Phil Gordon '78

Phil Gordon is a man of many titles—schoolteacher, entrepreneur, school board member, board chairman, lawyer, chief of staff, and mayor. But his real job was rebuilding—he rebuilt Phoenix’s city core and no one will ever forget it. To do it he spearheaded Phoenix’s Light Rail, ASU Downtown, a one-thousand-room convention-ready hotel, an expanded Phoenix Convention Center, an $878 bond program, and the Phoenix Biomedical Campus.¹

Education & Law Practice

He attended grade school at Madison Meadows Elementary and college at Phoenix College before transferring to the University of Arizona for his B.A. in education. He earned his J.D. at the ASU College of Law, Cum Laude, in 1978.

He practiced law with Striech Lang, P.A.² until 1996, when he became chief of staff to Phoenix Mayor Skip Rimza.³ That piqued his interest in running for public office.

Politics

Pledging to fight crime and preserve neighborhoods, he entered the race for Phoenix City Council and was elected in 2003, garnering 72 percent of the vote, and reelected on September 11, 2007, with 77 percent of the vote.⁴ During his tenure at Phoenix City Hall, “Gordon focused heavily on revitalizing downtown Phoenix. The Phoenix City Council put more than $1 billion into the city’s core, investing in projects such as the revitalization of the Phoenix Convention Center, the construction of a new $350 million Sheraton hotel, and the creation of a downtown Arizona State University campus.”⁵

Under the leadership of ASU President Michael Crow and Mayor Gordon, ASU’s Downtown Phoenix campus drew new jobs, businesses and housing to downtown, increased internship opportunities for ASU students, and attracted more pedestrians to existing downtown businesses. Gordon said, “This is such an incredible opportunity for our city, if this campus was a private venture, every other city would be chasing it right now because the economic development implications are huge. About 5,000 students attended classes in 2008 at three locations: (1) the ASU Mercado at Fifth

¹ https://www.economicclub.ca/speakers/81
³ Anton “Skip” Rimza was sworn in as mayor on November 4, 1994, following a special election held on October 25 to replace outgoing interim mayor Thelda Williams. Rimsza won reelection to a full term the following year during normal elections on October 3, and a second term on September 7, 1999. Limited to two full terms, Rimsza left office on January 2, 2004. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skip_Rimsza
⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Gordon_(politician)
⁵ Ibid.

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Street and Van Buren Street, (2) the 411 Building at Central Avenue and Polk Street, and (3) at the Park Place Building at Fillmore and Third."\(^6\)

Gordon backed the Phoenix $1.1 billion multi-modal transportation system, which was approved by 65 percent of Phoenix voters in March 2000.\(^7\)

Arguably, Gordon’s most significant battle while in public office was his contentious dispute with Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio over issues related to illegal immigration. He also opposed the controversial Arizona SB 1070 law,\(^8\) which he considered racist and poorly drawn.\(^9\)

In June 2010, the US Conference of Mayors, wrapping up their 78th Annual Meeting in Oklahoma City, passed a resolution condemning SB 1070, submitted by Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon. A strong majority approved the Gordon resolution during a voice vote, according to conference spokesman Carlos Vogel. Similarly, a resolution submitted by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villarigosa called for SB 1070’s immediate repeal and for the federal government to pass comprehensive immigration repeal. Gordon’s anti-SB 1070 resolution noted the conference’s strong opposition to Arizona’s new “papers please” legislation.

Speaking to his fellow mayors the day before the vote, Gordon told his fellow mayors “Ten other states were considering copycat laws to SB 1070. He made reasoned arguments against the laws noting the increased costs to cities in lawsuits and in jail costs, which he estimated would increase by $7 to $10 in Phoenix because of SB 1070. He “pointed out the threat to public safety because victims and witnesses that are here undocumented will be fearful of arrest or deportation if they come forward to finger a violent drug dealer, or murderer, or a smuggler.”\(^10\) On a wide scale, Gordon observed the impracticality of those demanding deportation of all those in the country illegally. “We are not going to be busing 12 million-plus individuals that have citizens and undocumented within the family across the border.”\(^11\)

