



Job Creation and Economic Growth

An Interview with The Honorable Asa Hutchinson, Governor of Arkansas

EDITORS' NOTE *Asa Hutchinson was sworn in as the 46th Governor of Arkansas on January 13, 2015, and immediately set in motion his plan to bring more jobs and economic growth to his native state. Before being elected governor, Hutchinson served in a variety of posts in the private and public sector. He served as Director of the Drug Enforcement Administration and as the first Undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security. Voters in Arkansas's Third District also elected him to Congress three times. A graduate of the University of Arkansas law school, Hutchinson, at age 31, was appointed by President Reagan as the nation's youngest U.S. attorney.*



The Hon. Asa Hutchinson

the manufacturing jobs back but we're not going to be able to do that at the pace we want unless we can match our job skill training with what is needed in manufacturing, and in the other industries we're targeting.

We also need to reinforce our computer science initiatives that match workers with the skills needed by the modern day workforce for technology, industry, or other job environments.

How do you define "business-friendly" in Arkansas?

We define it by the work ethic of the people of this state. We have an agricultural background and people here are willing to work, and are gratified by it. That message sells itself because any industry or business can conduct training but they need the work ethic to already be there. We have that to sell and it makes sense to businesses.

We are able to show our initiatives such as the change of course in this state to a focus on job skills training and computer science in every high school, as well as our focus on our middle-class tax cuts. All of this is backed by the incredible quality of life we have in this state.

All of that combines to create a business-friendly environment, but still nothing beats the governor of a state ensuring the enthusiasm and willingness of the government to work with the private sector in creating an environment of entrepreneurship and growth.

What initiatives have been put in place in Arkansas regarding education reform?

Credit goes to those who have preceded me in this regard, but we have more to do when we're talking about K-12 education.

We can't accept nonperformance of a school as an option, nor the attitude that some students aren't going to get the quality of education that should be expected. We have high expectations for our students and we have to measure the results, and hold the education system accountable. We have done that and we're not backing off.

What efforts have you made in health-care reform?

We developed the model of expanded healthcare access by utilizing Medicaid dollars to allow poor working families to buy insurance in the marketplace. This pilot ends December 31, 2016, so we are hard at work fashioning the next steps for reform. The key principles that we're driving are continued access to healthcare while

ensuring that the government's role in healthcare still provides an incentive for people to actually go to work. That is the danger of providing too many government assistance programs to those who are not working – it becomes a disincentive to work. We're trying to break that trend. It's those principles that drive us and will lead us to another good result.

How critical is public/private partnership and how important is it to engage the business community in these efforts?

It's essential in terms of infrastructure and driving our education efforts, and in terms of job skill training. Without private sector partnerships, we're not going to have continuity in terms of matching skills training with the jobs. Also, the private sector is able to invest in terms of equipment, training, and opportunities for young people.

We can then expand that public/private relationship into two essential areas we're working on in Arkansas, which are child welfare and second chances for ex-offenders. There is a limit as to how much the government can do in these areas so we had a faith-based summit in August to enlist the help of our nonprofits and faith-based organizations in these critical areas.

How challenging is it to find bipartisan cooperation today and what are the keys to bring people together in this type of environment?

The key is to make it a priority. We have rules in the state government of Arkansas that require that there be a two-thirds majority for many initiatives, which requires a bipartisan focus in order to get them passed.

It's challenging in politics because, during the political season, the differences have to be defined. However, I find that when the election is over, people have an expectation and a desire to work together.

What drove you into public service, and did you know it was the right time to run for Governor?

It was not just the right time from an historic political standpoint, but also from an experience standpoint. Everything I have done in the private sector and in the public arena gives me the knowledge base to perform better as Governor.

What excites me about being Governor is the impact I can have on individual lives and that is true whether it's via a broad policy or via one-on-one relationships. It's the personal side of public service that motivates me. ●

What is your vision for driving growth in the State?

It starts with clarity of the message and the mission, and that is the advantage of preceding being Governor with a vigorous two-year campaign – everyone knows exactly what your priorities are.

I have set a clear mission statement for my time as Governor built around job creation and economic growth, and it is very rewarding that every agency has responded to that vision.

We are also focused on creating the proper climate for growth, which is one where excitement and optimism back a positive visualization of the opportunities in Arkansas and the work to build them every day.

My calls to CEOs and our tax cuts send a signal out attesting to the business-friendly environment in Arkansas. Helping to restrain burdensome regulations that strangle business further helps to create the right climate and make us competitive. The excitement that these moves generate run through State government but also through the private sector, and people respond to it.

How critical is it across the country that we put more of an emphasis on preparing and training graduates for jobs of the future?

It's essential. We need to right-size our education system to lead to jobs and provide options for those who may not want to pursue college degrees to follow a career tech path.

For two decades, we have seen manufacturing jobs leave the United States and, with that, the skills that are necessary for manufacturing have eroded. We have the opportunity to bring