



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION SUMMARY STATEMENTS From Community Outreach Programs following the 97th Arizona Town Hall

*In programs held around the state to follow up on the fall 2010 Town Hall titled “Arizona’s Government: The Next 100 Years”, audience members were asked to participate in a Town Hall-style discussion. The question posed was: **What recommendation(s) should receive priority and how can we make the recommendation(s) a reality?** [from the recommendations that were generated at the 97th Town Hall] Statements prepared from the discussions at the Outreach Programs are set forth below.*

YUMA (January 19, 2011)

Our state government should pull out all stops to make Arizona competitive in the world market. We need a good plan to maintain and create good jobs. To maintain and create good jobs, it is important that Arizona’s state government engage in more long-term planning—with a focus on making Arizona competitive.

To truly make long-term planning happen, we need to change certain government structures specifically we need to abolish term limits, and consider increasing the length of terms. Next, we need to reform or abolish publicly funded elections, create competitive legislative districts and raise legislative salaries.

We also need to change the state government’s system for raising revenue. Specifically, we need to simplify our tax system, eliminate the supermajority requirement, raise or eliminate the debt limit and end unfunded mandates and legislative sweeps.

When making changes to our revenue system, we need to be especially sensitive to the need for local control.

Finally, the key to success for these recommendations is civic education and citizen involvement at the grass roots level. Reform starts with us.

PHOENIX – East Valley Partnership (February 9, 2011)

Education is critical for improving our economy and the future of our state. We need to be investing in education, which is in fact investing in our future generations. However, it is important to keep in mind that investing in education does not necessarily mean just the investment of dollars.

It is also important that we change those structures that can cause hurdles to electing the best people. Specifically, we need to abolish term limits, create more competitive districts, reform or repeal clean elections and increase legislative salaries. We should also find ways to make legislator schedules more predictable and manageable. Arizona should think about a true “interim process” similar to other states. We need to also reexamine if a part-time citizen legislature is still the best system for Arizona.

As part of accomplishing these goals we should all play a role in educating voters about why these changes are absolutely necessary for improving Arizona’s future.

We should also establish and utilize strategic planning that includes input from diverse parties. Budgets and other major state policies should be compared against this strategic plan—especially for some of the more difficult decisions.

Diverse Arizonans from around the state spent a lot of time and consideration in developing these recommendations. All of us need to give these ideas serious consideration and support the engagement of our fellow citizens in shaping the future of Arizona.

WEST VALLEY (February 23, 2011)

To improve our government for the future, it is important to develop long term and strategic planning processes. And, we must not forget that our children are our future.

We need to support our future by supporting education which in turn supports our future economy. The effort to develop long term and strategic planning should be led by the Governor's office but it should include citizen involvement.

Quite simply, we need to get back to long term planning—especially with education and economic development. Addressing our revenue and budget issues is critical for improving both education and economic development. It is also important for government to partner with business and education. Right now, some businesses feel that it is a hostile environment for business. Others find that it is our education system (and lack of support for it) that most impacts our ability to attract and retain the types of businesses we want. It is important to note that supporting education does not just mean funding. It can also mean real life experiences and partnerships with students.

To have the best long term planning, we need long term legislators. To get long term legislators, we need to abolish term limits. We also need to increase legislative salaries.

To promote more cooperation and civility, legislative districts need to be more competitive.

We need to empower independent voters who often serve to moderate extremists. Getting Arizonans to vote is also critical--as is finding ways to inspire Arizonans to become civically involved.

Transparency is also important for ensuring good government.

With respect to the initiative process, we should limit the citizen initiative process to Arizona citizens. In our early days, citizens came to gather to make this a fabulous state. It is time for us to again become an active citizenry working together for the next 100 years.

PHOENIX - Soroptimist (February 24, 2011)

To improve our government for the next 100 years, we need to find ways to elect the best people. To elect the best people, we need to abolish term limits. Term limits have eliminated the integrity and institutional memory of the legislature.

If you have the best people in place they will make decisions that reflect long term planning and strategic goals which are critical. For long term planning to be effective, it needs to include a scheme that transcends legislative terms. We should also encourage our legislators to focus their efforts on laws that are directly related to our strategic plans and long term goals.

Creating competitive districts is important although federal laws may some create hurdles. We also need to reexamine our tax structure.

