

Ducey appointee gets money from board she serves on

By: Julia Shumway ☉ May 6, 2021

A White Mountain rancher who received \$66,000 in grants from a state board she serves on will get another term on that board.

The Senate this week confirmed the nomination of Sarahmarge “Wink” Crigler to the state’s Livestock Loss Board, over the objections of Democratic lawmakers who argued that it looked bad for a person who benefited monetarily from the board’s decisions to continue serving on the board.

“This is all about the appearance of impropriety, and this just doesn’t look good for the state of Arizona,” said Sen. Martín Quezada, D-Glendale.

In 2019, Crigler received \$66,000 from the board to help pay to move 300 cows and their calves to a pasture outside of the range of Mexican gray wolves. The board gave just over \$206,000 in grants that year – \$96,000 to pay ranchers for cattle killed by wolves and \$110,000 through a new research grant program for ranchers to test methods to prevent conflicts between wolves and cattle.

Crigler, who has been a member of the board since it was created in 2015, voted to create the research grant program that her Springerville ranch benefitted from mere months later, according to meeting minutes. She recused herself from the vote on whether to fund her specific proposal, and she said she didn’t see any conflicts of interest.

“I did it in good faith with the intent of the board,” Crigler said. “One of the intents of the board was to look at strategies that would reduce conflict.”

The actual cost to move her cows out of wolf range was almost three times as much as the grant she received, she said. It cost about \$3.50 per head of cattle per day, and she had 300 cows for 180 days,

plus an extra \$1,000 in moving costs.

And people who criticized her for benefitting from a board she serves on didn't consider that her practices save money, she said. The board approved about \$25,000 in payments to neighboring ranches for lost cattle at its last meeting alone, Crigler said, and she could have been among the ranchers seeking payments if she didn't send her cattle away.

"What people don't look at is that I don't get paid large sums of money for lost livestock," Crigler said.

Ducey's office was similarly unconcerned about the appearance of a conflict of interest. Spokesman C.J. Karamargin said the governor expects Crigler and other board members to follow set rules, including recusing themselves from votes when necessary.

"In the past, she has complied with board policy and recused herself when issues come up that could be a potential conflict and we expect that she will continue to do so," he said.

Sandy Bahr, director of the state's Sierra Club chapter, said Crigler recusing herself from a vote on her grant request doesn't automatically eliminate conflicts for the board. Her status as a board member could still create pressure for other board members to approve her request, Bahr said.

"She's part of the board, she's sitting right there, and clearly if someone else on the board wants her support for what they're asking for, it creates a weird power dynamic," she said. "You have someone who has a vote on every other thing the board does asking for a substantial amount of the money."

The Sierra Club also opposed Crigler’s re-appointment because of her public statements about wolves, including comments about wolves being a government tool to **force people out of rural areas** and into urban areas.

Issue: C.J. KARAMARGIN DOUG DUCEY LIVESTOCK LOSS BOARD MARTIN QUEZADA SARAHMARGE CRIGLER SENATE

