



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION SUMMARY STATEMENTS From Community Outreach Programs following the 108th Arizona Town Hall

In programs held around the state to follow up on the spring 2016 Town Hall titled “Arizona & Mexico,” 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 (September 21, 2016)

The border with Mexico creates many economic opportunities for our region. However, Arizona is competing with Texas, New Mexico and California. For our region to compete effectively and maximize the economic opportunities that arise from the border, we need to focus on improving infrastructure—especially our transportation infrastructure. Specifically, we need better rail connectivity between Mexico and the US. We also need a divided highway that connects San Luis to I-10 so that we can move commerce quickly and efficiently. Funding for this infrastructure needs to come from ADOT, which in turn needs to be funded by the State. We also need to look for federal support and dollars to complete infrastructure needs.

For our state to move into the 21st century economy, we also need to revisit government regulations that stymie economic growth and modernize these laws so that they stimulate economic growth.

Prioritizing is important. Improving infrastructure to support trade is essential and should be our top priority. We need to work with other Arizona ports of entry, instead of competing with them, to support appropriate infrastructure for all of Arizona.

As citizens, we should be talking with our state legislators and our federal delegation. We need to focus on the goal of maintaining and improving transportation infrastructure and insist that funding for infrastructure be supported. Otherwise, we will lose the opportunity to maximize the many economic opportunities that arise from our proximity with Mexico.

Finally, we also need to tell our story better. We should stress the positive aspects about our border communities and collectively promote the region – not just individual cities. There are many initiatives that are having some success in changing the perception of our region, but we need to do even more. We should consider promotional videos that highlight the positive aspect of our region. We should also talk frequently with others, especially lawmakers, about the economic opportunities that exist in our region that can benefit the entire state—not just in the area of agriculture but also in the areas of energy transmission and exportation, manufacturing and tourism.

VERDE VALLEY (September 28, 2016)

All 90 Arizona House and Senate seats are up for election and we have the opportunity to ask the candidates where they stand on Arizona-Mexico trade and we need to keep this issue in front of our elected officials.

When our economic needs require them, we welcome Mexican workers into our state and then when the economy recedes, we turn on them. We need to foster a change in attitude – we need to stop thinking of Mexico as being uneducated, dangerous, and undesirable. The Mexican people are educated and their middle class is growing rapidly. We need to be proactive in changing mistaken perceptions.

Hands Across the Border and Sister City programs need to be supported.

Education can bridge so many of the gaps in our relationship with Mexico.

We need to move beyond a “we – they” relationship. There is a compelling opportunity to create unprecedented prosperity for all people in the Arizona-Sonora region. We need a long-range plan with a compelling vision to create two nations indivisible. The border does not divide Arizona and Mexico, it connects us and should be viewed as a bi-national region.

FLAGSTAFF (September 29, 2016)

Tourism is a major economic driver to our state and we need to encourage Mexican tourism and hospitality in northern Arizona. Sales tax is the largest revenue source for Arizona's state government. We should work with the Federal government to expand the Border Card Crossing Zone to include the entire state. Tucson and Marana are prospering today in part due to Mexican tourists and shoppers.

To attract Mexican tourists to northern Arizona we need to recognize the importance of changing attitudes statewide to understand the value of doing business with Mexico. We can make a difference by ensuring that local governments, businesses, chambers of commerce, visitor centers and more are actively welcoming Mexican tourists and businesses. Consider the growing medical and biotechnical industry sectors in northern Arizona; we should look at expanding medical tourism. We also need to identify the other industry sectors that we should focus on in attracting trade and business to northern Arizona.

Infrastructure is critical to increasing trade with Mexico. We need to invest in improved ports of entry that facilitate increased commercial traffic and encourage Mexico to make similar investments in their infrastructure.

We need to make sure we are sending the signals to Mexico that Arizona is a desirable location. We should encourage mutual education based on objective facts on both sides of the border to correct mistaken perceptions permeated by actions such as SB1070. In fact, repealing SB1070 would send a message that coming to Arizona will be a very positive experience.

The border does not divide Arizona and Mexico, it connects us and can be viewed as a super-regional trade zone.

