

The Daily Courier

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

Town Hall seeks solutions to higher education questions

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PRESCOTT - With Arizona ranking 40th in the nation in the percentage of high school graduates that go on to college, the state's future economic and social success may be less than stellar, a panel of education advocates said Monday.

More than 50 people comprising college administrators, community leaders, and educators gathered in The Hangar at Embry-Riddle on Monday to listen to a presentation by Arizona Town Hall on how the state can remain

competitive in a global economy, repair the state's broken higher education system, and expand higher education opportunities to all races.

Dan Anderson, director of Institutional Analysis for the Arizona Board of Regents, George Ruffner, a principal and biologist with EcoPlan Associates, Inc., and Kristine Woolever, president of [Prescott College](#) spoke to the group about the importance higher education plays in the economic and social success of the state.

"Shame on Arizona," Woolever said. "Shame on Arizona that we rank 40th out of the 50 states in the percentage of high school students that go on to college."

According to an Arizona Board of Regents report, 57 percent of Arizona high school students who graduated in 2006 went on to college, Anderson said. Less than 19 percent of those students graduated from a four-year institution within six years. An additional 6 percent graduated from a two-year college or trade school.

"Right now in Arizona about 26 percent of our adult population has a bachelor's degree," Anderson said. "One of the challenges we have is how can we raise that educational figure."

Workers in Arizona with bachelor degrees earned 80 percent more than those with only a high school degree, Ruffner said. People with graduate degrees earned 135



Les Stukenberg/The Daily Courier
Local businessman George Ruffner speaks during an Arizona Town Hall on the state of higher education in Arizona, Monday at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott.



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ERAU Chancellor Dr. Frank Ayers, Prescott College President Dr. Kristin Woolever, Arizona Town Hall President Dr. Tara Jackson and President of Yavapai College Dr. Penny Wills get acquainted before an Arizona Town Hall on the state of higher education in Arizona Monday at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in

percent more than people with only a high school diploma.

Prescott.

"To underestimate the importance of higher education in our economy and to our state is a mistake we would rue for many, many generations to come," Ruffner said.

According to Woolever, Arizona ranks next to last in state-funded financial aide.

Businesses and community organizations need to offer more internships, grants, and scholarships to encourage the pursuit of higher education, Woolever said.

During the presentation, attendees discussed a variety of possible solutions to the state's higher education dilemma such as:

- Lobbying state leaders to make a commitment to offer more funding for higher education.
- Support more grants for low- and middle-income students.
- Colleges and universities should work together to expand pathway opportunities between two and four year institutions.
- Remove the requirement that enrolled members of Arizona tribes be "on reservation" to qualify for in-state tuition.

For more information on Arizona Town Hall, visit www.AZtownhall.org.

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