Under his leadership, Phoenix was proclaimed a “21st Century City in 2008 and, in 2009 was named for the fifth time, an ‘AllAmericaCity.’”\(^12\) In November 2008, he was elected to the Phoenix College Hall of Fame.\(^13\) Also in 2008, a contest for Mayor of the World included him. “One of the many voters supporting him saying, ‘Mayor Gordon is the real deal. He’s like Arizona’s Mayor. He represents Phoenix with dignity

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\(^6\) [http://archives.azcentral.specials/special33/articles/0818extasu0818z3.html](http://archives.azcentral.specials/special33/articles/0818extasu0818z3.html)

\(^7\) [http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/stories/2004/12/06/newscolumn1.html](http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/stories/2004/12/06/newscolumn1.html)

\(^8\) The Support for Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act was a 2010 Legislative Act in Arizona that at the time of passage of SB 107- was the broadest and strictest anti-illegal immigration measure passed in the United States, received international attention, and spurred considerable controversy. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arizona_SB_1070](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arizona_SB_1070)


\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) [https://mcccdf.org/hero-of-education/phil-gordon/](https://mcccdf.org/hero-of-education/phil-gordon/)

\(^13\) Ibid.
and passion. While most sit and spew partisan rhetoric, Mayor Gordon is known for . . . reaching toward the people on both sides of an issue. Mayor Gordon brings people together and finds middle ground, collaboration, compromise, solutions! . . . Mayor Gordon focuses on the human element, human rights, and human dignity . . . He isn’t afraid to stand-up for his position and take the lead on the tough issues. Phoenix and Arizona are lucky to have Mayor Gordon in charge.’ 85,000 people voted for their favorite mayors all over the world. Helen Zille, executive mayor of Cape Town and leader of South Africa’s opposition Democratic Alliance, won in 2008, but Phil Gordon came in fourth, out of hundreds of mayors nominated by their cities worldwide.”

In a good way, he was a hyperactive mayor in a governmental structure where the City Manager actually ran the city. The Arizona Republic ran an editorial cartoon mocking him as a plate-spinner trying to keep too many balls in the air at once. Mike Bielecki, a longtime city official responded. “In this system, you've got to earn your power every day. If you have his qualities of good ideas, energy and reaching out to others, you can be a commanding presence anyway.”

Barry Broome, president and chief executive of the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, said Gordon’s legacy “is sealed as a mayor that worked hard on the city's economy.”

Post-Mayoral Life

Phoenix mayors are term limited by state law. As a follow-up to lawyering and public service, Gordon went to work in Arizona’s then burgeoning biotech sector. He joined a nonprofit whose goal is to transform the nation’s entire health system, Chan Soon-Shiong Institute for Advanced Health. As he left


16 Established in 1989, the Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC) actively works to attract and grow quality businesses and advocate for the competitiveness of Greater Phoenix. As the regional economic development organization, GPEC works with 22 member communities, Maricopa County and more than 160 private investors to accomplish its mission, and serve as a strategic partner to companies across the world as they expand or relocate. Consistently ranked as a top national economic development organization, GPEC’s approach to connectivity extends beyond the fabric of the community. https://www.gpec.org/about-us/


18 The Chan Soon-Shiong Institute for Advanced Health (CSS Institute) announced today it has achieved a major milestone in its establishment of a secure “medical information superhighway” as first envisioned by founder Patrick Soon-Shiong, M.D. and outlined to the Institute of Medicine in July 2009. The CSS Institute has assumed financial responsibility for the nation’s premier advanced research communications network – National LambdaRail (www.nlr.net). NLR consists of over 12,000 miles of high performance optical fiber from coast to coast, capable of speeds of up to 100 gigabits per second. In partnership with Cisco Systems and their technology platform, NLR provides universities and government agencies with massive data transmission services required by leading-edge research.
the mayor’s office he said he did not have an official title yet, and did know where his office would be, but “he would like to have office space in downtown Phoenix.”