

# [***Opinion: The bizarre opposition to a Sandra Day O'Connor statue***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BGH-CXX1-DY7V-G1WB-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Before Sandra Day O'Connor was appointed by President Ronald Reagan to the US Supreme Court, becoming the first female justice, she [*lived, worked and served in state government in Arizona*](https://www.supremecourt.gov/about/biographyOconnor.aspx).

Instead of celebrating the late justice's accomplishments on the court from 1981 to 2006, several of the state's Republican legislators are opposing the commissioning of a statue to honor O'Connor, who was a strong conservative. "We cannot allow the distinguished members of this body to have to suffer walking by such an undistinguished jurist when they enter here in the morning," Rep. Alexander Kolodin of Arizona said, [*according to the 19th*](https://19thnews.org/2024/03/sandra-day-oconnor-statue-arizona-republicans/). (It's doubtful Kolodin even read the text of the measure, as [*one columnist pointed out*](https://www.azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/laurieroberts/2024/03/01/sandra-day-oconnor-undistinguished-statue-kolodin-says/72797505007/) - since the measure would have placed the statue in Statuary Hall in Washington, not in Arizona.) Rep. Neal Carter of Arizona argued on the state House floor that he believes "that we should honor people, things and institutions for their merit, and not merely because they came from this state."

Today's MAGA-dominated Republican Party seems intent on proving itself profoundly, gratuitously misogynist - hostile not just to women's rights, but to the elevation of women into positions of power and to the recognition of women's accomplishments, unless those women fit a very narrow mold.

For her apparently insufficiently reactionary ***politics***, some Arizona Republicans are belittling and snubbing her and her legacy, arguing it's essentially beneath them to have to walk by her likeness.

O'Connor is hardly a liberal darling. But the claims that she is "undistinguished" or lacks "merit" are both lies and abuses of the English language. O'Connor [*enrolled at Stanford University*](https://libguides.law.asu.edu/sandradayoconnor/biography) in the 1940s, when very few women went to college. She was just 16 when she started, and still graduated magna cum laude. At Stanford law school, she served on the prestigious Stanford Law Review and graduated among the top of her class.

Despite these achievements - and the fact that she out-performed most of her male classmates - O'Connor struggled to find work, because many legal employers simply wouldn't hire women. Undeterred, she [*made her way up the professional ranks*](https://libguides.law.asu.edu/sandradayoconnor/biography), rising to assistant attorney general, then Arizona state senator and the nation's first female state senate majority leader. From there, she made her way up the judicial ranks, from an appointment to a county superior court seat to the Arizona State Court of Appeals and then to the Supreme Court, where she served for a quarter-century.

During her time on the court, O'Connor wrote [*hundreds of opinions*](https://oconnorinstitute.org/supreme-court-opinions), including several that remain among the most influential in American history and are taught in many law school courses. I don't personally agree with many - or even most - of O'Connor's jurisprudence. But to describe it as meritless, or her time on the court as undistinguished, evinces either an ignorance as to what those terms mean, or a shocking hostility to the first female Supreme Court justice.

The latter seems to be the case.

Many of the Arizona Republicans opposing honoring O'Connor are simply Trump acolytes, themselves willing to level meritless claims if it serves them or their kingpin. Rep. Kolodin, for example, is an election denier who filed evidence-free lawsuits and sought to invalidate the votes of millions of Arizonans; his actions were so egregious he was [*sanctioned*](https://azmirror.com/2023/12/14/gop-lawmaker-alexander-kolodin-sanctioned-for-2020-kraken-lawsuit-other-election-cases/) by the Arizona Bar and an Arizona Supreme Court disciplinary panel said he "violated his duty to the legal profession, the legal system, and the public."

Kolodin has, I suppose, distinguished himself, but not as an honest or ethical actor. Carter, for his part, seems to oppose honoring O'Connor because she was moderately supportive of abortion rights while Carter wants to [*ban*](https://www.azvoterguide.com/candidate/state-house/carter-neal/) the procedure with almost no exceptions, and because Carter is also a [*MAGA*](https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2023/01/12/freshmen-swell-freedom-caucus-defy-hobbs/) Republican.

The gall of these small, mediocre men to call O'Connor "undistinguished" and lacking "merit." They would be lucky to walk in the mere shadow of her statue.

These aren't the only two Arizona lawmakers to vote against the O'Connor statue. Several Democrats did as well - but not as a way to impugn O'Connor's work and legacy, but because her family has [*said*](https://19thnews.org/2024/03/sandra-day-oconnor-statue-arizona-republicans/) they favor a separate effort to construct a statue honoring her at the US Capitol. And Republican Rep. Matt Gress [*sponsored the legislation*](https://azmirror.com/2024/01/22/arizona-lawmakers-want-to-build-a-statue-of-sandra-day-oconnor-theres-already-one-in-the-works/), saying rightly that O'Connor "was a pioneer, a trail blazer" and that even absent this statue project, "she will be remembered and revered for her service to the state." Extreme MAGA Republicans who oppose honoring O'Connor, in other words, are not the totality of their party - or at least not yet.

This incident, and the comments made by some Arizona Republicans, marks yet another troubling departure from a political norm of basic decency. One does not have to agree with or endorse everything a justice, politician or influential person did in their lives to recognize their import, influence and valuable contributions. Conservatives seem to grasp this concept when the debates are over, say, statues of long-dead White men who enslaved people, but who also made invaluable contributions to the founding of our nation. But when it comes to those who even hesitate to get on the Trump train, a different set of rules seem to apply - like, say, the treatment of late Sen. John McCain, also of Arizona, who was on [*the receiving end of a stream*](https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/arizona/2023/04/27/donald-trump-still-attacking-arizonas-john-mccain-dead-nearly-5-years/70156441007/) of Trump vitriol while many in the party he faithfully served abandoned him and threw their support behind his aggressor. The MAGA refusal to honor the first female justice of the Supreme Court, who retired a decade before Trump took office, takes this despicable behavior to the next level. O'Connor was not publicly anti-Trump. She was just the kind of conscionable and non-extremist Republican who Trump partisans seem to imagine would have been.

No one can know what lies in the hearts of the men who don't just oppose honoring O'Connor, but have taken it upon themselves to degrade her life's work. It does seem telling, though, that the same men who support a former president found liable for sexual abuse and who want to ban women from exercising a full range of our reproductive rights also find it acceptable to denigrate one of America's most influential female trailblazers, resist recognizing her and lob gratuitous insults at her.

This is a story about more than a statue. It is yet another example of the unvarnished contempt that so many pro-Trump Republicans hold for American women.

Opinion by Jill Filipovic

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