WEST VALLEY (October 6, 2016)

Words matter. To create the strongest bi-national economic region, with Arizona and Mexico, we need to change how we talk about the nation of Mexico. We need to change the toxic nature of the conversation. As individuals, we need to model this behavior by speaking in a rational and respectful tone. We also need to speak up when people or policies create situations that treat Mexicans with disrespect. For example, green cards historically worked well with agriculture and business needs in Arizona. Changes to these policies have not only impacted business in Arizona, they have resulted in situations that needlessly treat Mexican Nationals in a disrespectful manner.

Education is critical. From grade school through the college and university level, including post-graduation level education, it is important to have cultural education and exchanges. Hands Across the Border was a great program that helped further such exchanges but its effectiveness has been challenged with new restrictions and regulations for border crossings.

Within our educational institutions we need to guard against policies that create segregation of different cultures and reduce the opportunities for cultural exchanges and understandings. We should make efforts with Mexico to help grow our mutual economies. This includes expanding the Border Crossing Card to include the entire state of Arizona. This will not only be a boon to our economy, it will allow for more cultural exchanges that will improve the understanding and relationships of Arizonans and Mexicans. We should also work to improve the stability and reliability of broadband internet access across the border. Finally, we need to work on improving the efficiency and speed of border crossings or we will keep losing business to Texas and California.

SHOW LOW/PINETOP (October 8, 2016)

Too often communication about the relationship with Mexico occurs in sound bites, without complete, accurate information or nuance. In addition, in our currently divided political environment some people can't hear information about the benefits of a relationship with Mexico until their concerns about border security are addressed. Other people may be inaccurately branded by the media as anti-Mexican or anti-immigrant when in fact their objections are focused on illegal immigration, or on the costs and economic burdens caused by unlawful immigration. For example, the local hospital in Yuma has reported that it is \$5 million in debt due to uncompensated care provided to Mexican nationals. The issues can be complicated, which makes useful discussion about the issues more difficult. In addition, politicians have used the hot button issue of immigration to benefit themselves, without regard to what is best for Arizona or for local communities.

We should change the national discourse about Mexico and international trade, so that Arizona discourse on these topics can make progress. To do this we should start with public education in the community and in the schools, to make the public more aware of the realities and benefits of Arizona's economic relationship with Mexico. It is important to recognize that while much of the discussion about Mexico is focused on illegal immigration, that is only one piece of the puzzle, and it should not eclipse the other pieces. There are many people in Mexico who are well educated and who have financial resources, with no desire to emigrate to the US, but who would love to come to the US as tourists.

The White Mountains is a tourism economy, and is working with groups in Sonora to attract Mexican visitors to the Sunrise ski area. The 75-mile limit on the border crossing card is an impediment to these efforts; expanding the scope of the crossing card to all of Arizona would help northern Arizona develop more tourism involving Mexican visitors.

In the recent past, the maquiladora program had some problems that caused Mexican businesses to be reluctant to work with American businesses. Some of these issues may have been addressed by a shift from US ownership of maquiladoras to Mexican ownership of maquiladoras.

Cross-border exchange programs, such as the Hands Across the Border program involving the Yuma school system, can facilitate better understanding and relationships between Arizonans and Mexicans.

Some specific actions that could be taken by the White Mountains communities to take advantage of the relationship with Mexico include:

- Translating TRAX materials into Spanish

- Developing cross-border sports leagues at the high school and college level

- Offering summer soccer leagues and camps

PRESCOTT – EMBRY-RIDDLE AERONAUTICAL UNIVERSITY (October 12, 2016)

The story we tell about the relationship between Arizona and Mexico is vitally important to expanding our economic ties. Sister city and similar exchange programs need to be renewed and expanded. We need to promote Spanish language education throughout our educational system. More Arizonans should be bilingual.

The existence of SB1070, even though it has been largely invalidated by the courts, continues to leave a chill in the Mexican community in Arizona and with Mexican citizens considering coming to Arizona to travel and do business. It is so important that our leaders and people find ways of coming together. The border does not have to divide Arizona and Mexico.

We need to work with the Federal government to increase staffing at the ports of entry in order to increase commercial throughput.

We should work on expanding the existing border crossing zone to include the entire state of Arizona but we should not underestimate the challenge in getting our own Federal government to agree.

Texas has made major inroads in advancing trade with Mexico. Arizona should look at what Texas did that has been successful in working with the Mexican Federal government.

