I Guest Con nentary

'Do tank' studying school dropout rates
ByLattleF.Coor
As Arizona's leaders grap-
ple with our current fiscal cri-
sis, they are urging us not to
lose sight of the future of our
state. The newly created Cen-ter for the Future of Arizona intends to respond to that challenge by creating an action agenda strategically targeted to strengthen key elements of the Arizona we desire in the years ahead.

A privately funded "do tank," the center will take on no more than three major projects at a time, staying with each chosen project three to five years to ensure that clear, bold and measurable goals are accomplished over the life of each project. With a board of well-known civic leaders, I am joined on the center's profes-sional staff by Dr. Sybil Fran-cis, a public policy expert with more than 20 years experience in academics, in Congress and at the White House working on significant national policy issues, and who arrived in Phoenix this past summer with her husband, ASU Presi-dent Michael Crow.

As a very small, lean organi-zation, the center will work in active collaboration with inter-ested individuals and organi-zations in pursuing its goal-
' oriented agenda.
The first issue the center
' will address is Arizona's
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alarmingly high dropout rate
> among high school students. A [recent report by the Arizona ; Commission for Post-second-i ary Education states that almost one-third of our young
i people drop out of school before high school graduation. Various other reports place our high school completion rate at the very bottom of the 50 states. The consequences of such a high dropout rate are a

threat to the kind of Arizona we aspire to in the years ahead. Educational levels are directly related to personal financial success and to a healthy economy for the state. We simply must do better, much better.

Working with the state's leadership, and a number of organizations and individuals already engaged in tackling this important issue, the cen-ter will strive for consensus on the desired goals for improve-ment in our high school com-pletion rate. We will announce these goals publicly, with wide-ly publicized annual reports on our collective progress toward reaching those goals over each of the next five years. T\vo additional projects we will actively explore over the next several months include identifying opportunities to strengthen the position of Ari-zona's working poor, and the development of a contempo-rary leadership model that will better meet the needs of the state.
In order to ensure that our work is part of a coherent vision for Arizona, over the next four months the center will endeavor to create a con-sensus vision for the future of the state drawn from reports

and recommendations from all sources in Arizona over the past 10 years. In addition to combing all relevant docu-ments, we will; meet with a variety of civic and governmen-tal leaders for advice and com-ment as we seek to develop this working model. Our pre-liminary work on a vision statement has identified the following elements for inclu-sion:

A competitive, knowledge-
based economy.
A state that develops and retains its most creative and talented people.
An educational and social
infrastructure that provides full opportunities for all.
A state that manages its
growth in a way that enhances rather than degrades its quali-ty of life.
An investment philosophy
that generates adequate resources, public and private, to accomplish our collective goals.
A leadership model
appropriate for a modern, complex society.
For more information about the center, please visit our Web site at wwwArizonaFViture.org. Dr. Coor is chairman and CEO of the Center for the Future of Arizona.