

# Opportunity for All

An Interview with The Honorable Doug Ducey, Governor of Arizona

**EDITORS' NOTE** Governor Doug Ducey was elected in 2014 as the 23rd Governor of the State of Arizona and was reelected in 2018. He has applied his experience from a successful career in business, which included being the CEO of Cold Stone Creamery, to bring much-needed change to Arizona government. Upon taking office, the Governor inherited a \$1 billion budget deficit and balanced the budget in his first year without raising taxes. Governor Ducey is



The Hon. Doug Ducey

committed to investing in public education and in his first year, he led a historic and bipartisan effort to invest \$3.5 billion into K-12 schools and also championed the passage of legislation to increase teacher pay by 20 percent by 2020. Governor Ducey has cut regulations and simplified taxes every year to stimulate job creation and economic growth. He has also prioritized public safety, creating the Arizona Border Strike Force, a statewide, multi-agency effort to combat border-related crime. In his second term, Governor Ducey remains committed to making Arizona a land of "Opportunity for All" and has pledged to work every day to make that vision a reality. Governor Ducey was born in Toledo, Ohio. He moved to Arizona in 1982 to attend Arizona State University, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Finance.

## After a successful business career, what interested you in running for public office?

I wanted to make a difference and I wanted to give back to a state that had given so much to me. I also realized that the only thing that grew faster than Cold Stone Creamery was the state of Arizona, and I couldn't believe that it was out of money and insolvent in 2009.

I thought that someone with a fresh perspective and a business background could make a difference, and that is why I threw my hat in the ring and got involved in public life.

**When you first took office, the state was in a challenging position and you inherited a billion-dollar budget deficit. What were the keys to changing the mindset within the government and being able to drive change?**

The real challenge of leadership is making the difficult decisions and setting the vision for where the state can go. Then we had to chart

the course and pick the people who could help us get there. Finally, we had to communicate, communicate, communicate.

It wasn't that the budget was so difficult to balance; it was that it was so politically unpopular to balance it.

As someone who had spent 30 years in the private sector and had lived through a few downturns, I knew that each time I looked back, I thought I should have acted quicker and dug deeper. I wasn't going to let that experience be lost on the biggest

job and responsibility of my life. I immediately set out to make the right decisions and tighten the belt inside state government to get the budget in the black.

It was difficult because many legislators knew it would be unpopular and that they were going to have to vote for an unpopular budget that actually reduced the size of government and the level of spending, and that had never been done voluntarily.

I wanted them to be able to go out into their communities and explain it so I told them that they could blame me; I was going to own this budget – it's going to be mine and, a year from now, our economy is going to be better and we're going to be able to heal some of these areas where we have had to make tough decisions.

The good news is the economy did get better and now it's booming. We have gone from a \$1 billion budget deficit to a \$1 billion budget surplus and, at the end of this year, we will have a \$1 billion balance in our rainy-day fund.

This is financially responsible and it's something every household and small business owner can understand.

## Will you discuss your efforts to transform K-12 education?

There is no better investment that a governor can make than in K-12 education that focuses on results and outcomes inside the classroom.

Today, in Arizona, we have more jobs available than people to fill them, so if we can have a virtuous cycle of children getting an education, leaving schools with skills and knowledge, and then matriculating to university, community college, the military, or beginning a career, that will certainly enhance the quality of life for our state and cities.

We want to make sure we're focusing not only on revenues and resources, but that a real exclamation point is put on the results. What does a child know at the completion of 12 years of education? We look at a number of points along the way – metrics like third-grade reading and eighth-grade math, graduation rates and chronic absenteeism, as these are metrics that can help measure the success of the system.

One thing that has been lost in our education system is that, when we were in school, we were exposed to shop. That is where many good people learned their passion and turned it into a purpose that resulted in a good paycheck. Over the past few decades, we have developed a mentality that everyone should go to college, get a bachelor's degree, and pursue a white-collar career. For many people, this isn't exciting and is not something they will be happy doing, so we have lost them to the system.

Exposing young people in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades to the multitude of wonderful careers that are available is important.

Today, it's not called shop – it's called career and technical education. The students have fun in these classes and learn to apply math, reading and computer coding to what they're doing on a day-to-day basis. These are the best educated kids coming out of our classrooms and, not only can they go into a skilled trade immediately upon graduation, but they turn out to be some of our best engineering students going to the finest schools.

## Has it been critical for you to focus on teacher pay in order to ensure that you are attracting and retaining the best talent?

Teachers, in addition to parents, make the biggest difference. In my State of the State address in my third year, I listed out the teachers that made a difference in my life.

Governors across the country are experiencing a teacher shortage. Part of that is the people who came out of college 40 years ago with teaching as a mission and have been in the classrooms educating us for four decades have now done their duty and are retiring.

I want to provide an attractive career path for young people to go into public education, so we have committed a 20 percent pay increase for our teachers by school year 2020. We have also created the Arizona Teachers Academy where, if young people attending a university today will commit four years to public education in Arizona, they can graduate debt free with the aid of a scholarship.

I use the example of Sandra Day O'Connor as the most honorable of all Arizonans. She was the first female supreme court justice, there is a law school named after her, she taught law, there is a federal court named after her right down the street from our state capitol building – yet if upon retirement in 2006 she had returned to Arizona and wanted to teach civics at a public high school, she would have been deemed unable by the system.