Arizona and the country as a whole needs a strong and prosperous Mexico.

PHOENIX – SOROPTIMIST (October 13, 2016)

In recent years there has been a great deal of negative information and rhetoric in the United States about Mexico. The time has come to change and re-brand that story, through education, marketing and communication about the positive aspects of our relationship with Mexico. Efforts to educate and inform Arizonans about the positive attributes of our neighbor to the south should include the public schools as well as public media, and take the focus beyond border issues.

Arizona should also consider teaching Spanish as a second language as a regular part of the statewide curriculum. We should embrace and encourage programs that involve exchanges of students between Arizonan and Mexican universities. We should encourage people to shift their focus beyond the problems at the border,

encouraging travel and commerce throughout Mexico. We should also make it easier for people to travel between the two countries, by easing passport restrictions and expanding the scope of the Border Crossing Card.

To be successful this effort will require the development and implementation of a long term, strategic communications and marketing plan. We also must have a legislature that will support and encourage these efforts. The legislature should repeal S.B. 1070. The legislature also should hold joint sessions with the Mexican legislature. If the Arizona Legislature does not change its tone and actions relative to Mexico we should elect legislators who will do so.

TUCSON (October 19, 2016)

Within the array of significant and feasible priorities in the report, the priority which runs through them all is the importance of communicating the Arizona-Sonora story. Focusing on promoting the positive aspects of the binational partnership, particularly in areas outside of the border region, will be critical in selling the concept of a true economic super region. These efforts in communication have the added benefit of helping to reverse negative perceptions and general misconceptions about the Arizona-Sonora situation, including: safe travel for Americans in Mexico, and vice versa; border security, or the lack thereof; cross-border trade and its effect on the American economy and workforce; and others. Working towards removing the sources of these perceptions, such as SB 1070, is vital. Ultimately, correcting and continually controlling the narrative is necessary to ensure the success of all initiatives, and the requisite political processes to ensure sustainable funding for them.

Infrastructure investment is a critical need throughout Arizona and Sonora. Immediately, funding and implementation of the SR-189 project is greatly needed, particularly considering the newly improved border entry and the incongruity created between different traffic flow capacities. Strategies should be developed, furthermore, to design and build adequate highways and railways from the Port of Guaymas through the State of Arizona. Water infrastructure, and the attendant water policy such as a feasible approach to desalinization, must be developed to support continued population growth on either side of the border.

Finally, cross-border leadership is fundamental to these efforts as well. Joint-legislature meetings between Arizona and Sonora should lead the way towards leaders at all levels of government, private and non-profit sectors engaging in effective cross-border discussions.

SIERRA VISTA (October 20, 2016)

It's important that we invest in robust infrastructure along our borders. We should research best practices from other states that are doing this well and we should discuss it in terms of the return on investment as opposed to the cost so that everyone understands the economic benefit of investing in improved infrastructure.

To improve economic opportunities, we need to expedite and simplify documentation for cross-border business and travel. We need to also promote consistency in the requirements for documentation. We should explore ways to improve transportation to and from the border with buses and other public transportation.

Technology is also important. We need to invest in better broadband across the border as well as programs that support cross-cultural relationships and business.

Finally, the stories we tell about the border and the language we use make a difference. The assets associated with the border are greater than the challenges. We can all be a part of telling the positive stories about the border. We should also support cross-border cultural exchanges and educational programs within our schools

DOUGLAS (October 20, 2016)

We need to change how people think of Douglas and the border. Many have the mistaken impression that border communities like Douglas are dangerous--in part because we tend to have media coverage from outside news sources *only* when there is a problem. We are a safe community with a lot to offer. We need to find ways to get outside media to cover the positive aspects of our community.

It starts with each of us. We all need to be the voice of Douglas. We need to share what is good about Douglas by word of mouth, through our schools and with those who are outside of our community. When the media wrongly portrays our community, we need to contact them and share the full story. When elected officials wrongly portray our community, we need to contact them and ask them to share what is accurate and balanced-- what is good about border communities like Douglas. We also should use social media extensively. Specifically, use #douglasaz to show positive images and messages about Douglas to the world.

