

Governor Doug Ducey
State of the State Address
Monday, January 14, 2019
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Chief Justice Bales, Members of the Legislature, Judiciary and fellow Arizonans — I am so honored to be back here today, and just like you, I am ready to get to work.

2018 brought a lot our way. Election years tend to do that for people in our business. Elections also bring change and new faces, as we see here today — and in government, that’s a really good thing. Let’s work together in the months ahead to transform our promises into progress for the state we all love.

To all who were sworn in for the first time today, and to the other public servants who took the oath with me last week, congratulations and welcome. It wasn’t so long ago that I was new here, too. I ran because I cared, believed I could make a difference, and felt we needed some fresh ideas. No doubt, you’re all here for many of the same reasons.

You’ve also lucked out, because you’ve got some real pros here to show you the ropes. Speaker Bowers and President Fann — you’re well suited and well prepared for these new roles.

Leaders Fernandez and Bradley — I’m looking forward to working together. I think we can all agree, there’s plenty of opportunities to find common ground.

Bipartisanship is a word that gets tossed around a lot. And today, it seems everyone has their own definition. So let me be clear on the approach I intend to take. I’m not here just to work with Republicans on Republican ideas. And bipartisanship doesn’t simply mean working with Democrats on Democratic ideas. I’m here as governor of all the people to work with all of you on good ideas.

And now’s the time to do so. Because the state of our state is strong, and it’s getting stronger. The challenge before us is to lay the groundwork today to make sure the Arizona of tomorrow remains strong. Doing so requires action now to do the things that matter and secure Arizona’s future.

The issues we need to tackle aren’t partisan ones. In some cases, they aren’t even political. At the top of that list: securing our water future.

Now stay with me -- this is not an issue that leads the news. It doesn’t make for a snappy headline, or a provocative soundbite, and it can’t be explained in 280 characters. But as I traveled the state this past year, it’s one of the issues I was asked about most by real people -- especially in rural Arizona.

It’s an issue that deserves your focus and attention. Which is why it’s first on my list.

Here’s the bottom line: We’re in a 19-year drought. It’s going to get worse before it gets better.

Arizona and our neighboring states draw more water from the Colorado River than Mother Nature puts back.

It’s time to protect Lake Mead and Arizona.

Doing so will require compromise. No one stakeholder is going to get everything they want. Everyone is going to have to give. And I've been impressed by the willingness of those involved to do just that.

It's been said: whiskey's for drinking; water's for fighting.

We have two leaders here today who've got the scars to prove it. They are giants, who deserve the credit for getting Arizona to this point — not to mention our gratitude for their lifetime of public service: Governor Bruce Babbitt and Senator Jon Kyl.

Bruce Babbitt served in public office for 20 years, first as Arizona Attorney General and Governor and later as Secretary of the Interior under President Bill Clinton.

Jon Kyl served Arizona in Congress for 26 years, including three terms as a U.S. Senator. Then, when Arizona needed him most, he returned to the Senate last September.

Governor Babbitt and Senator Kyl have shown us the path. Working with others. Setting aside differences. Putting our state, and the greater good first.

Now it's our turn to do the heavy lifting.

This issue is important and it's urgent. Our economy. Our environment. Our future.

Let's prove we can work together in a bipartisan fashion and get this done.

Same goes for a lot of other things, frankly.

We've implemented a hiring freeze and held the line on out of control growth in government. Today, our state government operates more efficiently.

We've gotten government out of the way of job creation, cutting red tape and placing a moratorium on new regulations. In fact, we've eliminated over 1,000 regulations.

Imagine if we took that same approach this legislative session regarding laws. We're not short on laws here in our state. Over 107 years we've built up a hearty 11,000 plus pages.

Certainly, many of our laws have merit. But many don't.

So why does each legislative session seem to be a competition to pass the most new laws?

What if we found a way to get rid of old unneeded laws, rather than just creating new ones? If for every law we passed, we repealed three or if new laws had sunsets.

I'm challenging this legislature let's chop the stacks and stacks of statutes down, so that the laws make sense and are relevant to the Arizona of today.

And how about we start with eliminating the most unnecessary law of them all: legislative immunity.

