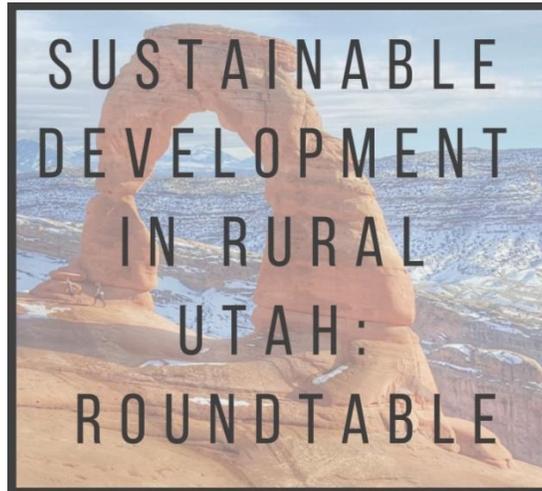


Roundtable on Sustainable Development in Rural Utah



On April 19, 2019, a group of panelists comprising of politicians, government officials, and business leaders from parts of rural Utah, primarily from Carbon and Emery counties, met for a roundtable event at Utah Valley University titled “Sustainable Development in Rural Utah” to discuss several challenges that face Utah’s rural communities as well as ideas for solutions that would bring sustainable development to these areas. The event was organized by Lacey Meyer, Vice President of the Utah International Mountain Forum at UVU.

After a brief introduction from Miss Meyer, each panelist had the opportunity to speak and make a presentation regarding their specific area of expertise and the challenges faced by rural Utah from their perspectives.

The first panelist to speak was Miss Geri Gamber, the Executive Director of the Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments. She began by specifying what is meant by the term “rural Utah,” and the distinct types of rural and frontier areas, including amenity rich areas, declining resource dependent areas, transitioning areas with amenities, and chronically poor

communities. She then delved deeper into the topic of poverty and provided poverty statistics for various counties in rural Utah. According to Miss Gamber, the rate of poverty in Carbon County is 15.5%, Emery County 12%, Grand County 17%, and San Juan County 28.4%. The primary factors she outlined that contribute to poverty are outmigration, chronic underinvestment, lack of adequate resources to participate in society, and lack of civic culture. She also addressed challenges such as isolation and remoteness, broken local government, and families that “run” things. She concluded by discussing ways that positive change can be created, as well as various programs and efforts that are taking place to help people develop professional skills, fight the opioid crisis, and help the youth of the area.



Geri Gamber, Executive Director of the Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments



Representative Christine Watkins

The

second speaker was Representative Christine Watkins, state representative of District 69 in Utah. She discussed her involvement in the legislative process in the state legislature as well as the representation of rural communities and of women in the legislature. She talked at length regarding specifically San Juan County and mentioned that much of the county is similar in many ways to a third world country. Two major issues in this area are the ability to provide people access to water and electricity, especially to many members of the Native American community in the area. Representative Watkins discussed her experiences having grown up and lived in various rural parts of the state throughout her life, and the struggle it can be in the legislature when dealing with those who simply don't understand the unique issues of rural communities.

After Representative Watkins, the audience was addressed by Michael Kourianos, mayor of Price, Utah. Mayor Kourianos also works as the operations supervisor of a power plant in Price. His goal in becoming mayor was to help “sell” Price and to help the community diversify itself economically. He recognizes that the days of the coal fire power plants that the community depends on so heavily are coming to an end, and that if they don’t diversify and move forward in the right direction the closure of the power plant would cripple the community. He discussed a proposal made in conjunction with the University of Utah that has the goal to increase 10,000 households by \$10,000 in Carbon and Emery County. This proposal has been selected to present before the Schmidt Foundation this coming summer in New York City.



Mayor Michael Kourianos



Nicholina Wolmack, CEO/Founder of FutureINDesign

Next to speak was CEO and founder of FutureINDesign, Miss Nicholina Wolmack. The mission of her organization is to narrow the digital literacy gap and reduce the constraints of intergenerational poverty through hands on job training in key technology areas and social skills. Her organization, while helping individuals develop technological skills, also helps people develop soft skills that can be very beneficial in professional careers. They especially focus on those in these rural areas who have the creativity and work ethic to be successful but lack the opportunities. They help individuals develop skills such as public speaking, cultural competence, leadership, and professionalism. The goal is to create 200 jobs in rural Utah by 2025, but as Miss Wolmack stated, more importantly they hope that beyond creating jobs, people will gain experience and knowledge that will push them to start their own businesses and cultivate their own ideas.

The final panelist to speak was Carbon County commissioner Tony Martines. He focused on some of the strengths that Carbon County does have, including a significant amount of cultural and ethnic diversity in the area. He also highlighted the infrastructure in the area from the coal, gas, and oil industries, such as a main highway, a rail road, an airport, a university, a top-ranked hospital, and a hard-working workforce. He stated that there are many home-based companies in the area that starting to grow and expand. He also mentioned the advantageous position of the area as urban Utah continues to grow due to its proximity to Utah Valley. In his first 100 days in office, he was contacted by 18 different companies inquiring about Carbon County due to its more affordable housing, and its more stable work force that is less likely to move around from place to place.



Carbon County Commissioner Tony Martines

The event concluded with a roundtable during which each panelist was able to address a variety of questions posed to each of them. There were a few themes that emerged from the roundtable that seemed to be unanimously felt from each member. One of these was the feeling that rural Utah doesn't need to be "saved" by outsiders and that they don't want to be viewed as a prize to be won, rather there simply needs to be a higher level of understanding between rural and urban areas of the state. Another theme that seemed to be a unanimous feeling among the panelist is a sense of hope for the future and of the potential of the area. There are certain advantages that they have that can lead to a successful future and modern technology will be able to allow more people to live there and work remotely.



In short, the roundtable event on Sustainable Development in Rural Utah was a fascinating and illuminating discussion regarding the challenges faced by rural Utah communities and the

solutions that can address these challenges. Solutions to these problems in rural Utah could be of international importance as they could be applied to assist rural mountainous communities worldwide that face similar challenges.

Nathan Wagstaff, UVU student