

# Year in Review 2014: Top 20 Arizona news stories

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A look back at 20 of the top stories from Arizona during 2014.



(Photo: Photos by The Republic)

Arizona had no shortage of big news in 2014, including high-profile scandals, record-setting weather and political and economic upheaval.

Here is a look at 20 of the top stories from around the state during the past year:

## **20. Super Bowl XLIX preparation (/sports/nfl-super-bowl/)**

The Arizona Super Bowl Host Committee began planning this past spring for the 2015 game that will be played Feb. 1 at the University of Phoenix Stadium. The committee has been working to raise about \$30 million in contributions from Valley cities and corporations to pay the costs of hosting the NFL championship game.

Unlike the 2008 Super Bowl, Glendale will only host the game and pregame festivities.

Super Bowl Central, a football-themed street festival, will be in a 12-block area of downtown Phoenix from Jan. 28 to Feb. 1. The NFL Experience, a football-skills event, will be at the Phoenix Convention Center.

Glendale expects to spend about \$2 million in public-safety costs hosting Super Bowl XLIX.

## **19. Wrong-way drivers (/story/news/local/phoenix/2014/06/25/phoenix-wrong-way-drivers-adot-signs-abrk/11361437/)**

Wrong-way motorists caused multiple collisions on Valley freeways this past year.

Authorities said the string of incidents was rooted in a persistent, broader issue that has plagued roadways for years: All of the wrong-way drivers appeared to have been under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

As the Arizona Department of Transportation and the Arizona Department of Public Safety continued to roll out efforts to curb the problem, including installing larger signs, officials stress that there is no quick solution, and community efforts against drinking and driving are crucial.

## **18. Shanesha Taylor arrest (/story/news/local/scottsdale/2014/11/19/records-shanesha-taylor-spent-about-4k-a-month/19269669/)**

On March 21, Shanesha Taylor was arrested for leaving her children unattended in her vehicle while she went into a Scottsdale office for a job interview. The arrest and viral circulation of her tearful booking mug provoked an outpouring of support for the woman, as some 4,000 supporters raised about \$114,000 for her defense.

Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery later agreed to drop the child-abuse charges if Taylor agreed to use much of the money to fund trusts for her children.

However, Taylor later found herself in court for failing to fund the trusts as promised, prompting the county attorney to reconsider. Records showed she had been spending some \$4,000 a month on expenses.

## **17. Mesa Apple plant closes, lays off 700 (/story/money/business/2014/10/21/apple-supplier-gt-wins-approval-close-mesa-factory/17689971/)**

GT Advanced Technologies, the Apple supplier of sapphire glass, filed for bankruptcy in October and announced plans to permanently shutter its glass factory in Mesa, eliminating more than 700 jobs.

The plant was originally built by First Solar and purchased by Apple last year. GT made scratch-resistant sapphire material used to cover camera lenses on Apple devices and for the fingerprint-scanning "home button" on the iPhone.

## **16. Gun instructor killed with Uzi (/story/news/local/arizona/2014/09/02/uzi-girl-killed-instructor-report/14967189/)**

Gun instructor Charles Vacca, 39, was killed at the Last Stop outdoor shooting range in White Hills in August after a 9-year-old he was instructing lost control of an Uzi. The girl told her mother immediately afterward that the gun was too powerful for her and that it had hurt her shoulder, according to a Mohave County Sheriff's Office report.

The accident sparked debate about whether young children should be permitted to fire automatic weapons at a gun range.

## **15. Gilbert dog deaths (/story/news/local/gilbert/2014/10/15/gilbert-green-acre-dog-death-charges-brk/17328499/)**

The deaths of more than 20 dogs at the Green Acre Dog Boarding kennel in June broke the hearts of their owners and animal lovers.

The tragedy at the kennel near Gilbert culminated in a civil suit and felony charges against the kennel's owners, the caretakers on duty and calls for more regulation of kennels.

Owners Jesse Todd Hughes and MaLeisa Hughes and caretakers Logan Flake and Austin Flake face charges of cruelty to animals. The kennel owners, accused of both animal abuse and fraud, are appealing to the public to raise \$50,000 for their defense.

## **14. Jodi Arias penalty retrial (/topic/0487871B-18D9-4857-92BC-DF99305E6AE7/)**

Jodi Arias last year was convicted of first-degree murder in the 2008 killing of Mesa resident Travis Alexander, but the jury could not agree on whether she should face the death penalty.

A new jury was assembled in October to reconsider that question, and the trial has once again sparked high drama and controversy.

Arias shot her lover, Alexander, in the head, stabbed him nearly 30 times and slit his throat.

