



## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION SUMMARY STATEMENTS

### From Community Outreach Programs following the 96th Arizona Town Hall

*In programs held around the state to follow up on the spring 2010 Town Hall titled "Building Arizona's Future: Jobs, Innovation & Competitiveness", 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 96th Town Hall] Statements prepared from the discussions at the Outreach Programs are set forth below.*

#### **YUMA (July 27, 2010)**

In Yuma we have learned to use partnerships and work together to get things done for Yuma. We need to maintain, support and build on these efforts because we cannot rely on Phoenix or the state legislature to look out for our concerns.

On a statewide basis, we need to change our tax structure and our constitution to better support attracting the kind of business Arizona wants. Specifically, we need to remove the constitutional restrictions on tax increment financing. We also need a more balanced tax structure — our current structure is overly reliant on business property tax. To attract more business the tax structure should be equalized with other sources of revenue.

We are at an opportune moment to take a competitive edge against neighboring states such as California. To do this we need to take additional actions beyond just restructuring our tax base. We need to make sweeping changes in how we educate our children and encourage them to stay here. We need to copy successful economic development strategies and take a proactive approach that includes a rapid response team.

Yuma can be proud of what it has accomplished as a community. Yuma can help move Arizona forward by taking action now as individuals, and as a community. As a border community specifically, Yuma has a unique and deep understanding of the immigration issue. The state and the nation could learn much about how to resolve this issue by bringing the discussion to Yuma.

#### **MESA (August 24, 2010)**

To improve our state's economy, we need to address all of the recommendations in a collective fashion. Changes in our state's leadership and government structures are especially important as they impact all of the remaining recommendations.

Reputation has a significant impact on economic development. Nationally, our reputation is struggling. SB1070 created a firestorm that is negatively impacting economic development.

To change this perception, we need to look at changing our government structure, and those who hold leadership positions. This issue has also created polarization of Arizona's citizens. We, as individuals, need to support more civil conversations about these controversial issues.

We need to also consider changes to government that will make it easier for businesses to thrive, including removing regulations that create hurdles for business growth.

As a state, we do not have a unified approach to economic development and we are struggling significantly as a result. GPEC and other similar organizations have taken actions that help create a unified approach in specific situations. However, to compete with other states, we must have a more unified approach that includes sustained support by our legislature and elected leaders

We must create a community that attracts and retains members of the next generation who are highly educated and creative. We should also encourage and support entrepreneurs.

Finally, improving our education system is critical for creating the "sense of place" that attracts the kinds of businesses we want.

## **GLENDALE – League of Arizona Cities and Towns (August 26, 2010)**

To improve our economy, we need to work on passing a jobs bill for the State of Arizona.

To attract the kinds of jobs we want, we need more incentives like the renewable (?) tax credits. Right now, it is hard for Arizona to compete with other states that have tax credits. We all need to work with and support the economic developers in drafting and passing such a bill.

Education is a key component for economic development including workforce training for the types of businesses we are trying to attract. Companies considering states for new business often look at the education level of the residents when deciding where to locate.

We need consistent adequate funding for our education system that is tied to trackable outcomes. Funding should come from a balance of sources.

As a result of our economic struggles and our current tax structure, the state has a severe budget deficit. We have cut many taxes in recent years but government expenditures—especially with certain entitlement programs—have not decreased proportionately.

We need to change the overall structure of our government revenue system to avoid these problems. However, it is politically very difficult to implement overall structural reform. While a piecemeal approach is not recommended by most groups who study the issue, politics often means that key recommendations have to be addressed separately or the whole effort dies.

## **TUCSON (September 1, 2010)**

Improving our education system is critical for improving our economy. We need to start with 0-5 year olds. The best investment we can make in education is to have our children prepared to learn.

To properly fund our education system, we need to restructure our revenue systems so that we are no longer ranked at the bottom in the country.

We also need to support the development of capital for companies—especially high tech manufacturing and “clean” technologies.

Term limits and redistricting have had some unintended negative consequences on the function of our government and the actions of our elected leaders. We need to consider changing some of these structures. As citizens, we also need to vote for those leaders who support education, economic development and a streamlined and effective government system.

As individuals, we should also commit to be engaged in a civic and civil way. While we are facing many challenges, we have an opportunity to look at new ways to do things. We should not waste a “good crisis”—the reports from the last two Town Halls on Arizona’s revenue systems and the economy should be used as a resource along with the upcoming report on Arizona’s government systems. These reports provide guidance for solving much of this crisis.

