

CUTS ON HIGH, GOV'S BUDGET HITS LOW

STORY BY
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SOURCE: GOVERNOR'S BUDGET OFFICE 2000-2016 azospb.gov

Dept. of Education	Universities	Community Colleges	Juvenile Corrections	Dept. of Corrections
\$2.44 billion in 2000	\$796 million in 2000	\$132.5 million in 2000	\$61 million in 2000*	\$587.9 million in 2000
\$3.99 billion in 2008	\$1.54 billion in 2008	\$167.7 million in 2008	\$84.8 million in 2008	\$934.3 million in 2008
\$3.18 billion in 2010	\$1.56 billion in 2010	\$135.3 million in 2010	\$67.3 million in 2010	\$910.3 million in 2010
\$3.5 billion in 2013	\$1.60 billion in 2013	\$68.9 million in 2013	\$43.1 million in 2013	\$1.02 billion in 2013
\$3.8 billion in 2016	\$1.74 billion in 2016	\$61.7 million in 2016	\$33.1 million in 2016	\$1.09 billion in 2016
\$1.4b NET GAIN = \$87m/year	\$944m NET GAIN = \$59m/year	\$70.8m NET LOSS = (-\$4.4m)/year	\$28m NET LOSS = (-\$1.8m)/year	\$502m NET GAIN = \$31m/year

OMAR VICTOR

Despite widely publicized criticism that once again put Arizona in the national spotlight, in mid-March newly-elected **Governor Doug Ducey** signed a \$9.1 billion budget that contained deep cuts to education across the board, described as "unprecedented," "devastating," and "a defeat for schools."

While Mr. Ducey stated the budget is "fiscally responsible," keeping his campaign promise that he would balance the budget without a net increase in taxes, the budget affectively passes those costs on to some of Arizona's most vulnerable populations. Said Tucson Unified School District's **Superintendent Dr. H.T. Sanchez**, "when we come into tough times, we shouldn't balance the budget on our children's future."

Cognitive dissonance is an apt way to describe the disconnect citizens, parents, educators, and students have expressed across the state in trying to reconcile what Mr. Ducey claims about his priorities and what the budget actually means for education in Arizona. For example, according to Mr. Ducey the budget "prioritizes education, with nearly half our overall budget going toward K-12 and universities." Further, K-12 funding saw increases in some areas and reductions in others, but will apparently come out ahead, \$81 million.

At the same time, 233 of the State's superintendents are "deeply concerned," collectively signing a letter asking the governor not to cut K-12 funding, that for the last 6 years, "in order to balance the state budget, the majority of Arizona's classrooms have been shortchanged by the actions of our elected officials." The letter cites previous reductions, which have included cuts to full-day kindergarten, funds for instructional materials, and failure to fund inflation. The State was required by a previously approved formula to increase spending next year by \$250 million. According to a **Joint Legislative Budget Committee Summary**, that number was reduced in Mr. Ducey's budget by \$169 million, the largest portion (\$117 million) taken from so-called "non-classroom spending." This translates to reduced hours and layoffs for essential staff such as crossing guards & security, transportation workers, nurses, psychologists, custodians, and other maintenance workers.

The issue regarding the state's failure to fund inflation is traced back to **Proposition 301**, which Arizona voters adopted in 2000, earmarked a fund for education through a formula that raised taxes by 0.6%, and was supposed to make a 2% annual inflation increase in state aid to schools. When the country went into recession in 2008, then-Governor **Jan Brewer** decided to ignore the voter mandate and reallocated the money designed for schools. The decision resulted in a lawsuit that reached the **Arizona Supreme Court** last year, ruling that the lawmakers did not properly fund education as mandated by voters, and the case has been sent back down to the **Maricopa Superior Court**. That court also ruled in favor of the schools. **Superior Court Judge Katherine Cooper** ruled the state must increase funding to public and charter K-12 schools by more than \$300 million a year. **Attorney Don Peters**, who represents the schools, claims that if schools were given all back funds, it would be \$1.2 billion, but last year offered to settle for \$250 million if the state would simply agree to adjust the current formula and start funding schools as the voter adopted proposition originally mandated. The state has continued to fight and today, legal arguments are ongoing.

The Ducey Budget continues Ms. Brewer's legacy of ignoring the voter approved mandate, and makes no provisions for previously unpaid funds. Said **House Assistant Minority Leader Bruce Wheeler**, "They may have increased it to a total dollar figure that's higher than last year, but on a per-pupil basis, spending went down." The letter signed by the 233 superintendents claimed Mr. Ducey's budget translates to an estimated reduction of \$120 per student. While one of Mr. Ducey's campaign promises was not to cut K-12 funding, his budget reflects the opposite.