## **13. Phoenix priest shooting (/story/news/local/phoenix/2014/06/13/grief-disbelief-valley-attack-priests/10410207/)**

In June, a 54-year-old transient recently released from jail broke into a church and assaulted two priests, critically wounding one and killing the other, authorities said.

Police said Gary Michael Moran broke into Mater Misericordiae (Mother of Mercy) Mission, 137 W. Monroe St., near the state Capitol, and assaulted Father Joseph Terra with a metal pipe.

Terra, who attempted to stop the attack, pulled out a handgun. Moran managed to wrestle it away from him and shot and killed 28-year-old Father Kenneth Walker, according to records.

Moran, who was on parole at the time of the attack, was indicted two weeks later on seven felony charges, including first-degree murder, aggravated assault, burglary and kidnapping.

## **12. PetSmart sold for \$8.7 billion (/story/money/business/2014/12/15/petsmarts-share-prices-rise-acquisition-announcement/20450191/)**

PetSmart, Arizona's fourth-largest company, announced its sale to a private-equity firm for \$8.7 billion.

The pet supplies retailer, feeling pressure in the increasingly competitive market for pet food and services, was bought by London-based BC Partners in a deal announced Dec. 14.

The new owners could chart a different direction for a retailer that counts thousands of Arizona employees and tens of thousands of customers.

## **11. Pension reform (/story/news/local/phoenix/2014/11/04/phoenix-voters-decide-fate-city-pension-system/18459487/)**

Phoenix voters in November rejected a ballot measure that would have closed the city of Phoenix's pension system and replaced it with a 401(k)-style retirement plan for new employees.

The outcome was a major victory for city labor unions, who argued Proposition 487 would hurt public workers and cost taxpayers more over the next 20 years. Residents put the initiative on the ballot. City leaders on both sides of Prop. 487 said Phoenix still has work to do to address soaring pension costs that add to its budget shortfalls, setting the table for a debate over alternative reforms in the coming months.

Meanwhile, Jim Hacking, administrator of the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System, a statewide pension trust that includes city police and firefighters, was forced to resign in July after The Arizona Republic revealed that he had authorized pay raises (/topic/14f8736a-2d19-4842-8ce0-b9f493cc5bc8/public-pensions/) for some staff without proper state approval. Hacking's departure came in the midst of ongoing legal turmoil at PSPRS and a federal investigation of certain investment activities.

In late November, the U.S. Attorney's Office announced that it had cleared PSPRS of any wrongdoing, but the trust continues to battle several former employees in court.

## **10. Solar slows in Arizona**



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(<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix-year-review-phoenix-mesa-scottsdale-glendale-top-stories/19818987/>)
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(<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/glendale-in-review-2014-top-west-valley/19489111/>)



## **(/story/money/business/2014/11/17/huge-solar-plant-lags-early-production/19191601/)**

After a period of explosive growth, the industry that Arizona helped pioneer is slowing as utility regulators grapple with how much of a premium energy customers should pay to implement solar and other renewables.

The U.S. solar market was expected to grow by one-third in 2014 compared with 2013. But the forecast for Arizona is cloudier. For the first time in several years, no large solar plants are under construction in the state, and the number of rooftop-solar installations is down year over year, particularly for businesses.

## **9. Storm of the century (/story/news/local/phoenix/2014/09/08/phoenix-flooding-monsoon-monday-abrk/15272279/)**

Arizona was unprepared for record-breaking rainfall this monsoon. The National Weather Service in Phoenix said Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport gauged about 3.3 inches of rain on Sept. 8. The previous rainfall record for a single day was 2.91 inches on Sept. 4, 1939.

Heavy rainfall caused road and school closures, power outages and flooding around the Valley. It prompted Gov. Jan Brewer to declare a statewide emergency.

## **8. Obama's executive action on immigration**

**(/story/news/politics/immigration/2014/11/20/obama-immigration-reforms-faq/70026000/)**

President Barack Obama followed through in late November on a long-standing promise to use his executive powers to bypass a gridlocked Congress on immigration, drawing an outpouring of emotion from millions of immigrants who will now be able to live and work legally in the United States without fear of deportation.

Under steps Obama announced in a 15-minute, prime-time television address, as many as 5 million undocumented immigrants, out of the estimated 11 million in the country illegally, will be eligible to apply for deportation deferments as well as work permits.

The most significant change is a new temporary program that will apply to undocumented immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for at least five years and have a child who is a U.S. citizen or legal resident. They won't be able to get permanent residency, citizenship or welfare benefits such as food stamps. About 97,000 undocumented parents in Arizona will be eligible.

