

Round table on economic development in rural areas in Utah.



The Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU) hosted a round table titled “Sustainable Development in Rural Utah” on April 19, 2019. It was organized by Lacey Meyer, vice President of UIMF as a student engaged learning model, when students learn professional skills by organizing as a group activities, like this roundtable when their teacher serves them as a mentor.

She invited to speak five prominent presenters: 1) Tony Martines, Carbon County Commissioner 2) Nicholina Womack, CEO of FutureINDesign; 3) Michael Kourianos Mayor of Price; 4) Christine Watkins, Utah State Representative; and 5) Geri Gamber, Executive director of the NGO titled SEUALGS/SEUDD. I was able to take part during the half of the event, unfortunately, but still I enjoyed the presentations of three speakers.

Ms. Geri Gamber, Executive director of the NGO titled SEUALGS/SEUDD, Gamber discussed the economic development in rural areas as it pertains to breaking out of poverty. Utah is experiencing rapid population growth however; rural counties have a much slower growth rate.

The four types of rural and frontier areas confirm that poverty is much higher in these rural counties. Factors contributing to poverty includes, outmigration, chronic underinvestment, Lack of resources, lack of civic culture. Challenges to address for advancement, isolation, addiction & mental health issues, broken community institutions, broken government. Creating positive change such as, supporting families, invest in our children's future, encourage outside programs to invest in the community, diverse mental health options for the opioid epidemic crisis. Gamber mentions poverty programs available to the community: The Circles program provides mental models, hidden rules, languages and resources. The Future in Design program creates sustainable lifestyles for the youth, this program addresses personal and professional development and possible career in manufacturing. Funding: rural online initiative, online courses to develop skills to strengthen and diversify economy. Following up by continuing to diversify the economy, investing in youth, embracing technical careers

Christine Watkins, Utah State Representative discussed the positive and negative complexities in the legislation process between rural and urban areas. Christine talked about the large areas rural district includes, she talked about the lack of resources that are needed for growth and sustainability. Water and electricity are the two main scarce resources in rural areas in price, therefore Its important to conserve and use our water appropriately.

Michael Kourianos Mayor of Price was the third speaker, whom I was able to hear. Kourianos's primary initiative as an employee at the local power plant was to move Price in a sustainable direction to conserve resources for the younger population. Huntington powerplant is substantial for the community of price. The idea is to come up with proposals to keep price pertinent to the local community, visitors and the rest of Utah by bringing the ideas from people in both rural and urban areas.

I enjoyed all three presentations because of the important issues, which were raised by speakers. And all of the mentioned about similar issues and challenges which are experienced by Native American communities in the area of Price and down to the south of Utah. As a member of Navajo Nation, I am studying issues of sustainable development for our communities and would like to do similar activities like, hosted by Lacey Meyer and UIMF round table.

Brianna John, UVU student