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Governor: Education changes are priority

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The Arizona Republic
Jan. 5, 2007 12:00 AM

Gov. Janet Napolitano kicked off her second term in office Thursday by sketching her vision of a united Arizona built on the foundation of a robust education system.

The Democratic governor wrapped her comments around the theme of "One Arizona." It was a phrase she used 10 times in her five-minute inaugural address as she emphasized her priorities for the next four years.

Napolitano returned to her familiar themes of education and innovation and said both must be employed to help Arizona grapple with its rapid growth.

And she foreshadowed her State of the State speech on Monday, promising more work on education.

"What we will prove as we move forward and build the 'One Arizona' is that we can continue to work on education, continue to invest in teachers, especially those who teach subjects like math and science, continue to create high-wage jobs, and continue to be a leader in 21st-century technologies," Napolitano said.

Former Supreme Court Justice and Arizona native Sandra Day O'Connor swore in Napolitano, as well as Secretary of State Jan Brewer, Attorney General Terry Goddard, Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne and incoming state Treasurer Dean Martin.

All but Martin are incumbents returned to second terms by voters in November. O'Connor gave the oath of office to Napolitano once before, when she became Arizona attorney general in 1999.

The ceremonies were held outside on the Capitol Mall, with more than 1,000 onlookers crowding into stage-front seating and nearly filling a pair of grandstands. A set of distant chairs on the Capitol lawn was virtually empty, though, and the crowd was roughly half that of four years ago.

The Capitol courtyard was transformed for the late-morning ceremony, with bleachers lining the concrete plaza and chairs arrayed on the lawn east of the Capitol. Giant screens flashing scenes of Arizona's desert landscapes flanked the historic patio, from which hung a giant Arizona flag.

Those filing in for the ceremony were handed miniature state flags, as well as buttons with the "One Arizona" theme printed on them.

Native American drummers pounded out rhythms as onlookers arrived and filled the towering bleachers. Napolitano wore a dark skirt and top and white jacket, and was escorted to the stage by her father, Leonard, and Maj. Gen. David Rataczak of the Arizona National Guard.

Hinting at an issue that will be central to her State of the State address Monday, Napolitano called for a new way when it comes to handling growth.

"Our rate of growth will challenge us to think differently about everything," she said. "We will foster smart, cooperative growth planning so we know that there will be enough water, enough schools, enough teachers, enough jobs, enough open land."

Arizona, which now has more than 6 million residents, was recently named the nation's fastest-growing state.

Education will be key as Napolitano embarks on a plan to beef up science and math instruction in schools, hoping to better prepare students for the high-tech, high-skill economy. That theme goes for universities as well.

The presidents of the state's three major public universities were on hand Thursday morning for Napolitano's inaugural breakfast. It was held at the University of Arizona's new medical school in downtown Phoenix, a facility to which Napolitano and others proudly point.

"We have moved Arizona forward," she said of the last four years. "We've invested in our schools, expanded our economy, built everything from roads to laboratories and forged our future."

Rep. Steve Gallardo, D-Phoenix, said the state has "a bright future."

"We have a governor who has a mandate."

But much of the GOP-led Legislature is likely to disagree with his mandate assessment. House Majority Leader Tom Boone noted that the tightening state budget will make it more difficult for the governor and lawmakers to find compromise on education, growth and other issues.

But, as is the case on the eve of most legislative sessions, cooperation and collaboration ruled the day.

"Most of her comments were right on," said Boone, R-Glendale. "I am very encouraged and optimistic about the next two years."

Staff reporter Amanda J. Crawford contributed to this story

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