

Verde Independent

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AZ Town Hall tests Verde Valley's mood

By Jon Hutchinson
Staff Reporter

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CLARKDALE - For the third time, the Arizona Town Hall brought an outreach session to [Yavapai College](#) to share the forum's recommendations, and then to poll local thoughts.

During the 96th Town Hall, held during April in Tucson, the discussion centered on [Economic Development](#), "Building Arizona's future: Jobs, Innovation and Competitiveness." Even though the forum topics are chosen two years in advance, the economic development topic is timely with much of the country emerging from a deep recession.

Arizona Academy President Tara Jackson said the panelists were asked to identify the issues that should receive a priority by the state and how to make them a reality.

Sedona's Dick Dahl, a veteran of 10 Arizona Town Halls and former Town Hall board member, admitted he was disappointed so few legislators attended this session. Many of the recommendations of every Town Hall are directed toward the Legislature.

The forum recommendations addressed 12 general headings with specific tasks under each area: Education, Strategic Planning, Changes in Governmental Structure and Political Ideologies, Capital Formation, Reputation Management, Infrastructure, Broadening Tax Base, Preserve Quality of Life, Pursue Jobs in Renewable Energy, Job Training Programs, Other Economic Development Actions and Other Activities that Influence Economic Development.

Each of the panelists spoke about issue that impressed them.

Evelyn Casuga, Community Development and Customer Offices General Manager for APS, highlighted the importance of education, "You can not build a world class economy without an educational system to match," she said.

Strategic planning was also key for building a future in Arizona said Casauga

Head of The Orme School Alyce Brownridge also identified education as an important focus point to boost the economy. She lamented, "Arizona is not known for education, we are at the bottom of all rankings." Brownridge said it is also suggested that we must, "Preserve the quality of life in Arizona while still having growth in the economy."



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VVN/Jon Hutchinson

Tara Jackson, President of the Arizona Academy said, references to need for educational improvement were called for over and over again during the three-day session.

A Cottonwood delegate, Andy Groseta had a different perspective. He cited Access to Capital, Infrastructure and amplified the need for an Immigration Guest Worker Program. Noting that it takes people to do work, he cited the fact that in the Yuma Valley alone, 30,000 people are needed when the harvest is ready. "Sixty to 70 percent of the people that come from Mexico just want to work, 10 percent want to live, work and become citizens. But, we should be spending our money and energy on the 10 percent that include drug lords and secure the border."

Cottonwood's Economic Development Director Casey Rooney also cited the importance of Strategic Planning.

Members of the audience also mentioned job training, how to work without funding, renewable energy were among other suggestions

Robyn Prud'homme-Bauer stressed the importance of Capital Formation.

Tara Jackson said that another recommendation is that the legislature become better educated about the needs of rural Arizona. Educational system should be improved by coordination between institutions of higher education and business. All these are demand good leadership, she emphasized.

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The next forum will ask delegates to look at the structure of state government and how we should change it.

Jackson says she conducts 15-25 of the outreach sessions after every town hall that tend to generate a statewide consensus that is more accurate than a poll. "For example," she says, "the outreach sessions around the state, with the exception of Kingman and Parker, were supporting a one-percent sales tax before the vote was taken, while the pundits suggested it would not pass. Only Mohave County voted against that tax. These programs do attract those people that do vote, and are leaders in their community," said Jackson.

The Town Hall is an independent organization that hosts forums for consideration of issues that concern the state based on an authoritative research document. The forums build consensus and then seek implementation of recommendations.

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