

EDITORIALS

THE ISSUE: ARIZONA FORWARD



Arizona Forward is laying the groundwork for dealing with urgent issues like state-trust-land reform. TOM TINGLE/THE REPUBLIC

COALITION HAS PROMISING START

Just when the polarization and partisanship in Arizona are becoming as toxic as rattlesnake venom, a new coalition has come forward to find collaborative solutions to maintain our quality of life.

Arizona Forward brings together business, utilities, conservation advocates, education interests and civic groups. The charter members range from Sundt Construction to the Nature Conservancy. These aren't natural allies.

But they have a common interest in the viability of Arizona as a place to live and work. They all recognize that our state must find the right balance between economic growth and a healthy, sustainable environment.

The statewide group is an expanded version of Valley Forward Association, which has promoted dialogue and advanced critical projects in the Phoenix metro area for 42 years. It has helped shape our communities with support for open space, recreational areas, freeways and light rail. It conceived the "pedestrian freeway," a regional system of trails and parks for hiking, biking and horseback riding.

Arizona Forward will start off by focusing on the Sun Corridor, the Phoenix-to-Tucson "mega-region" that is home to eight of 10 Arizonans. As Arizona heads into its second century, we will increasingly need this broader perspective to solve problems.

Right now, we have a string of communities more likely to spar than recognize their common interests. Here's an opportunity to create and refine the identity of the

Sun Corridor. That alone can be a strong marketing tool.

The challenges that Arizona Forward expects to tackle include land-use planning, transportation, air quality, renewable energy, water and natural areas. In other words, issues where any action requires negotiation and consensus-building.

Like its Valley counterpart, Arizona Forward aims to raise awareness of environmental issues and serve as a technical resource.

As part of its first project, the organization commissioned a poll about our state's natural assets. The results showed a big knowledge gap. While Arizonans overwhelmingly believe that parks and open space are essential to tourism (93 percent in the poll), few of us have a strong grasp of how parks are actually funded (18 percent).

Arizona Forward is filling that gap with an easy-to-read fact-filled report, "Why Parks and Open Space Matter: The Economics of Arizona's Natural Assets."

Readers aren't left with a bunch of numbers and no idea of what to do with them. Without endorsing any specific plan, Arizona Forward suggests a list of actions to develop a sustainable financial base.

This is important groundwork for urgent issues, including the future of Arizona State Parks, federal funding for national monuments and state-trust-land reform.

Arizona Forward is a welcome new player, and its fast start is encouraging.

For information, go to arizonaforward.org or call 602-240-2408.