

2019 BizFed Central Valley Leadership Roundtable Series Congressman TJ Cox, 21st District

BizFed Central Valley members had a lively and frank discussion with newly elected Congressman T.J. Cox during a Leadership Roundtable on Feb. 21.

A few key takeaways from Cox included:

- No, we will not have a 70% income tax any time soon (in response to a question about the Green New Deal ideas bubbling around the new Congress)
- Yes, a Friant Kern Canal fix is top of mind for him and he is gaining allies on both sides of the aisle who recognize this is a critical issue for water quality and farming.
- The Feds should take back the \$2.5 billion extended for High Speed Rail after Gov. Newsom kiboshed the project as it was originally presented.
- Immigration fixes need to go beyond a “blue card” for farmworker.
- Tariffs are exacting a “grim” toll on farmers and Cox believes the Trump administration is “feeling some very real political heat” on that issue.



Though Cox rode into office on the Democratic “blue wave,” he assured BizFed Central Valley members that he is an experienced, pragmatic businessman who knows the concerns shared by all business folks.



“It’s hard just to make payroll some months,” he said.

Cox called himself a “serial entrepreneur” explaining he had worked in fields as diverse as health care and home construction. He currently operates nut processing plants in a partnership.

BizFed CV members weren’t shy about asking questions and laying out their concerns jumping right into the fossil fuel debate.

They explained how natural gas is “fighting for its life” in California, where electric-only mandates for cars and buildings have been sought by various bills (defeated with BizFed’s help) and are now coming back through regulatory agencies that have little to no oversight by the public. Meanwhile, California electric rates are some of the highest in the country forcing nearly 25 percent of valley residents to seek subsidies to pay their bills.



“This is a real affordability issue,” members told Cox.



Others pointed out that the increased use of natural gas, thanks to hydraulic fracturing techniques, had been the single greatest factor in reducing CO2 in the atmosphere. And speaking of fracking, they noted, fracking in California was far different than other states. It uses much less water and has zero history of groundwater contamination or seismic events.

“Can you give me more color on that,” Cox asked, clearly eager to learn more. BizFed CV members obliged, setting up tours and promising informational packets.

Cox was equally surprised to learn that building a home in California, even lower cost counties such as Kern, Kings and Fresno, starts with impact fees at \$35,000. And that’s before the new “solar mandate” kicks in. That will require all new homes be built with rooftop solar, adding an estimated \$8,000 to the cost of each new home.

“The entry-level home market in California is close to extinction,” one member predicted.

Cox took it all in and was enthusiastic when asked if he would come back for future discussions.

“Let’s keep the conversation going,” he said.

Stay tuned.

