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by [Sandra Day O'Connor](#) - Oct. 11, 2009 12:00 AM
Special for The Republic

Arizona has always been home to me, even while I served as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. With just a little over a year before Arizona celebrates her centennial, it is an exciting time for me to be able to rejoin the dialogue in Arizona. We have come a long way since our territorial days, and now, we need to look anew at how our government works.

As majority leader of the Arizona Senate in the early 1970s, I regularly invited Republican and Democratic legislators over to my house to talk about issues facing Arizona. Over dinner, we would discuss ideas and options in a collegial, civil manner. We did not worry about the political parties because we focused on working together to reach solutions to the problems facing us.

As we've seen recently in the news, "civil talk" seems to be something that is missing in much of our politics today - whether here in Arizona or at the national level, whether among our politicians or our citizens.

The genesis for the O'Connor House Project is the mud-adobe home my husband and I helped build and where we hosted many of these events. I don't want it to become just a "house" that gets preserved. I want it to stand for "where civil talk leads to civic action." I believe we can return to a time when we work together, find commonality and make decisions that are in the best interest of all Arizonans.

The O'Connor House Project, like various other groups, is facilitating citizens of Arizona coming together to look at government for Arizona's second century. We brought together business, community and political leaders from across Arizona and the political spectrum. The gatherings are bipartisan and include a wide range of viewpoints. We have been and will continue to reach out to individuals and organizations that have ideas that will allow Arizona to be a model for other states to follow.

As Arizona matures and continues to grow, we are asking whether the structure of our executive and legislative branches, as well as the initiative process, need to be modified. Arizona's upcoming 100th anniversary provides the inspiration and opportunity to look at the structure and mechanisms of our government and ask if changes are warranted. Our project, "Government for Arizona's Second Century," is part of a wave of efforts across the state to discuss and potentially consider changes.

There are no predetermined reforms identified in our effort. Rather, my involvement is to facilitate the discussion and bring citizens of differing ideologies and beliefs together to look at what is best for Arizona's future. We did it before. We can do this again. My goal is to bring back to Arizona the willingness and ability to work together, in a civil manner, to resolve the big issues facing us.

As citizens, if we come together to make our state government more effective and representative, we will prepare and equip Arizona's current and future leaders to handle

tomorrow's challenges. Then, we will celebrate Arizona's second century with greater confidence.

Sandra Day O'Connor, a retired associate justice U.S. Supreme Court, was the first woman appointed to the court. The O'Connor House Project is dedicated to bringing people with divergent views to advance solutions for societal issues.

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How to get involved

The brainstorming process serves as a starting point for advancing the proposition that state government can be better and more responsive than it is today.

To help move these recommendations forward and get engaged in the reform project, please e-mail info@oconnorhouse.org.

This is a grass-roots effort. Volunteers are needed, and speakers are available to talk with groups across the state about ways to improve our government.

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