We are a nation of laws, not men. No one -- not me, nor you -- is above the law.

Now, congress likes to exempt themselves from the law -- but isn't that why Americans hold them in such contempt?

Let's show the people of Arizona that their elected leaders will live under the same laws as every man and woman in this state.

Send T.J. Shope's referral to the ballot and let the people speak on special privileges for elected officials.

And when there are emerging issues that need to be addressed, let's not ignore them -- let's solve them.

One year ago, most of us didn't know Parkland, Florida, even existed. But now, tragically, it's another on the list. Ingrained in our memories and American vernacular. Columbine. Virginia Tech. Sandy Hook.

So last spring, I convened Arizonans in my office. Parents. Teachers. Principals. Law enforcement. Prosecutors. Mental health experts. Democrats and Republicans. People who weren't Democrats or Republicans. Students themselves. With a goal of being proactive, and taking action to stop a tragedy from happening here. We researched the five deadliest school shootings of the last 20 years, and asked: How could these have been prevented?

We built a plan that could make a real difference: The Safe Arizona Schools Plan. More cops on campus. More school counselors. Improved background checks. A STOP order that protects Second Amendment rights while keeping guns out of the hands of individuals who are a lethal threat.

These are solutions that will make schools safer, and it's time for us to get it done. I'll be including some elements of this plan in my budget that you'll see Friday -- with an even greater investment than I proposed last year.

We know when a police officer is around, it makes things safer. Who do we call whenever there's trouble? Our brave men and women in blue. And that's why we're including enough dollars to put a cop on every campus that needs one.

And I'll be working with legislative leaders to pass the rest.

This plan is a reasoned and balanced approach. Which is why thought leaders like David French at the National Review and Hugh Hewitt have endorsed it; why the Arizona PTA supports it; and why we modeled elements of it from Gabby Giffords' plan.

This is simply too important an issue to let partisan politics and special interests get in the way. We've got a responsibility to do something for our kids -- and we've got to do it this session.

Whether it's water or school safety -- these are things that matter. We know that.

We've been here before. We did it on Prop 123 -- who thought that lawsuit would ever get settled? We did it with the 20-year extension of 301 -- nobody believed that would happen. University bonding -- the obituaries were written on it, but we got it done. Opioids -- a unanimous vote of the entire Legislature.

And it was just 8 months ago we delivered a 20 percent pay raise for hardworking teachers.

When we unveiled that proposal, many said it was not possible. And there's no doubt, forces were standing in the way. But because of teachers -- lots of them -- and principals, and superintendents, PTAs, parents, education champions and business leaders -- with the leadership of J.D. Mesnard, and former President Yarbrough. With bipartisan support from leaders like David Bradley, Sean Bowie, Andrea Dalessandro and Steve Farley, we got that pay raise passed and into teachers' paychecks.

Half of this commitment was added last fall, with some school leaders going even further. Payson. Yuma. Marana. The Washington Elementary School District, right up the street. Many others.

And to anyone out there considering using these resources somewhere else, I have one message - don't even think about it. These are raises teachers earned and they are raises we are going to fulfill and protect.

And more is needed on K-12 education. A focus on results, resources and reforms.

Arizona has been the leader in school choice. It's good for parents, and most of all, it's good for kids.

Healthy choice and competition brings about innovation, and that's been the case in Arizona public education. But we also know improvements can be made. More transparency, more accountability, and granting more financial review and oversight over taxpayer dollars -- all with the purpose of making sure every public school is improving and providing Arizona kids with the best-possible education.

Same goes for addressing the teacher shortage.

In my past life, I used to tell my team at Cold Stone Creamery -- if you find a good idea, grab it. So as we built Cold Stone -- we borrowed ideas from others: McDonald's. Subway. Starbucks.

And I confess -- I've kept the habit going.

Four years ago, I heard what sounded like a really good idea to address the teacher shortage. If someone graduates from an Arizona university, is willing to stay in Arizona, and teach in a public school, why not allow them to graduate debt-free by providing a scholarship?

So we turned it into reality and launched the Arizona Teachers Academy. Already, 221 students have started moving through the program.

