

2019 BizFed Leadership Roundtable Series: Senator Melissa Hurtado

State Senator Melissa Hurtado have an involved discussion with BizFed Central Valley members on Friday June 7 at a Leadership Roundtable held in Fresno.

The newly elected senator kept her remarks short and instead sought to hear from local leaders, something she said she's not seeing enough of up in Sacramento.

"We really need to get your position papers on bills so we know which way the district is leaning on issues," she said. "There's an entire list of budget request and a lot of them center on water.

"We want to hear from you, what is helping growth, what is impeding growth."

BizFed CV members wasted no time jumping into the discussion bringing up CEQA reform. That's the California Environmental Quality Act, which was intended as a public notification tool so residents near upcoming development would have a chance to ask questions and lodge complaints.

Over the years, CEQA has been used to stop vital housing and transportation projects by NIMBYs, used as a cudgel by labor unions to get greater concessions from employers and used by businesses to stymie competition.



The end result has been severe regulatory overload.

BizFed CV members let Hurtado know that locals don't need grants or state handouts. The biggest hurdle to more housing, job growth and economic expansion, they said is over regulation.

To that end, Hurtado sought BizFed members' formal input on the CEQA reform bills still in play: AB 1197 (Santiago) and SB 744 (Caballero) which have both passed their respective houses. They would prohibit CEQA

lawsuits on voter approved projects built with taxpayer funds.

Beyond CEQA, BizFed members bent the Senator's ear about a wide host of important issues:

- *Blanket project labor agreements hurt smaller construction companies
- *Private university students shouldn't be excluded from state grants/scholarships
- *Make sure local workforce development boards get a cut of homeless funding as they are a mechanism to deliver that money where it's needed



*Natural gas is a renewable fuel source used by 90 percent of Californians to cook and heat their homes, but its under attack by the CPUC and Cal. Energy Commission

*Methane digesters cut GHG emissions by a huge amount and provide fuel for residents (Hurtado agreed and said she wrote a letter in support of such projects)

* The central valley can be a “world class” source of renewable energy if the definition of renewable includes natural gas, cogeneration (we could turn the millions of hazardous dead trees in the Sierras into fuel) and hydrogen.



Of course, several key water issues were also discussed.

Hurtado was grateful for BizFed’s support of her SB559, which seeks \$400 million from Newsom’s budget to fix the Friant-Kern Canal. The bill passed the Senate with hardly any opposition.

She also mentioned that she supports SB 200 which would appropriate \$150 million a year for disadvantaged communities with tainted drinking water. The vast majority of those systems are in the San Joaquin Valley.

Members also brought up SB 1, which seeks to keep Trump administration environmental and worker safety rule roll backs at bay in California. Embedded in that bill is language that would force the Bureau of Reclamation, which runs the Central Valley Project, to adhere to Jan. 2017 environmental operating standards with regards to water exports from the delta.

There are several ongoing negotiations between California and the feds that could be upended if SB1 is signed into law, BizFed members noted.

The bill, authored by Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins, has already passed the Senate – with Hurtado’s vote.

One BizFed member said if the water section in SB 1 stands it could unravel years of new scientific research, negotiations and a lot of new creativity that’s been generated by the ongoing negotiations.

Hurtado’s message back was to let our voices be heard – tell Sacramento where the valley stands.

