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THE ISSUE: SHAPING STATE'S FUTURE



DEIRDRE HAMILL/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Former U.S. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor says the project's goal is to arrive at bipartisan proposals that will be referred to voters.

'COMPROMISE' IN LEADERSHIP NOT A DIRTY WORD

The U.S. Constitution starts with the words, "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union ..." That reference to a "more perfect union" suggests the need for continual improvement. It's a good goal for state government, too.

The idea that we can do better is behind an effort by the O'Connor House Project to look at the structure of state government.

The purpose, according to former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, is to engage in a bipartisan discussion that leads to specific proposals that will be referred to voters.

"I'm not criticizing anyone or saying anything is deficient," she said in an interview with *The Arizona Republic* earlier this year. "I'm just saying that, for Arizona's 100th birthday, maybe it's time we took another look."

Others would not be so diplomatic. A recent poll found only 14 percent of Arizona voters rated the Legislature's performance as "good" or "excellent."

After a prolonged and rancorous legislative session, Arizona still does not have a balanced budget. Nor is there agreement about how — or even when — to fix that problem. Budget deficits loom in coming years.

The O'Connor House Project brought together a bipartisan group of leaders representing

business, governmental, agricultural, environmental and community interests. They are exploring potential reforms that include creating an office of lieutenant governor and taking a look at term limits and public financing of elections.

This is one of several efforts to look for ways to improve the state. They all begin with the premise that we can do better by working together.

"'Compromise' does not have to be viewed as a weak word," O'Connor said during the "State of Our State" public-policy conference last Friday. The program was organized by the Morrison Institute for Public Policy, which also brought together leaders with a variety of expertise to discuss key issues facing the state.

A third effort is headed by former Arizona State University President Lattie Coor, whose Center for the Future of Arizona polled 3,600 residents and is now working to identify ways to tackle broad goals in pursuit of "The Arizona We Want."

These efforts would be appropriate under any circumstance. But today, as the state faces extraordinary economic challenges, it is critical to take a closer look at potential improvements.

By lending her prestige to this effort, Justice O'Connor is calling on Arizona to pursue a more perfect state government.