

Proposal to Build New ASU Law College a Perfect Example of Government Waste

By Hugh Hallman

Mayor of Tempe

I read with interest and chagrin recent media coverage suggesting that the Arizona State University College of Law could be moved from the main Tempe campus to downtown Phoenix.

I am interested because, as the Mayor of Tempe, I know such a move would have an effect on my community. Tempe has been the home of the College of Law since its inception in 1964. I'm chagrined, because this is just the kind of bad idea that makes Arizona taxpayers lose faith in their elected and appointed officials.

There's already been a huge investment in facilities ideal for the teaching of law on the Tempe campus. The John J. Ross-William C. Blakely Law Library, one of the most architecturally renowned structures in the Valley built in honor of two great lawyers and committed members of the community, was completed relatively recently in the summer of 1993. The current classroom facilities were built in the late 1980s, and most recently, the Ronald Jay Cohen Student Center at the College of Law was completed in 2003.

These facilities provide a great environment for the teaching of law, and with the recent opening of our light rail system, are a short 15-minute trip from Downtown Phoenix.

So why on earth, when Arizona is in an unprecedented state of fiscal crisis, would we build new facilities to replace these perfectly functional ones? It is exactly the kind of duplicate cost that demonstrates why many Arizonans view education and government spending as wasteful.

If ASU and the City of Phoenix want to build new facilities at their downtown Phoenix campus, that's fine — as long as they can convince a skeptical legislature and Phoenix voters that doing so is prudent and necessary in these difficult economic times. If there are programs or services that have subpar facilities on the Tempe campus or at ASU West, then by all means, Phoenix and ASU can work together to address these problems, just as Tempe has worked with ASU to build myriad new facilities for the university.

But to propose building facilities that are quite simply not needed, during an economic crisis of unmatched proportions in recent times, is the height of irresponsibility at a time when Arizonans are asking for more accountability from their leadership.

Situations like these are why I have proposed that we fix the way we finance state projects and untangle the restrictions between operations and maintenance and capital funding. Too much money is wasted tearing down or abandoning perfectly useful facilities to build new "monuments to bureaucrats."

It's no wonder that Arizona voters have expressed such displeasure recently with the efforts of our elected and appointed officials to deal with the state's fiscal crisis. They have a right to cynical, especially at a time when we are wrestling with difficult choices in how we are going

to continue to provide quality education in our state while dealing with the fiscal realities we face.

I can't speak for Phoenix voters and whether or not they want to throw taxpayer dollars at the construction of redundant facilities. I'm confident they would have the common sense to say "no." But I do believe that the leadership at ASU and the City of Phoenix are sending the wrong message at a time when we should be all working together to show fiscal restraint, not make out a wish list of pork projects.