



## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION SUMMARY STATEMENTS From Community Outreach Programs following the 105<sup>th</sup> Arizona Town Hall

*In programs held around the state to follow up on the fall 2014 Town Hall titled “Arizona’s Economy,” audience members were asked to participate in a Town Hall-style discussion on priorities and action items. Statements prepared from the discussions at the Outreach Programs are set forth below.*

### **YUMA (February 12, 2015)**

Yuma represents an important segment of Arizona’s Economy, in particular with its over \$2 billion annual agricultural industry, military bases, and tourism. However, there is concern that the rural areas of the state do not receive the same attention that the Maricopa County does. The rural regions of Arizona should band together to further emphasize how rural Arizona adds to our state economy. In particular, Arizona must improve its educational system and be competitive nationwide to attract business to our state. We must encourage new business, and can do so by revisiting how we tax businesses. Shopping at local businesses ensures that more of the revenue of purchases stays in our community and benefits our residents. Revisiting governmental regulations on business is crucial to decrease obstacles to ease the path of new businesses and help those existing businesses flourish. Above all, we must remember that each person is an ambassador for Yuma, and furthering our economy relies on our positive outlook of our community.

### **PHOENIX – Soroptimist (February 19, 2015)**

We, the members of the Phoenix Soroptimists International and distinguished guests, upon hearing a summary of recommendations from the 105<sup>th</sup> Arizona Town Hall on Arizona’s Economy recommends EDUCATION as the top recommendation, but in order for this recommendation to be successful this state must first address Arizona’s revenues in order to fund this investment.

Actions can include, but not limited to:

- Study all available options that may exist (looking at the AZ Town Hall Report on Taxes for recommendations) for new revenue
- Explore the creation of sales tax on e-commerce (which helps small businesses and entrepreneurs); and
- Tax reform across the taxing authorities (which can include taxing services) can act as ways to fund these priorities, which could include simply our tax code;

These tax reforms will help increase investments in education and will encourage private investment and restore confidence in our economy.

### **FLAGSTAFF (February 25, 2015)**

Arizona must increase funding for education but increased funding alone will not solve Arizona’s education woes. Further, simply raising revenue from the existing community is not a practical solution. A sustained focus on economic development and growth to drive increased industry, high-paying jobs, and infrastructure will support higher revenues. Additionally, Arizona should proactively look to limit the cost of education to students and their families.

Increased cooperation and consolidation in Arizona’s non-profit sector would allow for cost sharing and other efficiencies to further economic development priorities. While a focus on STEAM educational priorities may be desirable for economic development and to attract particular business, a diverse and broad-based education is very valuable and builds better more sustainable communities.

Government regulation is often an impediment to economic growth and in particular to the entrepreneurship and small-business growth that plays such a large role in Arizona’s economy. Arizona policy makers must consider the effects of regulation on these entities.

Arizona's economy is largely dependent on its unique natural resources—both abundant and scarce. Wise use, management, and conservation of these resources is a critical priority for Arizona continues economic development.

Tourism is a critical part of Arizona's economy—especially because Arizona's geography and climate are very unique and contributes over 19 billion dollars to Arizona's economy annually. Arizona must continue to support of the Arizona Tourism & Development Authority.

### **VERDE VALLEY (February 26, 2015)**

To improve our economy we need to invest more in education and ensure that our educational models support our economy. Aligning college curriculum with our economic needs is beneficial as demonstrated by some of the models currently being developed and implemented by Yavapai College. However, this does not minimize the need to provide students with a well-rounded education that includes humanities and arts-- skills that are essential for creating engaged citizens and future employees who can think critically and adapt to the economies of the future. Funding to support education is critical. It can come from many sources, including saving money by avoiding complicated and often unsuccessful litigation against our federal government and others. In essence, our consistent low spending on education prevents economic development. We need to reverse this trend and we need to better incentivize educators to reach the types of educational goals our future needs.

Providing venture capital is important for supporting entrepreneurs. Locating funders and alternate sources such as crowdfunding is crucial; it also takes work and collaboration. We can't wait for others to come to us. We need to make the efforts ourselves to find capital for entrepreneurs and to otherwise support entrepreneurial efforts in our community.

Tourism and the arts also are integral to our economy. Supporting Tourism and Arizona's film industry are just some of the ways we can both support the arts and help our economy. Whether it is through incentives or other financial support, the return on investment is huge.

Our economy needs the infrastructure to support it—whether its roads, water or broadband.

If we want good, reliable infrastructure, superior education systems and support for the arts we will need to make the difficult decisions of how to fund them, including the consideration of private funding or investment.

Some efforts take no funding. For example, establishing Arizona as a welcoming and culturally diverse place is a goal that all of our elected and policy leaders should strive for.

Finally, we all need to have more interaction with our state leaders. If we want our state leaders to consider these types of recommendations and to work toward a common vision for our state, we must get more people to vote for those who will provide the leadership we desire.

### **PRESCOTT (March 17, 2015)**

To improve the economy in the greater Prescott region, we need to improve our education system. Our schools are overwhelmed with responsibilities, including challenges associated with families who are in crisis. We need to better support our families and our schools. Supporting schools begins with funding. We consistently rank in the bottom for funding preK-12 education; this needs to change.

Education should be equitable and it should also be better aligned with the needs of business so that our educational institutions produce students who meet the job standards required in the region. This type of alignment will allow us to retain good students who now move elsewhere and will help attract those industries that have higher wage jobs.

