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New committees, chairs foretell tone of next session

Selection of committee chairmen is the first visible action by the incoming leaders of the House and Senate, often setting a tone for the upcoming two years.

If there was one word to sum up the past week of chairmen, committee and staff shakeups it would be **"reorganization."**

An examination of who will run committees shows a shift in priorities for both chambers and potential contrast in the governing style of Senate President-elect Bob Burns and House Speaker-elect Kirk Adams.

The committees Burns has formed show, for instance, that he is concerned with how government operates: **One panel will concentrate on public debt, while a pair of education committees were combined and refocused on holding schools accountable and changing how they operate.**

In the House, meanwhile, **Adams has trimmed the number of committees to 15 from 18.** The elimination of the Homeland Security and Property Rights Committee is a signal that immigration policy may not be as important as it was, while the expansion of the Transportation Committee to include infrastructure indicates that Adams is looking beyond this year's budget problems.

But the leadership style and ideologies of the committee chairs often determines the type of work that will be taken up in committee during session.

For his Appropriations Committee, Burns tapped fiscal hawk Russell Pearce, who led that committee in the House for six years. Burns, meanwhile, chose himself to head the chamber's Rules Committee, which is responsible for reviewing all bills before they head to the floor for debate.

Adams surprised some with his announcement that the House Appropriations Committee would be helmed by John Kavanagh, who was just re-elected to his second term, and that the Ways and Means Committee would be led by Rick Murphy, who is entering his third term but has never chaired a committee before.

The committee organizations also hint at a difference in philosophy between Burns and Adams. Like Burns, Adams combined two education committees — one dedicated to K-12, the other to higher education — into a single panel. **But while Burns appointed school-choice supporter John Huppenthal to head the Education and Accountability and Reform Committee, Adams named public education advocate Rich Crandall — the president of Mesa Public Schools — as chair of the House Education Committee.**

There's also the perception among some observers that committee assignments were used punitively, as a way to marginalize subversive forces in the caucus or to punish those who didn't support the leader's rise to power.

In the Senate, conservative stalwart Ron Gould was moved from chairing the Transportation Committee — which no longer exists — to a new panel, Retirement and Rural Development. Gould supported Burns, but also played a key role in the disruption of the legislative process during the final days of the last legislative session because he opposed the budget.

Similarly, Sen. Jack Harper, who not only was Gould's partner in crime in the waning days of the session, but publicly endorsed Burns' opponent for president, was shifted from the Government Committee to the new Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, which figures to be a much lower-profile panel.

Both Gould and Harper said they don't see the changes as demotions, though little doubt remains that the new roles will place them in the spotlight far less often.

Noticeably absent from Adams' chairmanship roster was House Speaker Jim Weiers, the man he unseated in a caucus election two days after Election Day. That Weiers, a veteran lawmaker entering his ninth term at the Capitol, would not be given a chairmanship was considered a political insult.

But Adams said he offered Weiers a committee to chair, but he turned it down. Instead, the new speaker said, the man he's replacing will fill a "significant and important," role in the House of Representatives, although he would not disclose what role that would be.

"There will be a big announcement coming about the speaker's role," Adams said. "We've been in discussions together about this, and I'm very excited about the role he's going to play. He brings a level of experience and political acumen that I think our caucus needs and will continue to benefit from."

Senate committees

Appropriations — Sen. Russell Pearce, Mesa
Pearce is the long-time chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. His selection as the next head of the Senate Appropriations did not come as a surprise. A fiscal hawk, Pearce is term-limited in the House and will begin his first Senate term in January.

Commerce and Economic Development — Sen. Barbara Leff, Paradise Valley
Leff chaired the committee last term and is entering her final term in the Senate. She has been recognized for her work to encourage business growth in Arizona.

Education Accountability & Reform — Sen. John Huppenthal, Chandler
Huppenthal is a veteran lawmaker known for his reliance on research and in-depth studies of issues, and points he raises are almost always backed up by statistics. He often emphasizes the need to improve government service.

Finance — Sen. Jim Waring, Phoenix
Waring has chaired this committee for the past two years and is decidedly in favor of cutting taxes to foster economic growth. A former aide to U.S. Sen. John McCain, he is in his final Senate term.

Government Institutions — Sen. Jay Tibshraeny, Chandler
Tibshraeny has spent the past two years as chair of the Rules Committee and is in his final term as a senator. Prior to coming to the Capitol, he was mayor of Chandler.

Healthcare & Medical Liability Reform — Sen. Carolyn Allen, Scottsdale
Allen has chaired the chamber's Health Committee since coming to the Senate in 2003. One focus of her work has been medical-malpractice reform. Though unsuccessful in the past, Gov. Janet Napolitano's expected departure to join the Obama administration may increase her odds of success.

