

Governor Doug Ducey

Inaugural Address

January 5, 2015

Pastor Gonzalez, distinguished guests, friends and fellow citizens:

A new administration rightly begins with appreciation for the work of others. Governor Brewer, for your good service to our state, we thank you and we wish you well. And I welcome Governors Hull and Symington – we're glad you're here, thank you for coming.

Among our seven former governors, the two most senior could not be here, but I want both to know that we're thinking of them. There's the great Arizonan who took this oath in 1975, and this year will reach the age of 99, Governor Raul Hector Castro. Let's also remember the gracious lady who is still very dear to our state, Governor Rose Mofford.

And it is my high honor to share today's event with members of Arizona's National Guard. It is because of their sacrifice and others who serve in uniform that we are able to exercise the freedoms we celebrate today. Thank you.

As my predecessors here can testify, it's not the promises we bring to office that count the most. The trust measure is taken in the work we finish, the good we do and the commitments we keep.

Our work at this capitol begins with challenges entirely in our power to overcome. Some are financial in nature. They are difficult, but hardly unfamiliar in the workings of government.

Several years ago, our state confronted fiscal problems on a scale few had seen before. But leaders – many of them here today, starting with my predecessor – made the decision to change course and avoid the worst.

For that, we owe them our gratitude. And now it is our turn to act. Once again, there is no escaping duty, reality or arithmetic. We can confront the budget shortfall this coming fiscal year – and we will.

Other pressing challenges put our word to the test. For as long as anyone can remember, we have heard ringing promises of a day when every Arizona parent could count on equal access to good public schools. As it is, we've got some great public schools, among the best in America, but Arizona's children do not yet have equal access. We can do better.

For some kids, it is a rising road of learning, achieving and gaining in confidence. Yet for so many other families, it is a long wait, on a long list, while years go by – years that can never be regained in the life of a child. I cannot and will not accept this inequity. You and I are not the first to notice the unfairness of it all. But if we act, with serious reform in our public schools, we can lead the way in setting it right.

Our economy, meanwhile, is growing, but it's time to up our game. Our people have put their faith in Arizona's future. They bring their families here, start businesses here, seek jobs here and build new lives here – believing in the promise of this state. Yet, as opportunity goes, in the rankings of states, Arizona is still too far down the list. We have what it takes to be at the top.

Opportunity for all: this was the defining commitment of my campaign. And you won't hear me changing the subject these next four years. Whether it is spending, or the tax code, or changes in our public schools and legal system – or any other policy question – my first priority is simple: put more opportunities and greater freedom within reach of all our citizens.

It bears repeating that I have pledged to be a governor for all the people. Opportunity is just a platitude unless all Arizonans are included, everyone given a fair chance and even a second chance,

no one forgotten, no one written off. Whatever your age or background, wherever life finds you today, you have a stake in all that happens at this capital, in the choices we make in the name of the people. It is not for the state to assure success, but we can promise, and I do, that this state is on the side of your success.

Opportunity is not a government program planned and distributed by some expert class any more than personal freedom is a favor granted by those in public office. Opportunity is a new job or training for a better job. It's the kind of school where every child can grow in knowledge and in character, the kind of neighborhoods where families feel protected, a state where enterprise is welcome and hard work is rewarded.

Opportunity is that chance we all need to use our gifts, rise in the world, live as we were meant to live and give our children a better future. Spreading more of these chances to more of our citizens will be the daily work of my administration. That is the chance you have given me as governor, and I will give this work all that I have in me, never anything less.

In resolving this year's budget challenges, we have plenty of good examples to follow. Tightening the belt on spending is the common experience of every family and small business in our state. They make tough choices and we are elected to do the same. So I will say to the legislature: we can do this – we can get these fiscal troubles behind us. Exactly as the Arizona constitution demands, we can put the Arizona budget in balance and we can keep it there.

Four times, starting next week, I will submit balanced budgets to the House and Senate. Fair warning: the budget will not meet with general approval among special interests – and if they did approve, I would start to worry.

It will be said that the state has already found all the savings that can be found, cut every line item that can be cut, and now, every option exhausted, it is for the people to pay for the shortfall with higher taxes.

And I will reply: not on our watch. As treasurer of this state, I saw for myself where tax dollars go. I can assure you that a more efficient government is not only necessary, but sensible. In the plainest terms, it's not that the people are taxed too little; it's that their government is spending unwisely. Raise taxes and you haven't solved anything. All that does is excuse the ineffective spending and invite more of it.

The business at hand, after all, is not to expand Arizona's government – it is to expand Arizona's economy.

Prosperity moves, and as taxes go up, it moves away. Gone as well are jobs, people and companies that found a better welcome someplace else. Other states have written that story for themselves by placing the political sector ahead of the public interest, and it rarely ends well.

We choose a different way. It's the confident, optimistic way that comes so natural to Arizona. By focusing our effort we will see new investment, more companies moving here, growing here, starting here, and many new jobs added these next four years. It's a new day and the only way to achieve all of this is to get moving right now. Fellow citizens, it is time we go back to our strengths, break away from the pack and make Arizona the pace leader in the competition for the very best state in America to do business.

And no matter how much we grow in prosperity, the right to a real education will not depend on family wealth or sheer luck. It will be a first principle of my agenda that schools and choices available to affluent parents must be open to all parents, whatever their means, wherever they live, period.

In the goals we set for our government, and in the principles we follow, there's a lot to be said for simplicity. Equal justice, public safety, aid to the helpless and the defense of the weak against the strong, take care of those duties and you have served well.

Guarding public health, protecting children, supporting higher education, building roads where we develop and preserving natural lands where we don't, these too are among the fundamentals, and they must be done wisely and well.

So we will not be searching these next four years for new excuses to insert government into the lives of our people. Americans get plenty of that already from Washington, D.C. By observing limits on government, we are merely recognizing the limits of its competence. In securing individual freedom, we affirm the ability, the dignity, and the right of free men and women to make their own decisions and to find their own way.

As a state too, Arizona can find its own way.

Who among us can see all the rancor in Washington, D.C., all the bitterness and dysfunction, and not feel that our country deserves better?

Those of us assembled here today can do better. We can hold ourselves to a higher standard.

We are not merely advocates for our respective political parties.

We are Americans and we are Arizonans – and those loyalties come first.

If we lead with civility and don't give in to the petty or partisan, if respect and courtesy are the order of the day, then all the good will we share will be answered in kind.

We can have legitimate differences and debate them openly and honestly. We can acknowledge that all members of an elected body chosen by the people are worthy and we can act accordingly.

And those efforts, as we strive together and succeed together, will set an example for a nation that badly needs it.

Grateful for the opportunities we have been given and called to share them, accepting the work we've been given and ready to make our start, mindful of the time we've been given and resolved not to waste it – today we go forward.

In all of this, may we apply our hearts to worthy things, trusting in the Lord who watches over all, and may we always show the best of this state that we love.

God bless you and thank you.