Regional collaboration and partnership, not competition, is critical. We need to explore public-private partnerships and how to leverage existing resources.

Our natural resources, especially water, are also important to our future economy. Central Arizona needs to work together to address our future water needs. Collaboration is essential for solving future water needs, as is the consideration for new and creative technologies to bring water to our area.

We need to also consider whether to revamp our current revenue system. For example, the current structure for funding our roads and highways through the use of the gas tax no longer aligns with our infrastructure needs.

### **TUCSON (March 30, 2015)**

The following recommendations about Arizona's economy should receive priority:

- We should increase, or at least restore to pre-recession levels, investment in all levels education.
- We should invest in upgrading our infrastructure to enhance our capacity to transport and deliver goods and services, as well as water, to, from and within Arizona.
- We should ensure that funding for education, economic opportunity and economic assistance, reaches communities outside large cities, including tribal communities and rural areas.

#### **We can take the following steps to make these recommendations a reality:**

- We can emphasize, and educate people about, the long-term benefits that communities derive from investment in education. These benefits include reduction in crime; increased cultural opportunities, improved quality of life, and helping vulnerable populations meet basic needs and enhance their economic security.
- We can examine opportunities for individuals and communities to enhance and fill in gaps in the current education system.
- We can market Arizona in a way that frames our in state in a more positive way, and highlights the state's successes and strengths, including industries and employers that are quality jobs.
- We can seek to make the legislature more responsive to the needs and demands of all citizens, by voting, use of the initiative process, and by reducing the influence of dark money.
- We can promote sustainable economic development, including solar power and water harvesting.
- We can increase our focus on water security and water infrastructure and plan to withstand economic shocks caused by drought. The issue of water security has urgent importance in rural communities and in tribal communities, but we are a single economically interconnected state, and we should water security has implications for all of us.

### **SIERRA VISTA (March 31, 2015)**

**The following recommendations about Arizona's economy should receive priority, and we can take the following steps to make these recommendations a reality:**

- We can emphasize the link between an improved education system and greater economic development. When people and businesses have a choice about where to go, they look at education and school systems. We can emphasize using today's education system to develop tomorrow's workforce. We also can become more creative in seeking solutions and funding from sources outside state government. We also can recognize that stronger, more secure families help students to achieve their full potential in the classroom.
- We can prioritize health and wellness, and health care as an aspect of economic development. Being a place with amenities and access to resources that allow citizens to be healthy and stay healthy makes a community attractive to business and families that may be seeking to relocate.
- We can re-brand our state with a clear, consistent story of opportunity and success. We can portray Arizona as a great place to live, work, and learn not just as a great place to vacation and retire. We can highlight success stories and instill pride in Arizona. We can deliver a call to action to individuals, who play a vital role in conveying this message

- On a local and statewide level, we can harness the power of collaboration to help businesses and community and nonprofit groups communicate with each other, pool resources, and learn about opportunities.
- We can emphasize that a diversified economy is a sustainable one.

### **DOUGLAS (March 31, 2015)**

**The following recommendations about Arizona’s economy should receive priority, and we can take the following steps to make these recommendations a reality:**

- We can focus on infrastructure repair and improvements, especially transportation infrastructure and the Interstate 11 project.
- We can focus on education that develops a workforce that will help attract new business and new investment to our communities, especially when that workforce will occupy stable professions that pay a sustainable wage. Educating the workforce of tomorrow begins with imparting fundamental knowledge and skills in K-12 education.
- We can expand Arizona’s public university system to include four-year universities in rural counties. Cochise County and Cochise College are ideally positioned for this type of expansion.
- We can broaden vocational and job skills training that delivers marketable skills and allows young people to find jobs outside retail or hospitality industries.
- We should present information to our high school students about opportunities for post-secondary education so that these students attain their full potential as future entrepreneurs, business owners, and employees. Our youngest generation remains an untapped resource unless we encourage and mentor our current students to seek education beyond high school.
- We can encourage students to participate in volunteer programs as a way to train them in professional and business skills.
- We can embrace Arizona as a dynamic place and embrace change rather than allowing our conversation to be about what used to be.

### **WEST VALLEY - SURPRISE (April 1, 2015)**

To improve Arizona’s economy, education is pivotal. Parent involvement is important to ensure success. As a community, we should also support those parents who may feel overwhelmed.

Education is being severely impacted by a lack of funding. We must increase revenue for our education systems. We can do this through reinitiated the one-cent tax. We should also consider a roll back of the tuition tax credits that take funding away from public education.

Increasing revenue for education is directly related to those we elect. We need to increase voter turnout and we need to ensure that voters have the resources to make informed decisions about those we elect to office. We can accomplish that through programs such as today and through pieces such as the Town Hall’s “Tips for Making Your Vote Count.”

Career technical education is also critical to Arizona’s future economy. We need to preserve and build these programs because they help to create the workforce we need in our communities. We also need to reinstate the Arizona Film Office because we are losing revenue from the film industry that is now working with other states instead of Arizona.

Arizona’s infrastructure—including our roads and highways—is directly related to having a robust economy. We need to recognize the relationship of infrastructure to our economy and ensure that we are properly investing in preserving and creating the infrastructure we need for our future economy.

We’re creating entrepreneurial think tanks but we could do a better job of getting the word out to students and in creating opportunities for students to partners with businesses and other organizations. We can also improve our economy by taking steps to show that we are a welcoming and culturally diverse place.