

Jeff Denham: Creating jobs key to Central Valley's future, health

By Jeff
Denham

As a Valley small-business owner and farmer, I grew up on a farm and want my children – and generations of Valley kids to come – to have the same lifestyle I had. That's why my top priority is creating jobs here at home, helping kids born and raised here to stay here and begin successful lives where they can find work.

Business owners know that the last few years have been tough. Our economy continues to struggle and unemployment remains high. Overreaching environmental regulations and health care mandates pose an ongoing threat to small businesses as they try to comply. The Stanislaus Alliance Worknet's recent survey of small business owners in the county found that environmental regulation and the Affordable Care Act were their top two concerns, with water not far behind.

To run my business, I must be able to plan ahead. I need certainty to make the right decisions for my employees, accurately predict costs and revenues and generate a vision for the future. Environmental regulations, especially those that exacerbate our already devastating drought, make that planning nearly impossible. Unfortunately, there are groups of people more concerned with protecting fish than our economy. Their desired regulations, on top of those already in place, threaten to choke off our limited water supply.

In the U.S. House, we passed legislation in February to put every option on the table for discussion as we work to help California cope with the drought. The House-passed bill included two bills I introduced to expand storage at New Melones and begin a pilot program on the Stanislaus River to suppress predator fish. We have been involved in negotiating with the Senate and the Obama administration. It is time for this administration to get engaged by instituting regulatory policies, providing storage and instituting long-term solutions so badly needed.

I've also fought off the EPA's proposed Waters of the U.S. rule in recent months. The proposed rule would extend the definition of "navigable waters" to miniscule bodies such as farm ponds and drainage ditches, making them eligible for regulations of the Clean Water Act (CWA). The EPA's proposal would add a new layer of bureaucracy between farmers and their lands, which is the last thing we need. With my support, the House passed a bill last month to prohibit this expansion and require the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers to consult with state and local governments when developing regulatory proposals.

As the Stanislaus Alliance Worknet found, the Affordable Care Act's layers of bureaucracy, complicated mandates and new rules have added to confusion and uncertainty for business owners. Businesses trying to cope with the law's new mandates face ongoing confusion about how many employees they can hire before their requirements change and how to afford to cover employee insurance plans. This is a job-killer. I'm committed to fighting to replace the law with a fiscally responsible health care plan with common sense initiatives to lower health care costs without reducing benefits or restricting choices.

For a start, we should allow Americans to purchase insurance across state lines and implement tort reform to significantly lower costs without an additional dime of spending.

The Valley needs jobs. Business owners need water, we need freedom from burdensome regulation, and we need laws that enable us to plan for the future. That's been my fight in Congress during my time in office, and I'll keep up that fight in the years to come.

Denham represents California's 10th Congressional District.

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