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Officials discuss jobs for the Valley

Posted: Thursday, Jun 5th, 2008
BY: Rebecca Van Dyke

SLV leaders look towards the future

By REBECCA VAN DYKE

ALAMOSA – Community leaders from around the San Luis Valley gathered with representatives from the governor's office to discuss the future of jobs and education in the Valley.

Colorado Jobs Cabinet representatives facilitated a work session to consider obstacles in employment, create goals for Valley employment, and eventually come up with an action plan to increase employment and employment opportunities in the Valley in the next 10 years. "It's about growing our own," said Ben Curtiss, policy advisor for the office of the governor.

The Colorado Jobs Cabinet came from the 'Colorado Promise' by Governor Ritter as one of his campaign promises. It serves as a tool to various regions in the state to "align economic development, workforce development, and education programs," according to the cabinet's mission statement.

The state was sectioned off into five regions to decide how the regions needed employment assistance individually in which industries.

Curtiss sectioned off the group into smaller groups to discuss what they would ideally like to see within five years of working with the cabinet, and to develop goals based on their expectations:

- Become the lead entrepreneurial partner for compatible and sustainable economic and community development in areas like alternative energy partnerships and agriculture-based research.
- Become a stable funding stream, tool or mechanism that creates and sustains programs based on our local strengths that support and promote a continuum from education to employment to quality of life.
- Appropriate investments in infrastructures such as technology, education, and transportation will support future job growth. Evaluate the current workforce infrastructure to develop premiere coordinated and integrated web-based tools.
- Ensure meaningful outcomes between education, government, and employers to make sure the needs of the employer and community are being met by the various institutions.



Photo by Rebecca Van Dyke From left, David Svaldi, Val Finnegan, Bob Rael, and Marguerite Salazar discuss the future of the San Luis Valley employment and economic situation as part of the Colorado Jobs Cabinet work session with the governor's office.

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capital and celebrates the unique identity of our individual communities.

The Colorado Jobs Cabinet will use these goals as developed by the community to make the program work for them.

On the other hand, they had to identify who the populations the program needed to target are, what kind of issues the Valley faces regarding employment, which industries needed focus, and what partnerships need to be developed.

The group decided target groups were the elderly, returning veterans, at-risk youth, disabled both physically and mentally, parents needing reeducation, undocumented workers, preschoolers, and convicted.

Industries needing a workforce in the Valley were pinned down to agriculture, tourism and recreation, education, healthcare, and energy.

As the group discussed the issues faced in the Valley concerning employment:

- Cultural diversity "is both a strength and a weakness," said Russ Johnson, CEO of San Luis Valley Regional Medical Center.
- People are too busy to commit or give their time.
- Changing the territorial mentality of the various communities in the San Luis Valley to make a cohesive unit. "The silos have to come down," said Ruth Ann Woods, co-chair of the Colorado Jobs Cabinet.
- A poverty of expectations. "It's hard to aspire for something you don't know exists," said Bob Rael.
- Young people want to leave.
- Geographic location, isolated or insulated.
- Below average education levels.
- Half of average Colorado household income for working individuals.
- A low-density population.
- People are not taking advantage of resources.

"We can't solve all these issues, but we can make headway," said Curtiss.

David Svaldi, president for Adams State College is the regional representative for the Colorado Jobs Cabinet. "What a neat bunch of leaders we have here in the Valley. They are engaged, committed, passionate, and have a unified approach to developing education and jobs," Svaldi said.

The Colorado Jobs Cabinet will meet again before the summer is over to develop an action plan to begin their goals by September.

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