We have to take ownership of what is needed to move our community forward. We need to believe in ourselves and build from our strengths and opportunities. It is our responsibility to support our community through the stories we tell, the mindset we have, the questions we ask of elected and other government officials and the investments we make in local business. We need to decide what we want, and what we need to change. Then, we need to be the agents of change and take responsibility for the actions needed. As a community we can change the perception of Douglas by consistently and collectively presenting Douglas in a positive way that accurately reflects the benefits of our border community.

YUMA – SOUTHWEST AGRICULTURAL SUMMIT (February 23, 2017)

The relationship between Arizona and Mexico is crucial.

There are issues on both the U.S. and Mexico sides of the border. It is important to have the perspective of residents from both countries on this relationship and to address the needs of both countries, such as rail access, infrastructure, wait time in border crossings, and other constraints that affect us both. We both seek collaboration as a mega-region where we can work together to better our area. Face-to-face contact is key to our mutual communication.

In Mexico, there are bureaucratic issues in obtaining funds for infrastructure at the border. Mexican customs is landlocked and is also looking at addressing issues also faced on the U.S. side of the border. Mexico is concerned about recent U.S. presidential actions that are affecting the Mexican economy, the peso, and the price of gasoline, thus directly impacting the Mexican consumer.

Dissemination of information on the relationship between Arizona and Mexico is crucial to promoting trade and the commercial side of this border relationship. Identifying an organization that connects both entities, such as 4FrontED, can assist in helping people understand the opportunities that exist in this mega-region of Arizona, Sonora, California and Baja California.

Many of the problems that have existed in the past between Arizona and Mexico have continued to exist. NAFTA has assisted in increasing trade dramatically between both countries; however, issues involving this dynamic border, such as government regulations, labor, and water, will continue.

Border issues can be confusing due to different messages given by media. Organizations, such as the Border Trade Alliance, can help, although government language can be highly technical and difficult to understand. Asking the right question is crucial to better understand a particular issue.

NAFTA has helped the agriculture industry by opening up markets in the Americas and expanding the marketplace. One example is the avocado industry, which has benefited both California farmers and other countries by significantly increasing both the demand and supply for this crop. This program has not necessarily resulted in losing jobs in the United States.

Streamlining the guest worker program would benefit the agriculture industry. There is demand for employment and demand from employers for workers. The H2A program has helped farmers in the U.S. address the continuing labor shortage in agriculture through employment of immigrant workers. This labor shortage in agriculture exists in the Mexican agriculture industry as well. Allowing people to legally work in the industry can benefit both employers and workers. Many of these agriculture jobs would not be taken by U.S. residents. However, having multiple government agencies involved with the H2A program can cause difficulties and it is crucial that these agencies work together.

It is important to look at governmental requirements that could be addressed to help the agriculture industry. The H2A requirement to provide housing for farm workers is expensive, although in the Yuma area, most workers do not use this option. Addressing this extra requirement would assist agriculture to control costs.

Raising wages has not proved to be a solution for increasing the labor supply. From previous wage increases, the industry has seen that it only moves workers from one company to another instead of expanding

the labor pool. Yuma has the opportunity to hire workers at the border; however, the new labor pool may not be skilled at the tasks they are required to do.

Mandatory nationwide E-verify is of concern given the subsequent effect that it would have on the agriculture industry. While mechanization is being incorporated into crops such as cabbage and romaine, it represents a high cost of doing business. Each machine can cost in the millions of dollars. Also, mechanization is not ready for many of the labor-intensive skills that are needed for harvesting crops.

The H2A program would benefit from being located under the Department of Agriculture. It is crucial that different government agencies work together to ensure adequate border trade and accessible and timely border crossings. Many regulations from the Department of Labor do not apply in the 21st century. Changing laws, such as the Affordable Care Act, have also affected the farm workers and employers and the facility of accessing medical coverage.

Opportunities exist that would help border residents with timely border crossings. One suggestion is to have an identified border lane for residents crossing for medical purposes. Another recommendation is to facilitate the crossing of children of farm workers who are often carrying important documents, such as U.S. birth certificates, that could be easily stolen. These documents could remain safe at home if a Pass Card were made available to them.

Information on the border situation is currently being promoted by the agriculture industry and by organizations such as the Border Trade Alliance. It is important to lobby for the CanaMex west corridor to facilitate and expand trade. NAFTA and what it represents is important to the survival of the agriculture industry in the United States.