



PHOTO, 4B

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders Town Hall and Student Protest

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders visits A-State to talk about the LEARNS Act

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PHOTO EDITOR

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders discussed the Arkansas LEARNS Act with local educators and constituents at a town hall meeting at the Fowler Center Monday.

The town hall meeting, a gathering in which public officials gauge the opinions of citizens on certain policies, allowed members of the community to ask questions regarding the LEARNS Act, one of the governor's top priorities since she began her term in January.

"I am very, very proud of the fact that we were able to pass such an important piece of legislation that I believe will truly transform education in the state for the better," Sanders said.

Sanders answered questions alongside Arkansas Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva. Breanne Davis, a Republican state senator and lead sponsor of the LEARNS Act, moderated the meeting.

The LEARNS Act, which stands for Literacy, Empowerment, Accountability, Readiness, Networking and Safety, will make changes to teacher salaries and academic standards in K-12 schools in Arkansas.

Signed into law March 8, the legislation provides starting teachers a base salary of a minimum of \$50,000, gives veteran teachers up to

\$2,000 raises, creates a voucher program for students to receive funds to attend private schools and removes the limit on the number of charter schools while encouraging them to work with low-rated public schools.

The act also repeals the Teacher Fair Dismissal Act and the School Employees Fair Hearing Act.

The Teacher Fair Dismissal Act required school districts to inform teachers before May 1 each year if they would be fired or if their employment status would change. Sanders included this in the act to make it easier for districts to fire teachers due to performance.

The School Employees Fair Hearing Act allowed school employees to request a hearing due to termination. School boards were required to hold a just hearing in which the employee could choose their own representation.

Brookland School District superintendent Brett Bunch asked how the LEARNS Act could support the district's expansions.

"We got to hire 12 new teachers that weren't on our salary schedule in the past and so that adds a burden and all of them come in at \$50,000, because we want the best for them. The second challenge is we have to build a new building, which currently it's put on \$425 per square foot," Bunch said.

Oliva said while growing



Photo by Rachel Rudd | News Editor

Gov. Sanders answered questions about the LEARNS Act, alongside Arkansas Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva. State senator Breanne Davis (R) moderated the meeting.

student bodies may be a good problem to have, it can be difficult for districts to deal with.

"The reality is you're gonna have to add more features to cover that and if we keep your current teacher salary allocations flat, you're gonna have to come up with those differences," Oliva said. "As we go from year after year, we need to use real data and make those allocation pivots and changes as we go through the process and work with the legislature."

Kayla Davidson, the educational administrator at

Ridgefield Christian School, asked how private schools could benefit from the LEARNS Act.

"Obviously, we're not going to get the \$50,000 raise. The gap already, between public school and private schools, is pretty large. We have some amazing teachers that work really hard and they don't have that ability to get that increase," Davidson said.

Sanders said private schools can opt in to the program if they are willing to meet the state standards required for public schools. Sanders added, "One of

the things that I think would help is if you do opt into the program, you could see additional students coming to your school that wouldn't have been there otherwise, that are funded through education freedom accounts at the state level, which will be additional funding for you."

Many Arkansans oppose the LEARNS Act due to its provisions regarding veteran teachers.

CONTINUED: GOV., 4A

Spring commissioning ceremony scheduled for May 5

The A-State Spring Commissioning Ceremony for cadets Hayden Foster, Jacob Henry, Alyssa Nelson and Caitlyn Rogers is scheduled for 3 p.m., May 5, in the Reng Student Union Auditorium. All are welcome to attend and show support to A-State ROTC cadets.

Spring fire drill AAR/IP report available online

The Office of Safety & Emergency Management has completed its after-action report and improvement plan of fire drills conducted in March. Both the review and improvement plan section of the report is available online.

Summer housing now open

Residents enrolled in summer or fall 2023 courses can live on campus during the summer terms. More information and room rates can be found on the University Housing webpage or in the student's email.

BRIEFS COURTESY OF THE DAILY DIGEST

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- A-State baseball wins first SBC series since April 2022
- A-State track athletes succeed at Red Wolves Open

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- Concert review: Kenny Chesney
- This week's Pop Picks

LIFE, 3B

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- Vote@A-State joins as new student-run organization

Walk a Mile in Her Shoes

SHAILEY WOOLDRIDGE

STAFF WRITER

The Sexual Assault Awareness Planning Committee hosted Walk A Mile In Her Shoes to raise awareness for sexual assault and domestic violence April 24.

Anyone can walk the mile, but men are encouraged to wear heels to show support and solidarity for women who experience sexual assault and domestic violence in the U.S.

Mark Zielsdorf, assistant director of communications, and Tristian Kalanges, director of student developments of athletics, planned the event.

"One of the biggest aspects of someone who has been involved in any degree with sexual assault or domestic violence is the feeling of isolation, the feeling of loss of control and that is one of the biggest hurdles of overcoming and coping with the situation that they might have experienced," Kalanges said.

Kalanges said events like this show solidarity and advocacy and are the most important things we can provide for those stepping stones of healing.

"It makes that statement in a fun and light hearted way and generates that conversation," Zielsdorf said.

The walk took place on campus starting in front of the library and ending in front of the Reng Student Union for a candlelit vigil.

Within the mile there are facts and figures posted with statistics and information regarding sexual assault and violence.

In front of the Student Union were 4,000 white flags set up on the lawn. Each flag represents 1% of people who experience sexual assault each year in the U.S.

Todd Shields, chancellor of Arkansas State University, and Chuck Welch, president of A-State, attended the walk.

"I think it's important to not only raise awareness that we have individuals in our university community that are facing difficult times, but also to raise awareness to the resources that are available not only on campus but in the community, and that we all band together," Welch said.

Shields said it's important for A-State to put on events like this.



Photo by Shailey Wooldridge | Staff Writer

There were 4,000 white flags in the front lawn of the Student Union. Each flag represents 1% of people who are sexually assaulted each year in the U.S.

"We want this to be home for people and to be a safe place and to be a place where they can express ideas and be who they are and know that they're safe and protected. It's important for us to make sure people are aware and that we do everything we can to make sure that

people are safe." Shields said.

Devin Nelson, a counselor at the Wilson Counseling Center, spoke at the candlelight vigil to share statistics about sexual assault and domestic violence in the U.S.

"In 2018, Arkansas experienced 44 deaths due to

an act of domestic violence, 51 in 2019 and 55 in 2020. But in 2021, 45 deaths. As a state we experienced our first decline in domestic violence deaths in years very recently because of work like we are doing tonight," Nelson said.

CONTINUED: WALK, 4A