

Planning Arizona's government for the next 100 years

By [Carol West](#), Inside Tucson Business
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When President William Howard Taft approved and signed Arizona's Constitution on Dec. 9, 1910, on the way to statehood Feb. 14, 1912, the state's bent for independence and populist government was in evidence. Arizona's constitution clearly states that power comes from the people and not the other way around.

In November, the Arizona Town Hall convened at the Grand Canyon for its 97th gathering of citizens from all parts of the state. The topic was "Arizona Government for the Next 100 Years." Attendees described Arizona government as a "chess board without any moves." It is locked in place with few possibilities for opportune changes or innovation.

The legislature has term limits, so institutional memory has been lost. Members have become polarized and unable to work together since their tenure is limited, and they want to get as much done as possible for their particular interests.

We have a citizen legislature rather than a professional body. Is it time for a change?

Some thought that by increasing legislators' salaries and abolishing term limits, we might attract a more professional legislature that would devote more time to the issues and work together. However, one legislator I know scoffed at these ideas.

Arizona's tax structure is based on a time when the state was mostly rural and had a goods-based economy. Our population has grown to nearly 6.6 million and is more diverse. Now with a service-based economy, the tax-structure is a mismatch.

Town Hall participants recommended the elimination of the two-thirds supermajority vote requirement in the legislature to approve taxes and fees. They also said lawmakers should stop sweeping money from special funds to put into the general fund and eliminate unfunded mandates.

Should all top-level Arizona officials be elected? Or should some, such as mine inspector, state treasurer, and state superintendent of public instruction, be appointed by the governor? It is time for some reform of Arizona's executive branch?

While many of us in the Tucson region call the Phoenix area the "state of Maricopa," all of us at the Town Hall were brought to task by interests of the state's 13 other counties who referred to urban interests as the "state of Maripima." More collaboration must take place so there is less division between rural and urban issues. Each must recognize the needs of the other.

Arizona's constitution has been amended 130 times. Ideally, amendments should address governance issues, but that has not always been the case. It would be better if some amendments were placed in our laws, officially named the Arizona Revised Statutes. That would make them easier to change later if necessary. There is a need to reform the amendment process.

Some Town Hall attendees felt that citizen initiatives tie the hands of the legislators. Others said when the legislators and other elected officials fail to act, the initiative process gives the people a chance to make the desired governmental modifications. However, outsiders are usurping Arizonans by bringing their pet initiatives to our state. Arizonans ought to be the ones deciding what changes in government we want.

Town Hall participants said the role of government is as a catalyst, innovator, and facilitator; it must work to promote the public good. For example, the government can do a great deal for the environment, including the preservation of natural resources, and it can support public safety and public health. At the same time, government must step out of the way when it comes to the economic growth

of the State. The private sector should lead this effort.

More populous Maricopa and Pima counties use the merit selection process to select their court judges, resulting in highly qualified judges. Other parts of Arizona are beginning to see the logic for merit selection and would like to see this process used throughout the state. A stable funding source must be established for the judiciary.

Attendees emphasized that the highest priorities should be given to education and economic development, which were also recommendations at two previous Town Halls.

In Tucson, a local panel will discuss the 97th Arizona Town Hall at a noon luncheon March 16. More information, if you would like to attend, is online at www.aztownhall.org.

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