Key to all of these goals is improving civic involvement. Civic involvement includes all of us but it also needs to include students. Quite simply, we need to better engage each other and our next generation for the future of our state.

SEDONA/VERDE VALLEY (March 8, 2011)

Our government needs to make education its highest priority. As a local example, funding cuts to Yavapai College are going to have a significant negative impact on the community. If citizens are truly interested in having education as a priority, they need to be contacting the governing board to let them know that they need to raise taxes to support Yavapai College.

Our government also needs to focus on economic development and adopt the best practices referenced in the Town Hall report which include: changes to Arizona's tax structure; tying revenues to the costs of programs; and, ending unfunded mandates and legislative sweeps. The state government should also be focusing on how to support economic development throughout the state. In particular, the Governor should charge her newly created Rural Business Advisory Council with formulating a rural economic development strategic plan for the state of Arizona.

We can improve the constitutional amendment process by making the collection of signatures a volunteer effort instead of allowing paid signature gatherers. This should help reduce the impact of amendments funded by special interest groups from outside the state who do not always have the best interests of Arizona in mind.

Critical to all of these reforms is electing the best people. To get the best people we need to repeal term limits and create competitive districts. We should develop metrics to measure related items as discussed in the Arizona We Want report. We also need to allow local communities to have more control over local issues.

Most importantly, we all need to be involved in making these changes happen. It starts with talking to our elected leaders. To improve Arizona's government for the next 100 years we need to create and implement structures and processes to ensure a higher level of public engagement in government decision making. Quite simply, we have to let our legislators know that they are not speaking for us when they do not act in our interests.

TUCSON (March 16, 2011)

To improve our state for the next 100 years, we need to get the best people in the legislature. To accomplish this goal, we need to eliminate term limits, reform clean elections, create competitive districts, and increase legislative salaries. Raising salaries would also allow for a greater cross section of representation. To make these changes, the public needs to be educated about the basis for these reforms.

We also need to look at how to improve the state's financial position. Specifically, this includes reforming and restructuring our tax structure in a manner that is simpler and that allows businesses to succeed. It also includes eliminating unfunded mandates and examining our criminal justice system for possible cost savings.

Although we are in the midst of a budget crisis, we need to remember to consider water issues as well as the physical and mental health of Arizona residents.

Further, our segments of government need to work together more efficiently instead of competing and working against each other. Our state government would also be more effective if we reformed and reorganized the executive branch as summarized in the Town Hall report.

Public education is a requirement of our constitution. Our legislature should be required to meet this obligation, including the financial requirements relating to the obligation. Improving education also includes looking at best practices. Without a good education system we don't attract businesses. Education is the foundation for making our state better.

Finally, we must remember that it is people who elect our legislators. We need to educate the populace on important issues and encourage them to vote in a way that supports the legislature we want.

SIERRA VISTA (March 17, 2011)

Merit selection is critical to preserve for maintaining the integrity of Arizona's judicial system. Merit selection is important to preserve for all parts of the state—even those counties that are not large enough to have superior court judges appointed in this way. Merit selection should not only be preserved it should be expanded. To preserve merit selection it is critical to educate the public about its importance.

To improve our state government finances we need to get rid of those hurdles that keep our legislature from making good financial decisions, including the supermajority rule.

Public education about what the legislature is doing can have an impact on citizen engagement. We should all encourage the local paper to report how local state legislators are voting while the legislature is in session. Rules limiting the access of voting records should be changed. Voting records should be easily available online and with no cost.

We need to get the best people in office. To get the best people, we need to abolish term limits, repeal clean elections and raise legislative salaries.

Building up civic engagement and getting people involved is of paramount importance for the future of Arizona's government. One way to inspire people is to have them watch the legislature in action. Student government representatives can impact citizen engagement by encouraging other students to become informed, and to become engaged in local community service. All of us need to support civic engagement and community involvement, and we need to encourage people to register and to vote.

DOUGLAS (March 17, 2011)

Our legislature is supposed to represent its constituency not their own personal agenda. Clean elections has made it easier to get elected without representing the people of the state. We need to reform or repeal clean elections to correct this problem. We should also consider eliminating early ballots because of misinformation that can impact early votes.

Cuts to Arizona's budget have had a significant negative impact on our health care and education systems, as well as local judicial systems. Unfunded mandates are another significant problem for local communities—especially those areas outside Maricopa County.

