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NEW ARIZONA HOUSE SPEAKER TALKS 2017'S TOP ISSUES

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J.D. Mesnard Candidate for Legislative District 21 Arizona House of Representatives www.jdmesnard.com 480-650-4509 Name: J.D. Mesnard Party affiliation: Republican Office sought: Sate Representative D Legislative District 21 Occupation: Small Business Owner, Consultant, Investor and Adjunct Faculty at Mesa Community

College. Web site: www.jdmesnard.com Noteworthy: Mesnard, 29, spent the last eight years working at the Arizona Senate, serving as a policy advisor on issues ranging from education, transportation and retirement, to family services and government administration. He is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of Arizona State University with a Bachelors degree in Music Composition. He also holds two masters degrees, one in Business and the other in Public Administration. (Photo: Special for The Republic)

Arizona's new House speaker will formally take the reins in early January when the Legislature begins its session. But Rep. J.D. Mesnard, R-Gilbert, is already settling into the office and setting priorities. He has hired staff and issued a plan on restructuring how the chamber does its work.

Mesnard sat down with The Associated Press for an interview on how he views the job and what he sees developing as the top legislative issues in the coming year. His answers have been edited for length.

Question: You're now speaker, and after three, two-year terms you have the ability to push through legislation you want to see pass. What's at the top of your list?

Answer: If I sponsored something it's going to be Article 5 related (a call for a constitutional convention of states) or possibly some kind of major tax reform. And the latter I don't even (necessarily) know what that looks like at this point. I've made it no secret that I'm interested in a single-rate, simplified income tax system. I think that's conducive for those that one day want to go down the road of eliminating the income tax entirely.

Q: You've pushed legislation to tax internet sales, if Congress passes a bill

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allowing that. Is that still on your agenda?



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A: My goal as speaker has never been 'I'm speaker, thus sayeth me.' I'll introduce policy and try to sell it like everybody else. Will there be the potential for some level of deference? I suppose, yeah, but I'm not here to try to twist arms and make people vote against their conscience. I'm here to

win them over on the merits of the policy.

Q: There's lots of talk about the effect of the minimum wage increase, and with just a \$24 million budget surplus going into the year, there's concern that dealing with that will crimp other spending priorities.

A: The impact of Prop. 206 could very easily by itself eat that up, not just in (developmental disability services) but in all sorts of other places. Just as a microcosm of an example, I'm hiring pages right now. Pages were \$9 an hour, and that was above minimum wage. Now for me to attract people that want to be pages, I'm competing against as a baseline \$10 an hour. So I've now increased the page salary for this coming spring, and that will have an impact on the House budget. And you're going to see that all over the place.

Q: Democrats made a big deal of some Republican members carrying guns on the House floor last year. With new security put in place, metal detectors and gun lockers, will you ban that practice?

A: The preliminary policy will be that you don't carry weapons. But it may be kind of a don't ask, don't tell policy, which would preclude people from just wearing it for the world to see. But I'm not sure that I'm going to make a habit of having every woman open her purse to see if she's carrying or whatever. The policy is what it is. There's a level or degree to which I will go or not go in enforcing the policy.

Q: We've seen yearly battles over school vouchers and groups called school tuition organizations where people can get tax credits for giving to these groups that fund private school scholarships. Efforts to expand vouchers to all children have failed in recent years. Will we see a new effort this year?

A: We have a lot of new members, so it's a bit early to say. My gut is that I don't know that construction of the Legislature on school choice has really changed that much during the past two years and the upcoming two years. I think a lot of the resistance to the expansion to the universal (vouchers) had to do with a timing issue, and that was Prop. 123 and not wanting to rock the boat there.

Q: We see legislation every year adding more abortion restrictions. They generally pass, although some are blocked by the courts. What's coming this year?

A: I think a lot of folks, not just on the abortion issue but a number of issues, are in wait and see mode with the feds — we really don't know what's going to be happening at the federal level. So I'm not sure that there will be much. And obviously we have gone about as far as you can go within the context of the 9th Circuit and their opinions, and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Q: The former director of the Department of Economic Security was ousted after

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