

Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee

Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas is recognized as a national leader in the area of education reform. Huckabee is the chairman of the Education Commission of the States, a highly respected education policy organization. He will lead the ECS until July 2006. The ECS helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. The organization, which is based in Denver, was formed in 1965. Arkansas' ACTAAP system is widely hailed as one of the nation's best school accountability programs. Huckabee has pushed through reforms in Arkansas that have significantly expanded the availability of college scholarships, increased the number of charter schools and established new approaches to workforce education. His Smart Start initiative placed a heavy emphasis on reading and mathematics for students from kindergarten through the fourth grade. He then created Smart Step, a similar emphasis for students from the fifth through the eighth grades. Student scores on standardized tests have risen steadily since the creation of Smart Start and Smart Step.

Huckabee became governor in July 1996 when his predecessor resigned. He was one of the youngest governors in the country at the time. Huckabee first was elected lieutenant governor in a 1993 special election and was elected to a full four-year term in 1994. He was only the fourth Republican to be elected to statewide office since Reconstruction. Huckabee was elected to a full four-year term as governor in 1998, attracting the largest percentage of the vote ever received by a Republican gubernatorial nominee in Arkansas, and was re-elected to another four-year term in November 2002. He's now the second longest-serving governor in the country. In addition to his education reform efforts, Huckabee has been a leader in improving health care for Arkansans. He created the ARKids First program, a nationally recognized initiative that provides health insurance to tens of thousands of children who previously had no access to health insurance. He also led a ballot initiative in 2000 that devotes all of the state's tobacco settlement money to improving the health of Arkansans. He recently announced the Healthy Arkansas initiative to encourage Arkansans to stop smoking, exercise more and eat healthier.

In 1996 during his first months in office, Huckabee led the fight for Amendment 75 to the Arkansas Constitution. The amendment created a sales tax of one-eighth of a cent that benefits the state Department of Parks and Tourism, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the state Department of Heritage and the Keep Arkansas Beautiful Commission. Proceeds from the amendment have allowed Arkansas to build the finest system of state parks in the country along with a system of state-of-the-art nature centers operated by the Game and Fish Commission. The first of those nature centers at Pine Bluff was named after the governor in recognition of his conservation efforts. Huckabee, a noted outdoorsman, was honored in 1997 as the American Sportfishing Association Man of the Year and was inducted in 2000 to the Arkansas Outdoor Hall of Fame.

Huckabee also has become known nationally for his focus on technology in state government. He created an automobile license renewal system that's a model for states across the country. He has supported other advancements that have made Arkansas a technology leader among the states. Brown University recognized Arkansas for being first in the country in on-line services.

Many Arkansans also have come to know Huckabee as the "highway governor." That's because he developed and led the campaign for a 1999 bond issue to totally rehabilitate the state's system of crumbling interstate highways. Arkansas is now in the midst of the largest road construction project in its history. Huckabee, a fiscal conservative, pushed through the Arkansas Legislature the first major, broad-based tax cuts in state history. He led efforts to establish a Property Taxpayers' Bill of Rights and created a welfare reform program that reduced the welfare rolls in the state by almost 50 percent. The governor is a noted speaker and author. He has given speeches on politics and public policy to groups across the country and around the world. He's a regular guest on national television and radio shows, discussing issues of importance to the states. In the fall of 1997, his book "Character Is The Issue" was released by Broadman & Holman. The book chronicles Huckabee's political career and discusses the importance of character in politics and life. The following year, Broadman & Holman released "Kids Who Kill," a book that addresses the issues of juvenile violence. His third book, "Living Beyond Your Lifetime," was released in 2000. It examines how to establish a legacy that will live on after one's death.

Huckabee has taken on numerous national leadership roles. In addition to being the chairman of the Education Commission of the States, he's the immediate past president of the Council of State Governments. The CSG is the nation's only organization serving every elected and appointed official in all three branches of state government. Founded in 1933 on the premise that states are the best sources of insight and innovation, the CSG provides a network for state leaders to share ideas. Huckabee is the vice chairman of the National Governors Association. He will become NGA chairman in July 2005. The NGA, founded in 1908, is the group through which the nation's governors collectively influence the development of national policy. Huckabee is also the NGA's lead governor on the issue of welfare reform.

The Arkansas governor is extremely active in regional organizations. He's the immediate past state co-chairman of the Delta Regional Authority. He was selected to the post by the governors of the other seven states that are part of the DRA -- Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Missouri, Alabama, Kentucky and Illinois. The DRA was established by Congress to help alleviate poverty and stimulate economic growth in impoverished counties in the eight member states. Huckabee is a former chairman of the Southern Governors' Association, the Southern Regional Education Board, the Southern Growth Policies Board, the Southern Technology Council and the Southern International Trade Council.

Huckabee also is a former chairman of the Interstate Oil & Gas Compact Commission. The 37-state coalition develops energy policy and lobbies Congress on energy matters, serving as the voice of state government on energy issues. Congress approved the creation of the IOGCC in 1935. Since that time, the commission has been the leading voice for state regulation of oil and gas production.

The governor and his wife, Janet, have three grown children -- John Mark, David and Sarah. Huckabee enjoys hunting, fishing, reading and playing bass guitar in his band, Capitol Offense.