

4/15/11 Speaker 3

04.15.11.A -

Rural West Side of the San Joaquin Valley

Good Evening. My name is Javier Guzman. I was raised in Huron and worked in the cotton fields of the west side as a child. After working for many years with the Legislature in Sacramento, I returned to Fresno County.

I am here today on behalf of I-5 Social Services that operates 8 Early Childcare Educational Centers on the Westside of the San Joaquin Valley serving up to 700 children and their families in Mendota, Selma, Huron, Cantua Creek, Kerman, Madera, Del Rey and Firebaugh.

The San Joaquin Valley

The San Joaquin Valley has long been recognized as this nation's richest agricultural area while home to some of the most poverty stricken communities in the country. For the last half century organizations like West Side Planning and National Land for People have struggled to address that dichotomy to no avail. Despite these efforts little has changed. That struggle continues today with others like The Rural Development Center at CSU-Fresno and I-5 Social Service Corporation.

A tour of communities on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley is a revisit of the "Grapes of Wrath".

- The Public Policy Institute of California reported in 2009 that the Child Poverty Rate in the San Joaquin Valley ranged from a low of 20% in Kings County to a high of 33% in Tulare compared to 18% nationwide.
- The James Irving Foundation reported in 2010 that household income for the San Joaquin Valley skews lower than that of all Californians and clearly lags in the highest income brackets.
- Perhaps the most alarming statistics were reported by Oxfam America and the Rockefeller Foundation's study "The Measure of America". They report that poverty, poor health, and low graduation rates have put the San Joaquin Valley's 20th Congressional District (reaching Fresno, Kings and Kern Counties) dead last in a national scorecard that ranks the well-being of residents of 436 districts nationwide.
- A recent Gallup Survey that identified the top 10 national metropolitan areas with the highest percentage rates of food hardship rated Fresno as number 1 - the "Hunger Capital" of the nation.
- A close look at the communities where I-5 Day Care Centers are located finds unemployment rates ranging from a low of 20.2% in Cantua Creek to a high of 42.7% in Mendota.

The communities are mostly Latino (98%) with household incomes that range from below poverty to moderate income. The majority of these families are employed in the agricultural sector and live in the rural San Joaquin Valley. Less than 50% of our parents have the equivalent of a high school diploma. More than four out of five (80%) of the children live below the poverty level and 77% of them face food shortages in the home. More than half of the children and families do not have health insurance. Nearly 100% of the children qualify for Free and Reduced Lunches at school.

In drawing state Congressional, Assembly, Senate and Board of Equalization Districts it is essential that each district "Communities of Interest" reflect similar characteristics in terms of poverty, health care access, educational achievements, and employment opportunities so that they can work together to address their needs. This clearly demonstrates that as a COI the rural west side has much more in common with the Southeast and Southwest City of Fresno than with the Northern Fresno Urban area.

Google maps

To see all the details that are visible on the screen, use the "Print" link next to the map.