Arizona has since joined with more than 20 other states in a federal lawsuit (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/12/04/brewer-joins-states-fighting-obamas-immigration-action/19918273/) challenging the president's action.

## **7. Senate Bill 1062 (/story/news/politics/2014/03/09/arizona-religious-freedom-law-debate-milestone/6226277/)**

The bill, introduced at the Arizona Legislature in February, would have offered a legal defense for individuals and businesses facing discrimination lawsuits if they could have proved they acted upon a "sincerely held religious belief." The legislation, written by the conservative advocacy group Center for Arizona Policy and the Christian legal organization Alliance Defending Freedom, ignited an international backlash and once again thrust Arizona into an unwelcome national spotlight.

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer ultimately silenced the outcry over S.B. 1062, which was described by opponents as being potentially discriminatory to gays and lesbians, with a veto announced during a rare news conference in the rotunda outside her office. But not before days of protests, threatened boycotts and hand-wringing by some in the business community over its potential economic impact.

"Senate Bill 1062 ... could divide Arizona in ways we cannot even imagine and no one would ever want," she told the room packed with journalists from around the country. "Let's turn the ugliness of the debate over Senate Bill 1062 into a renewed search for greater respect and understanding among all Arizonans and Americans."

## **6. Execution of Joseph Rudolph Wood (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/07/24/arizona-execution-joseph-wood-eyewitness/13083637/)**

The execution of Arizona inmate Joseph Rudolph Wood made national headlines in July. An Arizona Republic reporter who witnessed the execution said Woods gasped 640 times over nearly two hours before he died. Most executions by lethal injection take about 10 minutes.

Wood's execution took so long that his attorneys had time to call a federal judge and conduct a telephone hearing as the execution dragged on. Arizona used a controversial cocktail of the drugs midazolam and hydromorphone to kill Wood.

Records later revealed that the medical team injected Wood with 15 supposedly lethal doses (/story/news/local/arizona/2014/09/18/joseph-wood-arizona-execution-lawsuit/15852841/) before he finally died. So, instead of 50 mg of each drug, Wood was injected with 750mg of each drug in injections that were administered in about 3- to 10-minute intervals.

## **5. Arizona state budget and public-schools funding crisis (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/10/27/arizona-school-education-funding-goes-trial/17986415/)**

State officials announced in October that the state could run a budget deficit of \$520 million this year, (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/10/07/arizona-financial-picture-dims/16891941/) and \$1 billion the following year. The primary reasons: Arizona's sluggish economy has produced lower-than-expected tax revenue and the impact of a long-running lawsuit challenging state funding for schools.

The state Supreme Court ruled the Legislature is required to account for inflation costs as required by 2000's Proposition 301. Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Katherine Cooper ruled the state must boost funding to public and charter K-12 schools by more than \$300 million a year, beginning this fiscal year.

In October, arguments began on whether the state owes an additional \$1.3 billion for retroactive inflation costs.

#### **4. Pipeline of children: An immigration crisis (/longform/news/politics/immigration/2014/07/10/immigrant-children-border-kids-pipeline/12410517/)**

Gang violence, extortion and consuming poverty in Central America drove more than 200,000 people - many women and minor children - to flee toward the U.S. in 2014. In June, President Barack Obama called the immigration flood an "urgent humanitarian situation" and pledged more than \$255 million in new aid to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

At the time, unaccompanied children apprehended while crossing into the U.S. in Texas were being dropped by the busload in Arizona, often with no food, no way to find shelter and few personal belongings. The flood of migrants has now slowed to a trickle, but a special Republic report found that challenges remain. Many who were deported back to their crime-ridden home countries simply vanish without a trace. Those who remain in the U.S. are in limbo.

But despite public promises made last June at the height of the crisis, the U.S. and Central American governments have done little to address the gang violence, extortion and poverty.

#### **3. 2014 midterm elections (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/11/05/new-republican-generation-charge-state-government/18520905/)**

In November, Republicans, riding a wave of anti-Obama sentiment, regained control of the U.S. Senate and swept statewide offices in Arizona. Political observers say Gov.-elect Doug Ducey, Secretary of State-elect Michele Reagan, Attorney General-elect Mark Brnovich and Treasurer-elect Jeff DeWit represent a new generation of younger Republican leaders.

Arizona bucked the Republican trend in Congressional races, as Democratic Reps. Kyrsten Sinema and Ann Kirkpatrick won re-election, while Rep. Ron Barber, D-Ariz, apparently lost to Republican Martha McSally, though the outcome was being challenged.

