



## Roxanna Pitones: At home in the Legislature

By: Julia Shumway February 17, 2020



Roxanna Pitones

After her first session working in the Arizona Senate, Roxanna Pitones was hooked.

Pitones, then a sophomore studying political science at Arizona State University, wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her degree when she first walked into the Senate in 2013 to interview for a page position.

"After my page experience, I knew," Pitones said. "You get to see behind the scenes and the craziness, and I knew that I wanted to be part of the behind the scenes of the Legislature."

A policy internship in the House, a session as a legislative assistant and three more working from the Senate Democratic policy staff's basement offices followed. And since November, Pitones has been watching the Legislature from a different angle: as a legislative associate for the League of Arizona Cities and Towns.

**In that first session particularly, what surprised you that you wouldn't have expected going in?**

I think my biggest take-away from that experience, and why I think I felt comfortable coming back, was that legislators are pretty normal people. As a newcomer, they can seem intimidating, but they are people like you and I living their lives. I mean, they have a little more power, obviously. The things that people at the Legislature stand up for, they genuinely believe. From the outside perspective, it's easy to kind of paint issues and people with broad strokes and consider them all to be one way or the other. But when you're around them and you get to know them, they are just like you and I, or like my parents. They're pretty normal people, so they're less intimidating in that way.

**After three sessions working on Dem staff, and a couple more before that, what's it like to be back and almost on the outside looking in?**

I heard from friends that have been at the Legislature before and left that coming back was going to be different, and it is in some ways. I built really strong relationships and friendships there and so in some ways I still think of it like home, or like a second home because it was really my first grown-up job, and I learned a lot, grew a lot, during this time. I'm 26 now, and so I think the years prior to that were very formative years for me being there and learning from there. It's like home, but it is different and I would say I'm conscious of how my title and position might come off or might appear to other people, so I'm conscious of that. It's all about building relationships and building on friendships and so I feel, I feel very comfortable going back.

**Dem staff in particular this past year seemed like they were at the center of a lot of attention mostly based on how you all were paid, which is not much, and an ongoing lawsuit. Do you think there was anything that that highlighted staff and the work that you all did?**

I want to be careful. I won't speak to all of that. I will only say that my experience working on Dem staff was nothing but amazing and I have a lot of respect for the people that are there. As you know because you see it, they work extremely hard. And I think that Senate Dem staff, or Dem staff in general, I've heard from other people that they don't work as hard because they're not in control, but I think in some ways, you have to work just as hard if not harder, because you have to always be kind of on the defense. Sometimes you're out of the loop on what's going on so you kind of have to expect the unexpected in many ways. They're very hardworking people and I'm proud to be able to be a former staffer. And I should say my internship experience was on House Dem staff. It was a different makeup at the time, but they all work really hard and are really passionate about their jobs. If you don't love it, it's easy to walk away, because it is a demanding experience.

**Cities and towns are also frequently on the defensive at the Capitol. How does this session look for cities and towns right now?**

From what I've been able to learn in the short time that I've been here, I would say that our mayors as well as our council members work really hard. We like to say that they are the closest to the people and so we should allow them to govern in a way that is unique to their communities. We're hopeful that this session will be good for cities and towns. There's been a few measures out there that we're watching. But we have a good rapport at the Legislature, and we will continue to build on that, and hopefully, the Legislature can look to us as a partner. The 91 cities are in the lives of most Arizonans. We hope that the Legislature will see us as a partner and work in partnership with us.

**If you could talk to someone who might be where you were about six years ago, thinking about maybe doing an internship here, or stepping into the world of politics and policy, what would you most want to tell them?**

Jenna Lyon (Senate deputy sergeant at arms) will ask me to come chat with pages every so often and talk about my experience, and they pose a similar question. And I would say, work hard and be kind. In my position now and in previous positions, obviously we all encounter situations when you just don't know the answer and that's hard sometimes to accept that you just won't know the answer, because your job is to be that source of information. I think I'm deviating a little bit, but working hard and knowing that you can only know so much but you will work to learn more and continue to work to learn more, goes a long way. Being kind to everyone, not just for the sake of it but because it really does help you in the long run. At people's core, they believe what they believe and they believe that they're advocating for the right thing. And that's perfectly fine. Just understanding that people's beliefs are grounded in their values essentially and just accepting that and moving beyond that and just taking people for who they are. Essentially, work hard and be kind.

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