Arizona's legislature is dominated by legislators who do not seem as concerned as they should be about areas outside of Maricopa County. Arizona's legislature has overspent and is now wrongly placing the responsibility for their financial problems on the backs of local and rural areas.

To create a legislature that looks out appropriately for the entire state we need to consider changes to how we elect our legislators. We should also look at how those parts of the state outside of Maricopa County can work together better to represent the interests of the rest of the state.

We need our legislators to stop focusing on areas such as expanding gun laws and instead focus on improving our education and our economy. To keep good people from leaving this state and to support our next generation, we need to support education at all levels and we need elected leaders who also support education. To accomplish these items there must be efforts on a grass roots level to change things. It starts at home and expands to the school system. We need to be active in informing voters and encouraging people to vote.

FLAGSTAFF (March 23, 2011)

To improve our state government, we need to elect the best people. To elect the best people we need to modify or eliminate term limits. Term limits have had a negative effect on long-term memory, long-term strategic planning, and having experienced legislators. However, term limits are not the only reason that we do not always attract the best people to run for state office. We also need to have more competitive districts and consider changing the nature of the legislative session so that more legislators can fully participate without giving up their other professions. If we are going to continue to require long sessions, we should consider increasing salaries. We should also consider having certain education requirements for legislators (either formal education or training).

It is always important to improve coordination between governments. However, there is specifically a need to improve coordination between state and local governments.

With respect to the executive branch, we need a Lieutenant Governor but the position should not include the current election duties of the secretary of state.

To improve our justice system we should consider having minimal education requirements to hold justice of the peace positions.

The workings of our state government system—especially the legislature—should be more open to the public. Advances in technology should be used to accomplish this goal.

Our revenue system needs to be reformed. Specifically, we should consider eliminating the 2/3 requirement to raise revenue. We also need to have a stable tax source that is not as volatile as sales tax and personal taxes.

Finally, our state government should engage in more long-term strategic planning. The state should have a requirement similar to what counties are required to do—a 10-year strategic plan. The 10-year strategic plan would be a policy document that would be implemented with interim laws and regulations.

KINGMAN (March 24, 2011)

To improve our government for the next 100 years, we need to implement mechanisms to counter financial abuse of government programs. An audit or accountability mechanism for government programs, including clean elections and AHCCCS, should be implemented.

To reform our legislature, we may want to consider expanding the terms of service or implementing a program where people serve for two years, such as what happens with the National Guard.

We also need greater transparency in government. Greater transparency may encourage people to become more involved in their government and in voting.

Key to an effective government is education and involvement of Arizona's citizens. We need programs that include effective media campaigns to involve our citizens. We also need to better educate our next generation about the government.

We can all be change agents. We need to encourage greater civic involvement and encourage our fellow citizens to vote. We must all play a role because, in the end, we the people are the government.

SHOW LOW (March 29, 2011)

State government needs to focus on business retention and expansion; and job creation. We also need to find ways to maintain our education investment in Arizona. Many of our young people are being educated in Arizona but are then leaving the state. To maintain our education investment and keep the next generation in Arizona, we need to focus on creating a competitive business environment with quality jobs.

Long-term planning is lacking in our state. The executive branch should take on primary responsibility to guide long-term and strategic planning for Arizona.

In recent years, the relationship between state and local government has become more adversarial. This results in inefficiencies and a waste of resources. It needs to change.

Term limits have created a legislature that is ill-informed about the nature of this relationship. To change this relationship and to have better institutional knowledge in the state legislature, we need to abolish term limits.

Our current state legislature also seems to be disconnected from Arizona citizens and unwilling to listen to organizations like the League of Cities and Towns. The legislature may be more willing to listen to local constituents.

Accordingly, we as local constituents need to let our opinions be known.

PHOENIX (April 13, 2011)

The City Hall outreach program audience recommends that we prioritize the following changes to Arizona's government:

1. The most important priority should be to take action to promote the creation of more competitive legislative districts. One action we can take to accomplish this objective is to participate in public hearings and other proceedings of the independent redistricting commission (now ongoing).
2. We recognize the importance of electing good people to public office, and should consider increasing the length of terms of office. However, we are concerned about potential entrenchment of less desirable legislators.
3. We should increase the transparency of government by making more and better information about governmental actions more easily accessible, and by making it easier for citizens to participate in the governmental process.
4. We should end unfunded legislative mandates and fund sweeps.
5. We should assure that education at all levels is adequately funded.