We want those principals and superintendents to take advantage of the amount of talent we have in the state of Arizona. When someone wants to give back and get in front of a classroom, we need to bring them in and not send them off for additional schooling when they have all this life experience that can make a difference in a young person's life.

**You have also prioritized public safety and created the Arizona Border Strike Force. Have you been happy with the impact that this has made and will you discuss your focus on public safety?**

Public safety is the top priority of a governor – it's something I wake up every day thinking about. I look at the news differently and listen to phone calls differently because of all the concerns around public safety.

Four years ago, when I came into office, Washington, D.C. wasn't listening – they were unconcerned about Arizona and other border states. I remember my first month as governor we hosted the Super Bowl in Arizona. It was a smashing success from every angle.

After the Super Bowl, I met with then Secretary of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson. I suggested that, if we enhanced the cooperation between the federal government, our state law enforcement assets and local law enforcement leaders, and applied those joint resources to border security, what a difference we could make.

Secretary Johnson liked the idea and said he would take it back to Washington, D.C., but we didn't hear back.

We created the Border Strike Force because Washington would not address this issue.

The Strike Force is led by our leader of the Department of Public Safety, Frank Milstead. He partners with our county sheriffs and local law enforcement in our border areas to make sure we're focusing on the bad guys – the drug cartels, the human traffickers, the child sex traffickers.

With the Trump Administration, we now have a partner in the federal government – Kirstjen Nielsen. The Department of Homeland Security has been fantastic.

We work with customs and border patrol and border agents to make sure we have the best possible communication among all law enforcement assets in the state of Arizona.

**You have established a goal of making Arizona a land of opportunity for all. What are the keys to accomplishing this and how concerned are you about the divide today when it comes to opportunity and income inequality?**



Part of the reason I talk so much about being a governor for all the people and focus on that vision of opportunity for all is because this is something we can be successful at and it's a way to bring people together.

For example, we have a bill we are working on with our state legislature that would allow universal licensing for anyone who comes to Arizona. Someone doesn't lose their skills because they pack up a truck in Chicago and come to Arizona. Yet, we have our own government boards and commissions that will tell that individual that they can't work here because they have not paid the piper.

To me, issues such as this are nonpartisan and provide opportunities for people to enter the workforce and begin climbing the economic ladder. It's a function of leadership to set that vision, bring people together and chart the course.

I am concerned about income inequality, so I want to see people have mobility and be able to climb the economic ladder. I know the people at the top are doing well and they're going to continue to do well, but rather than seeing the haves and have nots, I prefer to see it as the haves and the soon to have mores. This is a model that allows the economy and country to thrive and states to compete.

There are other ways we can look at tax policy and regulatory policy that allows people to get involved in the economy and the workforce and create a better future for them and their families.

**Will you discuss your efforts around building a strong public/private partnership in Arizona?**

The business community is critical – it's a community I came from, so I'm often more comfortable talking in a room of business leaders than I am in a room of politicians. I know what motivates and incentivizes business leaders, but I don't always understand it with other politicians.

I look at the large communities like the business community, which is not monolithic; like the education community, and the faith-based community; and there are other constituencies like those in agriculture, our veterans and tribal communities.

When I get into settings where there can be a free flow of conversation with these communities, I become smarter and more knowledgeable as to how our team is doing and communicating.

That is true whether I'm at a sporting event or walking the aisles of grocery stores. I'll often pick something up for my wife on the way home and find that citizens will tell me what is on their minds if I take the time to listen.

**What is the business climate in Arizona today?**

Arizona is open for business, and business leaders across the country know that. Arizona, by any measure, is winning. We are the fourth fastest growing state in the country; Maricopa County is the fastest growing county in the nation; and we have the fifth fastest growing city in the country.

Not only are we growing from a population perspective, but also from a personal income perspective, so not only are we bringing people here, the people here are doing better.

I'm the chief executive of the government, but I'm also the chief spokesperson and salesperson for the state of Arizona, and that is a role I have really embraced. We weren't in this position four years ago.

Fast forward to today and we have the largest budget surplus in a decade, the education lawsuits are behind us, we're investing in K-12 education, and our economy is booming.

It's my role to take full advantage of those opportunities for the citizens of Arizona.

**When you look at the success you've had, are you able to take moments to reflect and celebrate or is it always about what is next?**

In this business – the business of leadership in government – the best leaders are thinking about what is next – they're putting an agenda out there that is action-oriented and staying on offense.

I have often said to my team that, in the private sector, when we had a victory, we would have a closing dinner; in this business, we're on to what's next.

There is a lot of satisfaction in the success we see the state having, but it isn't the state government that rebuilt Arizona; it's business leaders who rebuilt their businesses and employees who worked hard and plowed through the downturn. Now things are booming and, as leaders in government, we need to make sure we stay out of their way and provide an environment where it's the best possible place in which to live, work and play.

Governors don't create jobs, and I get a real kick at election time, hearing all the politicians that are talking about the jobs they're going to create. What they do is create an environment in which jobs can be created.

Arizona and our team, along with the business leaders and education community, is creating the best possible place in the nation for people to live and build a future and we will continue to do that for the next four years. ●