



# The Arizona Education Commitment

## NEWS RELEASE

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## O'CONNOR HOUSE AND EXPECT MORE ARIZONA UNITE AROUND ARIZONA CONSTITUTION'S PRIORITIZATION OF EDUCATION

*Launch of "The Arizona Education Commitment" advocates for Arizonans and state leaders to consider all options in addressing budget deficit*

(Phoenix, AZ) – The O'Connor House and Expect More Arizona announced today the launch of [\*The Arizona Education Commitment\*](#), a statewide, nonpartisan initiative to protect and preserve Arizona's state educational institutions. The principles outlined in *The Arizona Education Commitment* are based on Article XI, Section 10 of the Arizona Constitution. It is being elevated by the [supporters](#) to increase public awareness about the constitutional prioritization of education and as a means to encourage Arizona citizens and leaders to explore *all* revenue enhancing options for addressing the state's budget deficit and protecting vital public services such as education, public health and public safety.

"The authors of the Arizona Constitution believed so strongly in providing for our state educational institutions that education is the only significant affirmative appropriation identified in our state's governing document," said Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (Ret.). "As a result, the state legislature is required to insure the proper maintenance of *all* our state educational institutions, even in tough economic times, and to make such special appropriations as shall provide for their development and maintenance."

*The Arizona Education Commitment* was developed by the O'Connor House and Expect More Arizona with the support of community leaders to open positive and productive discussion about the current, critical state of education in Arizona and to elevate Arizona's constitutional duty to prioritize the continued maintenance, development and improvement of all state educational institutions. The intent of *The Arizona Education Commitment* [supporters](#) is to work with Arizona leaders to meet the constitutional duty placed upon us by our founding fathers.

"The future of Arizona business and industry depends on the strength of our education system and our ability to deliver a competitive and skilled workforce," explains Phil Francis, Executive Chairman, PetSmart. "We must invest now. We are below average and deteriorating. We cannot afford to wait any longer to ensure Arizona has world-class educational institutions, at all levels."

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Arizona is currently ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation for K-12 per student investment. Although Federal stimulus funding and voter-approved initiatives such as Proposition 100 have helped to temporarily mitigate some of the multi-million dollar cuts that have already occurred to K-12 education over the past two years, much of those sources of funding are not recurring. In addition, the Governor's proposed FY12 budget includes cuts of \$170 million to our state's universities and \$64 million, a 46% decrease, to community colleges. The collective FY11 and FY12 cuts and disappearing sources of revenue come at a time when Arizona students already rank below their national and international peers in academic achievement, graduation rates and postsecondary degree attainment.

"Arizona cannot cut its way out of its current budget challenges," comments Sue Clark-Johnson, Chairman of the O'Connor House Policy Advisory Committee. "The Arizona Constitution gives all Arizonans clear direction for how they can protect education while increasing aggregate incomes, adding wealth to the Arizona economy and generating revenues for vital public health and safety services."

Ironically, Arizona voters have consistently shown support for investing in education. The landslide passage of Proposition 100, a temporary sales tax for primary and secondary education as well as the defeat of Proposition 302, which preserved funding for early childhood health and development programs, during the 2010 elections are just two representative examples. In addition, according to a 2010 Pew Center for the States poll, 60% of Arizona voters want to protect education during budget cuts and 71% would vote for a tax increase to support K-12 education.

"It is time for Arizona to view education as an investment, not an expense to be minimized," states Paul J. Luna, chairman, Expect More Arizona. "The long-term economic growth of our state and our overall quality of life are directly tied to the quality of our education system."

Arizonans are encouraged to sign on to *The Arizona Education Commitment* by visiting [www.ArizonaEducationCommitment.org](http://www.ArizonaEducationCommitment.org). They are also encouraged to contact their legislators to let them know that they want education to be protected and preserved as tough budget decisions are made.

*The Arizona Education Commitment* is a statewide, nonpartisan initiative led by the O'Connor House and Expect More Arizona. The partnership includes business, philanthropic, nonprofit, and faith-based institutions, leaders and concerned citizens who are committed to Arizona, and believe our state's long-term economic growth and prosperity is directly tied to a strong educational system and an educated workforce. As required by the Arizona Constitution, the partnership advocates that all state educational institutions must be prioritized, protected, preserved and enhanced. For more information, visit [ArizonaEducationCommitment.org](http://ArizonaEducationCommitment.org).