Republicans Tom Forese and Doug Little won the race for two seats on the Arizona Corporation Commission, which regulates public utilities. And Diane Douglas, the conservative critic of the national education standards known as Common Core, won despite opposition from many in the business community and the Republican establishment.

Spending by outside groups was the other big election story. (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/08/26/outside-money-fuels-shadow-campaigns/14597309/) It totaled \$27.3 million in state and legislative races, eclipsing candidate spending in many races. Because of this spending, 2014 featured four of Arizona's 10 most expensive races since 1990. Ducey was the biggest beneficiary, attracting \$8.2 million in outside money that either directly supported him or worked to defeat his opponent, Democrat Fred DuVal.

#### **2. Gay marriage legal in Arizona (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/10/17/arizona-gay-marriage-ruling/17431229/)**

In October, Arizona joined the historic tide of states legalizing the unions of same-sex couples, expanding gay rights in a direction many never thought they would see in their lifetimes.

Arizona became the 31st state in the nation to legalize marriage for same-sex couples after a federal judge ruled that the state's law banning gay marriages was unconstitutional, and Attorney General Tom Horne announced he would not appeal the decision. Many couples had lined up at clerk's offices, with children in tow, tearfully anticipating Horne's decision.

But while same-sex couples in Arizona are celebrating their newly won right to marry, their fight for equality under the law isn't over. (/story/news/arizona/politics/2014/10/20/gay-marriage-hurdles/17615631/) Same-sex couples still face potential challenges when it comes to adoption, workplace discrimination and other issues.

#### **1. The Phoenix VA scandal (/politics/vahealthsystem/)**

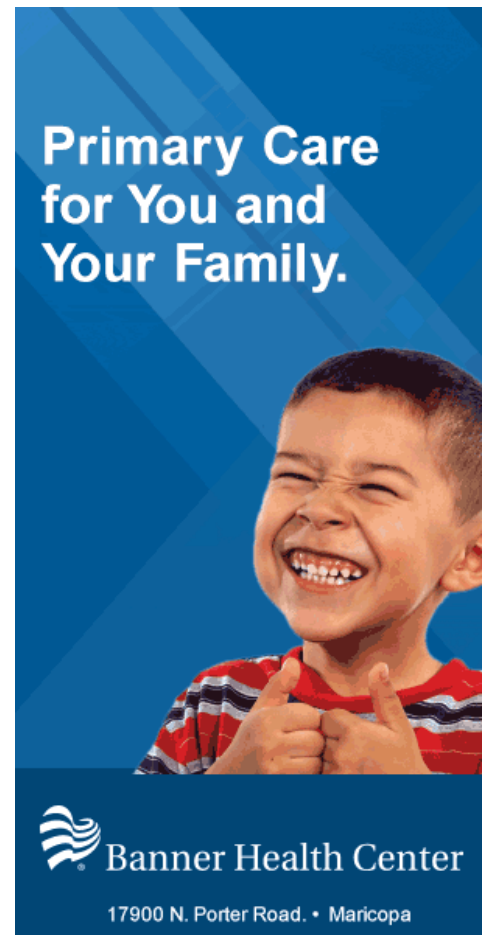
In April, *The Arizona Republic* was the first to disclose detailed allegations by Dr. Sam Foote. (/story/news/politics/2014/04/10/deaths-phoenix-va-hospital-may-tied-delayed-care/7537521/) a retired VA physician and whistle-blower, who told The Republic and a U.S. House panel that top administrators at the Phoenix VA Health Care System manipulated patient wait-time data to hide how long veterans were awaiting care. Foote said some patients had died while stuck on waiting lists for medical appointments.

The story caught fire nationally, eliciting additional whistle-blower allegations in Arizona and across the nation and prompting more than 90 investigations by the inspector general. The Phoenix probe eventually confirmed most of the whistle-blowers' allegations.

The crisis resulted in the resignation of VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, the firing of Phoenix Director Sharon Helman, and the resignations or retirements of other top national and local VA officials as it became clear that the problem had been deliberate and ongoing, and not restricted to Phoenix.

Veterans organizations staged nationwide protests and held numerous town halls, while Congress passed and President Barack Obama signed bipartisan VA reform legislation that included \$16.3 billion to expedite care. The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act also empowers the VA secretary to more rapidly fire and replace executives for misconduct, negligence and incompetence.

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Dec. 18, 2014, 10:47 a.m.



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Dec. 18, 2014, 11:16 a.m.



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[\(/story/news/world/2014/12/17/texas-plumber-truck-]((/story/news/world/2014/12/17/texas-plumber-truck-syria-terrorists/20563151/))

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Dec. 17, 2014, 5:31 p.m.