps the additional 10%!

The money can be spent on almost anything including supplies, trips and tuition for camp or future college, with unspent money rolled over to the next year. State Superintendent Tom Horne responded to concerns about fake students and huge amounts being spent on Amazon and at other retailers by saying that vouchers less than \$2000 would not be questioned!

Neither the home-schooled students nor the private schools must report on student outcomes with grades, tests or graduation statistics nor are there requirements for teacher training or curriculum. The families most likely to use the vouchers can afford to pay the difference between the voucher and the cost of private schooling and live in areas where there are educational options.

Every voucher represents a loss of money to the public schools. Statewide, schools are being closed, staff reduced and transportation curtailed as districts cope with these losses. It has created a state budget crisis with the cost of the program to taxpayers equal to about half of the current state deficit.

Nationally, Congress is considering a voucher program modeled after the one in Arizona. This is in line with the object stated in *Project 2025* to dismantle the Department of Education, defund public schools by rerouting money to private education, and eliminate the federal civil rights protections that children have in public schools.

Our job is to stay informed, lobby our representatives, turn out for protests, and support the schools in every way possible if we want to save public education in America. There are 24 Dysart District public schools and 11 charter schools in Surprise. Between them, they educate 99% of the city's students. About 20% of Arizona's students attend charter schools which are managed privately by the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools or by universities rather than by an elected school board. They are funded publicly by the state at the same per pupil rate as the public schools plus additional assistance since they cannot

raise money by taxation. Charter schools have fewer restrictions than district schools but do have to report academic outcomes and test scores.

There are 28 private schools in Surprise. According to the SOS website, 2256 private schooling vouchers have drained \$22,571,000 from the Dysart School District, of which 83% went to students who already attended private schools. Now Dysart is proposing a second vote on the capital improvements bond issue that was defeated in the last election.

Brent Peak is co-Chair of Northwest Indivisible, one of 30 Indivisible groups in Arizona. The Indivisible Movement began in 2016 after the election of Donald Trump and the publication of *Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda* by former Congressional staffers Ezra Levin and Leah Greenberg who now lead the coalition of some 3,800 groups across the country. Brent is a Phoenix therapist and former Republican who became a Democrat in 2015 and, after a period of despair following Trump's re-election, became active in the campaign to make Abe Hamedeh accountable to the electorate by holding open meetings. Hamedeh refused to meet with them and the group's protests outside his local office were met aggressively with prohibitions against parking in their lot and calls to the police to keep them off the property. One woman's car was towed and eventually counter-protesters began to show up. Things remained friendly, but there was competition for space and little progress in influencing Hamedeh. The protests at Tesla may have been more successful as Elon Musk just announced he is leaving Washington to return to his company.

In April, Indivisible was a sponsor of the HANDS OFF rally that brought some 3 million Americans into the streets protesting against Trump's immigration policies and disregard of due process. On June 14th, Brent hopes there will be 5 million out for their NO KINGS demonstration to counter Trump's and the Army's big Birthday Parade in Washington, D.C.! Bring a chair and be comfortable or just drive by in your car and wave signs. It all counts.

Will it make a difference? In their book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan analyzed 323 political and social movements that challenged repressive regimes from 1900 to 2006. Such mass demonstrations are so visible, they found, that no one can ignore them and no democracy movement ever failed when it was able to mobilize 3.5% of the population to protest over a sustained period. In the U.S., that means our goal is 11.9 million people! Brent is hopeful that a national teachers' strike would put us over that number.

Adjournment

The meeting concluded with drawings for the 50/50 and Wine raffles. Our next general meeting will be September 24th featuring Adrian Fontes.

Respectfully submitted,
Carole Parnell, Secretary