Funding for state universities were hit especially hard. **University of Arizona, Arizona State, and Northern Arizona University** were cut by \$99 million, which according to Arizona Board of Regents President **Eileen Klein**, amounts to 63% of the state's total cuts. It's "a big blow," she said in a prepared statement, that such a large percentage of the state's cuts will be absorbed by the universities. And community colleges across the state face an outright elimination of all state funding, including **Pima, Maricopa, and Coconino Community College**, among others, particularly rural colleges who are the recipient of "flat funding," which was cut entirely. The **Center on Budget & Policy Priorities** recently released a study citing Arizona as having cut more out of higher education since the recession than any other state in the country. According to the study, Arizona funds higher education in the state at a rate 48.3% lower than pre-recession levels.

There were two initial budget proposals on the table, the first announced in January, and the second in early March. The budget proposal back in January outlined initial cuts to universities at \$75 million. The three Arizona universities were expecting cuts, and this was a big one, but

the response was begrudging optimistic, at least on the part of administration.

"The reduction proposed ... by the governor will be challenging to manage as we remain committed to increasing the number of Arizonans who obtain a bachelor's degree," wrote NAU President **Rita Cheng** on January 16. She went on to explain in her letter to the students, employees, and faculty members of NAU that the university had adopted extensive efficiency measures during the great recession "when the universities shouldered a significant share of the budget reductions."

She noted that during this time "NAU students and their families have picked up a larger portion of the cost of a university education." Because the university had already made great strides during the recession to cut its budget, further cuts would be challenging, but ultimately the President remained positive. "We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature to redefine the relationship between the state and Arizona's universities in a way that encourages growth, vitality and performance," she said.

A second proposal in early March announced the cuts could be as much as \$104 million. Ms. Cheng sent out another letter, this time the tone was much different. "Once again the leaders at the State Capital have chosen to place the majority of the state's fiscal burden onto higher education, proposing more than \$100 million in reductions to Arizona's university system. NAU's share of this proposed reduction is more than \$18 million," she said. Citing her university's economic impact on the state alone is upwards of \$1.8 billion, she reflected: "Higher education is not a luxury and should not be treated as expendable ... The effect of these reductions will ripple into the economy for years to come ... The state is making it very difficult for NAU to maintain its commitment to access and affordability."

NAU Director of Public Affairs **Tom Bauer** called the cuts "unprecedented," underlying the university is "dealing with funding at 1995 levels," he said. "If adjusted for inflation it would most likely take NAU into the '60s, maybe even earlier." Regarding the process by which budget decisions are made, Mr. Bauer said the President is working with the provost and vice presidents of university divisions to determine how the reductions will be instituted, underlining: "If someone — faculty or staff — has been made an offer, it should not be rescinded."

During Mr. Ducey's post-election victory speech, by which he won the state with a 36% voter turnout last November, he said, "I can tell you this: As governor, I will focus dollars on teachers teaching and students learning and never accept that there are losers in the classroom."

Within weeks of his inauguration, however, his tone changed: "This is the job Arizonans hired us for ... the budget reflects the priorities I ran on and addresses the problems I was elected to solve," he said. Insiders point to the fact that at no time during his public campaign did he say he would cut \$99 million in funding to state universities.

Fellow Republican and Chairman of Arizona Board of Regents **Mark Killian** is threatening to sue, not only the State, but the Governor himself for the latest round of cuts, which he regards as unconstitutional. The **Arizona State Constitution** mandates that higher education must be "as nearly free as possible," yet tuition for the three state universities has soared at an average of 10% a year as state funding has decreased.

While Mr. Ducey says that the universities are one of the largest recipients of state funding, Mr. Killian, again revealing the cognitive dissonance many appear to be feeling, notes that state funding for just universities has shrunk by half a billion dollars over the last 7 years.

While education budgets were slashed, so too were prevention programs: \$11 million was cut from the **Department of Child Safety**, \$4 million in cuts to childcare subsidies for low-income families, and more cuts to other services related to mental health education programs, housing assistance funds, youth treatment funds and more. Meanwhile **Arizona Department of Corrections** will enjoy a \$39 million budget increase, with plans to construct a 3,000-bed private prison, a plan even Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio is against.

Dana Naimark of the **Children's Action Alliance** recently told *Tucson Weekly*, "The budget backtracks on prevention strategies, puts more children at risk for child neglect, grows prisons while shrinking resources for higher education, and permanently reduces per student operational funding in public schools."

There is already an effort to recall Mr. Ducey, which can only constitutionally begin until the Governor has been in office for at least 6 months. Nevertheless, a **change.org** petition attempting to do just that is nearing 14,069 signatures at the time of this publication.

| Kyle Boggs may attest the only cuts within education that should occur should occur in the barber shop.
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