## **SIERRA VISTA (September 2, 2010)**

Arizonans should recognize the economic development differences between its rural and urban communities. That said, we should organize a local, regional, and statewide economic development strategy.

To improve Arizona’s economy, we should tell companies that they can come here and make money. These efforts can be improved by broadening and balancing the tax base and property tax structure, as well as by making it more conducive to small business. In addition to cultivating small business, we should grow relationships with anchor tenants (e.g., Fort Huachuca).

Arizonans also should consider the cost of doing business in Arizona. For example – we should re-evaluate the one-size-fits all cost structure for energy, as determined by the Arizona Corporation Commission.

Arizona needs to develop a reputation management strategy and promote our state's positive accomplishments. Arizonans also should promote a stable political environment and work to better develop a well informed electorate.

We should consider choice of education limitations, particularly in rural Arizona. This has a long-lasting impact on our economy by creating a shortage of competent workers. This also speaks to the chicken or the egg problem – (jobs or education first?). In short, Arizona needs to develop a better plan for providing high quality education to our citizens; we need to better educate our children, voters, business, and government.

### **DOUGLAS (September 2, 2010)**

The ideological machine currently driving Arizona is eroding our ability to grow and prosper economically. We should promote a stable political environment and consider changing our political structure, such as eliminating closed primary elections. One fundamental way of accomplishing this goal is for every eligible citizen to vote. Moreover, we need our elected officials in Phoenix to recognize rural Arizona's needs and diversity.

We also should try to provide better community and statewide communication, such as community discussion forums. While interest exists for developing alternative forums, like community newspapers, such forums may be difficult to start.

Economic gardening is important and job creation is essential, not only for job creation in and of itself, but job creation that will bring additional, supporting jobs. Additionally, Arizonans should recognize the job creation needs and differences across this state's diverse communities.

To accomplish all these goals, we should coordinate efforts to develop and implement local, state, and regional strategic economic plans.

### **WEST VALLEY (September 14, 2010)**

Education is a top priority for improving Arizona's economy. This includes Pre-K through 12, and higher education. However, it also includes retraining for those who have lost their jobs. We can all support these efforts by reaching out to our legislators and letting them know that education must be a priority.

It is also essential that cities, counties, and municipalities work together instead of competing against each other.

In the short term, we must address the state's reputation problems. We need to promote what is special and positive about Arizona—including some of the positive accomplishments such as improvements in education and the support of small business.

Finally, we need to support legislators who are willing to work together to solve our state's issues, not those who engage in unproductive political infighting.

### **PHOENIX WORKFORCE CONNECTION (September 15, 2010)**

We should take better advantage of the unique assets of Arizona's universities—such as their strong engineering programs—to promote Arizona to companies that we would like to relocate to our state. We should also broaden the tax base to stabilize Arizona's economy.

As part of our efforts to improve Arizona's economy, it is important to increase communication between our students, our educational institutions and business. We should also restore funding to the department of commerce and consider providing the funding to Arizona businesses to use in retraining our workers. We need to also restore funding to career and technical education programs.

Finally, we need to support our classroom teachers so that they have the training to teach our children to be better prepared for higher education and the new economy.

## **PHOENIX/SOROPTOMIST (September 30, 2010)**

To improve Arizona's economy, we need to focus on supporting and increasing our dwindling industry base. Nonetheless, improving our educational system is the most important priority.

As part of improving our education system, we need to consider changing methodologies that encourage teachers to teach to the test. Properly funding education is even more critical now. Lack of funding to education is directly tied to the problems with our revenue system. We need to reform our revenue system and increase funding for education. Otherwise we will continue to lose good teachers and economic opportunities from businesses that refuse to locate here because of the state of Arizona's public education systems.

We also need to focus on improving our reputation. Arizona has unfortunately become the butt of many jokes—not just because of SB 1070, but also because of our standing with funding education. We need to be better at touting what is great about Arizona. We should also look at ways of supporting local businesses, supporting new industries such as renewable energy, and revamping our tax structure to level the playing field so that we can capture some of the internet sales revenue that is currently slipping through the cracks.

## **VERDE VALLEY (October 5, 2010)**

Improving our infrastructure, engaging in strategic planning, supporting capital formation and business incubators, and supporting the renewable energy and agricultural industries are essential for improving our economy.