This year we plan to significantly expand it: more dollars, more support. We are going to create a pipeline of talent and the next generation of Arizona teachers.

And today, as a guest of Angela and I -- we have the person who came up with the idea. He's had an incredible career of public service, he's continuing that service as newest member of the Arizona Board of Regents, and his wife, Jennifer, is with him today. Arizona thanks you, Fred Duval.

Education and our economy go hand in hand.

Many of us remember a class back when we were in high school called shop.

It's where a lot of good people discovered a passion, they turned into a purpose, and then a pretty good paycheck.

Our education leaders are creating the "shop" classes of the 21st century-- it's called Career and Technical Education-- CTE.

Today, students in these programs are training to becoming nurses, pilots, pharmacists, bankers, firefighters and software developers -- all before graduation.

In fact, 99 percent of CTE students graduate high school--99 percent-- a rate much higher than the national average.

They perform better in mathematics and reading -- and their technical skills rival professionals in the same trade.

Just take a look at some of these programs: Aviation at Pima Community College. Advanced manufacturing at Maricopa Community Colleges. Diesel mechanics at the Western Maricopa Education Center. And culinary arts at the East Valley Institute of Technology.

Today, we have more jobs available in the state of Arizona than we have people to fill them.

Whatever and wherever the skilled trade is needed, Arizona is prepared to meet the demand.

I want to recognize education leaders who are paving the way:

Lee Lambert, Maria Harper-Marinick, Greg Donovan, Doug Pruitt, and Sally Downey. Thank you for your leadership.

These are programs we plan to build, expand and align with the jobs of tomorrow. And my budget will do just that.

If people want to work, let's let them work! 100,000 people will move here this year. There's a job available for every one of them. Lots of them are trained and certified in other states. Standing in their way of earning a living in Arizona, our own licensing boards, and their cronies who tell them -- "You can't work here. You haven't paid the piper."

Let's stop this foolishness. Pass Warren Petersen's bill to grant universal recognition for all occupational licenses-- and let them work.

And before those unelected boards feign outrage -- let's remember: workers don't lose their skills simply because they move to Arizona.

And, in the name of good government, let's have the bullies on these boards answer three questions: what do you exist to do, how do you know if you're doing it well, and who would miss you if you were gone?

There's dignity in all work.

Last fall, I visited our state prison in Buckeye, Arizona. There, joined by Arizona Cardinals defensive back Antoine Bethea and D lineman Corey Peters along with Cardinals President Michael Bidwill, we saw the possibilities of Opportunity for All first hand.

At a job fair, soon-to-be-released men and women were excited to participate in a program that equips them with the skills to successfully re-enter society. They lined up at employers like Jacksons Car Wash and Hickman's Family Farms -- some left with multiple job offers.

This is a program we need to secure well into the 21st century to protect public safety and reduce Arizona's prison population.

Arizona's economy is booming. There's no doubt about it. We've added nearly 300,000 new jobs in the last four years.

And I'm proud to say, our relationship with Mexico is stronger than ever. With an updated North American trade deal, known as the USMCA, this will mean even more trade coming through our ports and more jobs for Arizonans.

I've become fond of saying that the last time unemployment was this low, you were renting your movies at Blockbuster.

But the benchmark is moving. By the end of this year, unemployment is forecasted to plummet to levels we haven't seen since before you knew what a hashtag was.

Some said the teacher pay raise was unsustainable and based on rosy projections. Turns out those projections weren't rosy -- they were in response to a growing economy that has led to a record balance in our general fund.

When I stood here four years ago, we faced a \$1 billion deficit. It's not by accident that today, we've got a \$1 billion surplus.

Arizona weathered the storm. Made tough decisions. Held the line on raising taxes and will continue to hold the line on raising taxes.

It's the Arizona way, it's a winning game plan, and I have no intention of changing course.

Government didn't rebuild Arizona. People rebuilt their businesses. They hired and invested. Workers and families rolled up their sleeves.

So for their sake, let's make sure we're on strong footing today and into the future.

With revenue soaring, some have suggested loosen up, let the good times roll.

