



Government Doesn't Have to Be Broken

An Interview With: Governor Doug Ducey

By Jared Meyer

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"The federal government makes a mess out of everything it touches... [But] government can work when it respects its limited role, and listens to the people." This quote comes from Arizona governor Doug Ducey's 2017 State of the State address.

Over the two years since Governor Ducey took office, the Arizona Management System has developed into a guiding instrument for state agencies. Arizona agencies are required to apply business best practices to their operations, and the addition of private-sector accountability to government operations has led to significant improvements in government efficiency.

In the following interview, Governor Ducey shares how his goal of "making government work" leads to more economic opportunities.

Jared Meyer: Many policymakers campaign on the promise of improving, modernizing, and streamlining government services. But the challenges posed by established bureaucracies mean that all this talk of reform rarely translates into action. Facing this uphill battle, what was your plan to stay on top of the operations of 35 different Arizona state agencies?

Governor Doug Ducey: I've been a businessman far longer than I've been a politician. My experience has taught me that any successful reform requires vision, determination, and collaboration.

When I was first running for office, I promised voters that I'd use my experience as a CEO to make government operate at the speed of business. I recognize that running a government is different than running a business, but we've brought business-like principles to government by implementing a management system that produces actual results and pushes agency directors to make continuous improvements. I like to say that, as an elected official, I'm still in the customer-service business. And we want every public servant to operate that way and feel obligated to give our customers — in this case,



taxpayers who visit government websites and interact with our state agencies — a satisfying experience.

The idea that you can't manage what you can't measure is something that we take seriously. We define and track our agencies' successes so that we can find out what's working and then do more of it. By tracking specific targets, we're empowering agency directors and their employees to spot where they might be underperforming and quickly deploy countermeasures to get back on track. Our goal is that everybody, every day, is moving in the right direction.

Whether it's creating a business environment where people can start and grow a business, increasing consumers' choices in the marketplace, letting taxpayers keep more of what they earn, reducing excessive regulatory burdens like occupational licensing, or reducing phone and in-person wait times at government offices, our improvements are making a difference in the lives of Arizonans.

It's important to note that this has not been a smooth curve upward. Some agencies have taken to this philosophy faster than others and recruiting the right people to lead these state agencies can be difficult. But we're working every day to make improvements and we're committed to this over the long haul.

JM: What numbers do you have that prove your reforms are making Arizona's government more efficient? And why did you decide to place such a high emphasis on efficiency when most governors primarily focus on job creation?

DD: We are absolutely focused on job creation. Growing our economy has been a major focus since day one and the volume of business expansion announcements — Intel, Raytheon, Lucid, Apple, Caterpillar, Orbital, Google, Rogers Corporation, Houzz — shows the progress that we're making.

But we believe that we can walk and chew gum at the same time. The Arizona economy struggled after the bust of 2008 and families had to do more with less. We're simply applying that thinking to state government by trying to get greater value out of our 33,000 employees and the \$42.5 billion that Arizonans invest into state government. Wait times at the Motor Vehicle Department are down an average of 20 minutes and contractors are getting licenses 76% faster. These accomplishments are saving people and small businesses time and money and improving the quality of life in Arizona.

Part of efficiency is being smart about what not to do. We make it a priority to not push out innovative business models which is why we have dedicated substantial energy to recruiting the businesses that drive the sharing economy. Companies around the country increasingly see Arizona as a place they can



call home because we have forward-thinking elected officials who aren't trying to regulate the 21st-century economy with a 20th-century government. Whether that's welcoming autonomous vehicle testing or protecting Arizonans' right to use their property for short-term rentals, this attitude helps create jobs and promote efficiency.

JM: I found the idea of agency and cross-agency "breakthrough projects" particularly interesting. Government is not usually known for being innovative, so how do you incentivize government workers to reimagine how their agencies provide services?

DD: Our breakthrough projects offer a way for state government to focus energy and resources where they matter most. Again, that means delivering results that do the most good in the lives of our citizens. Having a standard, disciplined way of approaching our work makes it easier to address pressing social problems like curbing inmate recidivism and reducing deaths due to opioid abuse. Applying a rigorous, data-driven management system to solving these issues ensures that our administration is thinking and operating as one cohesive enterprise rather than a bunch of individual state agencies doing their own thing, their own way. And, because we're tapping into employees' ideas for better ways to achieve success, they feel a sense of ownership in delivering results that matter.

We're also fortunate to employ a lot of dedicated women and men who care deeply about their state. They want to see Arizona continue to be best state in the country to start a business, get an education, have a family, and retire.

JM: What economic challenges does Arizona still face? How do you plan to address them over the rest of your time in office?

DD: One of our biggest initiatives right now is strengthening the talent pipeline in Arizona. That means not only attracting new companies to our state, but also preparing our all of our citizens, regardless of age, for the new jobs and career opportunities that await them.

A few months ago, we announced a collaborative statewide effort called Achieve60AZ to equip 60% of Arizonans with post-secondary education by 2030. This includes a degree from a university, career and technical training, or other paths. We believe that education advances everyone, but we also understand that the traditional four-year higher education model does not fit everyone. And that's something we want to emphasize so that people don't get discouraged and wrongly assume that they cannot contribute to a 21st century economy.

Our K-12 system is a top priority as well. My new budget outlines several ways that we're investing more



money in K-12 education without raising taxes. This is in addition to the historic passage of last year's Proposition 123 that will put \$3.5 billion into our public schools over the next decade. We're also investing in STEM teachers, along with career and technical education.

JM: Based on your experience, what is the one piece of advice that you would give to new governors?

DD: Recognize that it's your job as the chief executive to provide vision and leadership and then surround yourself with the most talented team you can find who will implement your vision with urgency and purpose. Never forget that it's the people you serve and the people you must ultimately answer to.

JM: Arizona's example under Governor Ducey shows that while it is not easy to fix a calcified bureaucracy, it is possible to make concrete, positive changes. Anyone who truly wants to improve government needs to be willing to spend the time, energy, resources, and political capital to do so.

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