We need to also address job training. Specifically, Arizona should be more aggressive in obtaining federal funding for community colleges to work with established industries in retraining Arizona residents.

Job training is a form of education, and it's important, but improving our overall education system and the education of our community is critical. It is also important that urban areas of Arizona and our elected legislators become better educated about the needs of rural Arizona.

One of the roadblocks to improving our education system is our government structure which needs to be changed. It is hard to attract the businesses we want to Arizona when our educational system is repeatedly ranked at the bottom in the country.

We could also improve our education system through better coordination and communication between secondary schools, colleges and businesses.

Improvement in all of these areas requires good leadership—leadership that understands the importance of education, the importance of a good learning environment within our schools, and the importance of rural Arizona to the entire state.

## **AAED (Arizona Association for Economic Development – October 5, 2010)**

First: Arizona should focus on education. Arizona must better fund and better prioritize the use of education resources so that economic developers can sell this state as one that is focused and committed on education. Arizona should follow the lead of progressive education states and create an education fund

Second We must broaden the tax base in order to fund the priorities identified by the AAED and the Town Hall. There was consensus that the tax system should benefit and focus on economic development, including already identified priorities such as education and infrastructure investment.

Third: Changes in Governmental Structures and Political Ideologies must occur in order to ensure that funding is on appropriate economic development priorities. These changes must involve more strategic long-term planning. Arizona as a whole, including governmental or private entities, must have a more concerted effort to focus on economic development. Arizona must create a climate for development that is attractive to those outside of Arizona who would invest in our State.

Fourth: As Arizona improves at strategic planning and focuses on economic development, Arizona should take a more sustainable approach in this effort, including in managing tax dollars, managing our impact on the

environment, and limiting sprawl. Arizona should carefully focus on the types of jobs we want, and not just any jobs. We should not seek growth for growth's sake.

### **SHOW LOW (October 12, 2010)**

To improve Arizona's economy, the state as a whole needs to better consider the needs of small business—especially those in the rural areas. Local and state governments need to consider this impact and then determine how to “get out of the way” of businesses thriving. For example, we should make efforts to assist companies wishing to relocate in our communities with permitting and planning so that these procedures do not become roadblocks to economic development.

While government needs to streamline planning and permitting and otherwise “get out of the way” of building businesses, local, regional, and state governments do need to be involved in supporting overall strategic plans. This will not only support local economies, it will also reduce costs to the state. The “Real Arizona” corridor is a good example of such an effort.

On a statewide level, the new commerce authority has potential, but it does not have enough rural representation. ADOT and other state entities also need to work with local areas to employ local residents when state projects are being performed in our communities. This will not only support local economies, it will also reduce costs to the state.

We need to support local businesses—both in retail and in the use of professional services. To the extent procurement laws and other incentives prevent supporting local businesses in this way, they need to be changed.

### **FLAGSTAFF (October 13, 2010)**

Arizona needs to strategically plan in a cooperative and all inclusive way as opposed to having multiple strategic plans with a myopic and individualistic vision. This should involve the cooperation of both public and private organizations working together and taking advantage of best practices and diverse resources to achieve the common goal of economic development.

Arizona should focus on incenting the types of industries that we want to attract. Additionally, we need to work together, with both private and public partners, to locally grow the types of businesses we want.

Arizona should broaden the tax base but must analyze the fairness of the tax system. Arizona should pay careful attention to the disproportionate sales tax impact on Arizona businesses as opposed to e-commerce ventures.

Arizona citizens feel disconnected from their elected state leaders—but Arizona suffers from very low voter turnout. Arizona should work to encourage all citizens to vote. Additionally, careful attention should be paid to the creation and design of voting districts. Arizona elected leaders should be present and active in the very types of decisions we are participating in.

### **KINGMAN (October 14, 2010)**

Education is directly related to economic development. To improve our economy, we need to improve our education system. This includes expanding the availability of four-year degrees to Mohave County and rural areas.

This also includes supporting pre-k education and supporting First Things First. We should vote no on proposition 302 which seeks to strip funding from First Things First.

We should strive to reduce barriers to manufacturing—which includes maintaining low energy costs when possible. We should also broaden the tax base to lower the high corporate tax burden. Having investment funds available is critical. To facilitate construction and other industries, we need to remove lending, funding and investment barriers that are currently preventing these industries from thriving. This would help stimulate the economy for Mohave County and the rest of the state.

Finally, we as individuals should all take the opportunity to express our voice in this November's election.