Ladies and gentleman: We've seen that movie before, and we know how it ends.

It wasn't that long ago that this state racked up a massive tab, went on a spending binge, with no long-term plan of how to pay for any of it. And when the economy tanked -- every one of those false promises evaporated.

It was painful, for real people. Let's learn from the mistakes of the past.

To the big spenders: On November 6th, the people spoke. They want their teachers paid and their budgets balanced.

So, the balanced budget I will present to you on Friday fully funds the priorities we know are important -- public safety, child safety, education -- above and beyond inflation. There are some targeted investments in critical areas. But frankly, for a surplus year, this budget is pretty light reading.

Because I'm proposing that we secure Arizona's future and prepare responsibly for the unexpected and the inevitable -- by bringing our Rainy Day Fund, to record-breaking balance of one billion dollars.

If ever there were a way to protect public education, to protect the pay raises our teachers have earned and deserve, to prevent budget gimmicks, band-aids and massive cuts down the line; to avoid tax increases and budget standoffs and government shutdowns -- it's through this thoughtful, prudent and fiscally-conservative approach.

Four years ago, as a new governor, I inherited 35,000 hardworking state employees, 40 billion in combined spending, over 200 boards and commissions and 43 plus state agencies. We got to work restructuring a government that should operate at the speed of business.

We've made a lot of progress. We've got less bureaucracy, more efficiencies. And still, more can be done. Remember when Andy Tobin worked his way out of a job?

Well, buckle your seatbelts because there's going to be a lot more of that as we look to save taxpayer dollars and streamline state government.

And our dedicated state employees will continue to play a critical role in shaping our direction. We'll rely on their expertise, and know-how as we apply technology and customer service techniques to further consolidate our government.

This is another non-partisan issue. It's not Republican versus Democrat. In our nation's capitol, both parties are equally guilty for bloated government, spending sprees and unmanageable debt. If anything it's an Arizona versus Washington, D.C. issue. The federal government is broke, broken and broken-down, and has been for decades. Washington could learn a lot from us.

When the federal government failed to secure our border, we created the Border Strike Force, combating crime without interrupting trade.

We know the value of time, so we reduced wait-times at the MVD.

Our Department of Child Safety has become a national model and the envy of other states.

And yes, when congress failed to do their job, we kept the gates of the Grand Canyon open.

I've spent a lot of time these last four years, making a lot of new friends. I've been to every county. In dozens of schools. In our state agencies. Businesses -- large and small. It's been fun and pretty darn delicious. The chocolate chip cookies at Beyond Bread in Tucson. The Especial at Lute's Casino in Yuma. And you've got to try the pies at The Mogollon Moose out in Payson. Let's just say you don't have to guess my new year's resolution.

We've got great people in this state. Some have been here for generations -- others just got here yesterday.

And then there are those we said goodbye to last year for the final time. Their memory, and their legacies will live on:

Congressman Ed Pastor

Superintendent of Public Instruction Carolyn Warner

Treasurer Carol Springer

Chief Justice Bud Jones

Senator John McCain

Others had names we were not familiar with -- their lives cut short in the line of duty. Their service will be honored and remembered all the same:

Staff Sergeant Maximo Flores

Chief Warrant Officer Taylor Galvin

Staff Sergeant Alexander Conrad

First Sergeant Nicholas Amsberry

Army Specialist Robert Jones

U.S. Deputy Marshal Chase White

Nogales Police Officer Jesus Cordova

Salt River Police Officer Clayton Townsend

Trooper Tyler Edenhofer

Their ultimate sacrifice reminds us of the sacrifices made every day by our heroes in uniform -- law enforcement, first responders, correctional officers, our National Guard, and military personnel. We salute you. We are proud of you. And we thank you.

We know that to truly secure Arizona's future, we can't do it without you. And we pledge to continue to support and invest in you and your families.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Legislature -- we've got our work cut out for us. But with the leadership here, and the passion and purpose that you and I bring to the issues that face us, I have high hopes and great enthusiasm that this will be our most productive session yet.

Let's put party labels aside.

Let's put Arizona first.

Let's do the things that matter.

Let's get to work.

Thank you and God bless.