Natural Resources, Infrastructure & Public Debt — Sen. John Nelson, Glendale
Facing term-limits in the House, Nelson successfully ran for the Senate this year. A civil engineer by profession, Nelson is a former Phoenix City Council member and is the chairman of the House Counties, Municipalities and Military Affairs Committee.

Judiciary — Sen. Jonathan Paton, Tucson
Paton, a lieutenant in the Army Reserves, served a six-month tour in Iraq in 2006 and 2007. This will be his first term in the Senate and first chairmanship, though he was vice chair of the House Government Committee last term.

Veterans & Military Affairs — Sen. Jack Harper, Surprise
Harper, a U.S. Army veteran, joined the Senate in 2003 and served as chairman of the Government Committee the past two years. Harper has been controversial as a senator and has been criticized for being overly partisan.

Retirement & Rural Development — Sen. Ron Gould, Lake Havasu City
Gould, who will be a third-termer in January, may be the most conservative lawmaker. He led the Transportation Committee last term, but now will be tasked with monitoring the state's retirement system.

Public Safety & Human Services — Sen. Linda Gray, Glendale
Gray chaired this committee last term and has worked extensively on drunk driving laws, for which she has been recognized by anti-drunk-driving groups. She will be entering her third term in January.

Rules — Senate President-elect Bob Burns
The Senate president himself will chair this committee, which is commonly regarded to have more authority than any other because all bills must go through it to determine whether they are constitutional. Burns is the fourth president since 1976 to chair this committee.

House committees

Appropriations — Rep. John Kavanagh, Scottsdale
Kavanagh is entering his second term. A retired New York New Jersey Port Authority officer, he is best known for his attempt earlier this year to change the state's 9/11 memorial.

Commerce — Rep. Michele Reagan, Scottsdale

Reagan is entering her fourth and final term in the House and will chair this committee for the third time. In that period, she has been recognized by business groups for the work she's done on behalf of small businesses.

Education — Rep. Rich Crandall, Mesa
Crandall will be a sophomore legislator this term, and his background as a school board member in Mesa — he currently is president of the board — makes him a strong advocate for public education.

Environment — Rep. Ray Barnes, Phoenix
This will be Barnes' final term in the House and third term as chair of this committee. In the past, he has fought what he says are attempts by the Department of Environmental Quality to usurp legislative authority.

Banking and Insurance — Rep. Nancy McLain, Bullhead City
McLain will be entering her third term in the House and this will be her first time chairing a committee. She served as vice chair of the Higher Education Committee last term and also as a member of this committee's predecessor, the Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee.

Government — Rep. Sam Crump, Anthem
Crump, who was re-elected for the first time in November, has been critical of government waste in his first term. Prior to moving to Arizona, he was a city councilor and mayor of Sebastopol, Calif.

Health and Human Services — Rep. Nancy Barto, Phoenix
Barto was appointed to the House in 2006 to replace David Burnell Smith. Last term, she was vice chair of the Human Services and Rules committees. This will be her first term as a chairman.

Judiciary — Rep. Adam Driggs, Phoenix
A private-practice attorney and former county prosecutor, Driggs was vice chair of this committee for the past two years. He is generally considered to be thoughtful and deliberate.

Military Affairs and Public Safety — Rep. Jerry Weiers, Glendale
The no-nonsense third-termer, the brother of the current House speaker, helmed the Natural Resources and Public Safety Committee last term. His district includes Luke Air Force Base.

Natural Resources and Rural Affairs — Rep. Bill Konopnicki, Safford
The district of the fourth-term lawmaker spans much of the eastern part of the state, ranging from Winslow to Payson to Globe to Safford, including much of Arizona's mining operations.

Public Employees, Retirement and Entitlement Reform — Rep. Tom Boone, Peoria
Boone currently serves as majority leader, and in that role he has advocated for the Republican principle of smaller government. He works as chairman/CEO of the Valley Schools Insurance Trust and is a former CFO for a northwest Phoenix school district.

Rules — Rep. Warde Nichols, Gilbert

Nichols is a staunch pro-family conservative who has been the driving force behind legislation dealing with abortion and gay marriage during his three terms as a lawmaker. As the head of this committee, he has the final say on whether a bill goes to the floor.

Transportation and Infrastructure — Rep. Andy Biggs, Gilbert
Biggs, who will be term-limited from the House in 2010, has led the chamber's Transportation Committee since 2005, and has been a proponent of more freeways and toll roads as ways to solve the state's transportation problems.

Water and Energy — Rep. Lucy Mason, Prescott
Mason is regarded as the go-to person on energy issues, as she has advocated for increased opportunities for renewable energy use. She chaired the Water and Agriculture Committee last term.

Ways and Means — Rep. Rick Murphy
Murphy, a third-termer, was vice chairman of this committee last term. He is a tireless advocate of lowering taxes on individuals and businesses and would be unlikely to allow any bill increasing taxes through the committee. This is his first chairmanship.