

Arizona lawmakers call for investigation of Michelle Ugenti-Rita after lobbyist's claims

Andrew Oxford, Arizona Republic Published 7:30 a.m. MT Feb. 6, 2020 | Updated 1:10 p.m. MT Feb. 6, 2020
CONNECT TWEET LINKEDIN COMMENT EMAIL MORE



State Sen. Michelle Ugenti-Rita, R-Scottsdale. (Photo: Sean Logan, The Republic)

The top Democrat in the Arizona Senate called for an investigation Wednesday as new details emerged about the case of a lobbyist who [received unsolicited, sexually explicit photos from a lawmaker's husband](#).

The incident was only vaguely described over the course of a few paragraphs in a 75-page legislative report on lawmaker misconduct published in 2018. In a sworn deposition in November that was made public for the first time this week, the lobbyist said the report did not fully or accurately portray the harassment she experienced.

The lobbyist said she believes Brian Townsend, then an aide to the governor, was soliciting her for sex with him and his future wife, state Sen. Michelle Ugenti-Rita, when he sent her nude images of the legislator.

She said Ugenti-Rita later confronted her about the allegations, calling her a liar at a conference the women were attending in their professional capacities.

The 2018 report cleared Ugenti-Rita of wrongdoing and said Townsend acted alone.

'Allegations ... appear to be a clear violation'

But the details of the deposition raised new questions about the investigation and Ugenti-Rita's actions afterward.

"The allegations contained in the deposition appear to be a clear violation of our sexual harassment policy that warrants further investigation by President (Karen) Fann," Senate Minority Leader David Bradley, D-Tucson, said Wednesday.

Fann declined to discuss the details of the depositions on Thursday.

"We do not comment on ongoing litigation and this issue is involved in litigation. And in addition to that, this issue was already heard in an investigation. So, consequently, it was already decided on," Fann told The Republic. "If there is any new allegations about any new situations, I will certainly look into it."

The Senate's workplace and sexual harassment policy prohibits unwelcome sexual advances as well as conduct that is intimidating or creates a hostile environment.

History of harassment at state Capitol

Ugenti-Rita was a member of the House of Representatives at the time Townsend sent sexually explicit images to the lobbyist in 2016. But she had just been elected to the Senate when she confronted the lobbyist.

The Scottsdale Republican became the face of the #MeToo movement at the state Capitol in 2017 and 2018, calling out harassment and leading to an investigation into state Rep. Don Shooter, R-Yuma.

The investigation detailed lewd remarks and inappropriate gestures of affection by Shooter, ultimately leading to his expulsion in a highly unusual vote by the House.

Ugenti-Rita sued Shooter after he raised allegations about her actions toward the lobbyist. The ongoing lawsuit and his counterclaim led to the deposition in November that dragged new details of the incident to light.

Contact Andrew Oxford at andrew.oxford@arizonarepublic.com or on Twitter at [@andrewboxford](https://twitter.com/andrewboxford).

This story can be found at:

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/arizona/2020/02/06/arizona-senate-democrats-call-investigation-michelle-ugenti-rita-scottsdale-sexually-explicit-photos/4675876002/>