

Economic Development in Utah

On April 19, 2019, members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU), under the leadership of Lacey Meyer, UIMF vice-president hosted a round-table titled, “Sustainable Development in Rural Utah.” UIMF since 2011 advocated the sustainable mountain development agenda of the United Nations in the State of Utah and North America. It does that as a student engaged learning, when students gain professional skills as a group by implementing practically initiatives with international implications with faculty serving them as mentors.



Ms. Geri Gamber speaks at UVU

Ms. Geri Gamber, Executive Director of the NGO SEUALG/SUEDD, was the first speaker who had the topic of breaking out of poverty in rural Utah. She defined what rural Utah is and what it looks like. Geri Gamber explained how Utah is experiencing significant growth with population projections that suggest the state will double in residents by 2060. In comparison to the most populated cities in Utah like Salt Lake City and Provo, rural counties have a slower growth rate and make up less than 10 percent of Utah’s population. Within rural Utah, there are four types of rural and frontier areas: amenity rich areas, declining resource dependent areas, transitioning areas with amenities, and chronically poor communities. Geri Gamber mentioned that San Juan

county has the greatest Navajo population which contributes to over 28% of poverty in the county. Moreover, Geri Gamber further explained the factors which are contributing to poverty in rural Utah, which are: migration of young adults who leave rural Utah, chronic underinvestment in low-education and weak community institutions and an inherent law of capacity which is hard on low-income residents. These challenges, as well as isolation and remoteness of the counties, make it difficult to implement programs. Small social worlds mean family stigma can have consequences like addictions and mental health issues



State Representative Christine Watkins speaks at the roundtable

On strategizing against poverty in rural Utah, Geri Gamber also spoke on creating a positive exchange which would include working families, investment in young children, and on the encouragement of outside programs. These programs would be an investment to the area to encourage work and offer a living wage with benefits and a career path, encourage community pride, and have diverse mental health options. In addition, the future of design is crucial for creating curriculums for sustainable lifestyles focused on youth programs like coding and design. The purpose of these programs would lead to career opportunities for those who would otherwise not have had the chance for career or education advancement. Online courses through an online

initiative created through legislative funding are also offered for individuals to develop skills and find living wage jobs.

Next speaker, Utah State legislature, Christine Watkins spoke on the challenges with legislatures and budget access in Utah. With 25% of the Utah legislature being women, she is the only female representative who covers rural Utah. She had a disadvantage to campaigning due to the size of the counties she covers, being more spread out in rural Utah. Christine Watkins compared San Juan county to a third world country due to the lack of clean water and electricity, and how other states argue on water because they do not understand the urgent need from these counties. Her time is dedicated to educating fellow representatives about rural challenges in order to win their votes and pass bills as there are not enough rural legislatures. Currently, she is working on funding to find more technical opportunities for their residents.



Mayor Michael Korianos during the round table at UVU

Another speaker, the mayor of Price, Michael Korianos spoke on leading the direction of the community to be sustainable and educated. Working at a power plant, he has noticed that power

plants are coming to a close in the next 10-15 years, which severely affects young people who are at the start of their careers. Michael Korianos's goal is to educate people to a diverse community so that when the main power plant is gone, the city does not cripple. Notably, he spoke on the Utah Coal strike team who was put together by the Schmidt Foundation, co-founders of Google. The foundation received idea proposal from universities including the University of Utah. He is trying to sell his community and focusing on the positives, and what makes them unique.

This event was extremely beneficial for UVU students, as well as for the community, especially for those who are unaware of the issues related to sustainable development in rural Utah. All speakers spoke about their personal and professional experience between rural Utah and state and federal legislature. The topic was a crucial matter due to such issues taking place in this state, therefore affecting our own Utah citizens. Not only was this event able to help students, such as myself, to learn about issues in rural Utah but how I can be involved through engaged learning initiatives in the matter. Overall, student participation can be directly and effectively applied in hosting future VIP-presenter panels for fellow students and the community.

Vanessa McCann, UVU student