138th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

Today’s viewer-suggested topic: What does employment diversity in Ridgecrest mean to you?

As the debate of a new casino heats up, one aspect of the project hits at a goal for the city for years.

I’ve been here since 1979. I came for one year and never left. It was a town that I fell in love with. The very first summer I was here, a neighbor got me involved in local politics. I had never been involved before. My neighbor came one evening pounding on my front door. I opened the door to him ranting at me to come along with him to the city council meeting. He said they are planning things we need to fight. The topic of controversy isn’t important to this editorial, but what I learned down there is. At this meeting was the first time I heard that the city needs to bring in other business. We respect and appreciate the navy and the base, but we just have to have other business here, as well. That was in 1980.

Four years later I ran for city council and got elected. During that term, everyone talked about employment diversification, but it seemed no one had a solution. If anything new came up, it seemed there was always a rather large group that would be opposed to it. The opposition was usually based on two main points: either on the no growth perspective or this new business is just not right for the city. Many times opposition was based on emotion alone.

Over the years, other projects were proposed, and run off, like a new water park. It was run off, and they built in Barstow instead. A prison was proposed, and it was run off and built elsewhere. Twice over the years solar fields were proposed. They, too, were opposed and run off and were ultimately built somewhere else.

This editorial is not a support or opposition to any of those projects. This editorial is to ask what is the right business diversity the people want? What are these same people doing to help get that business here? That is the hard part. Right now, the city is working pretty hard to bring news business here. This work has been going on for many years now. Economic development director Gary Parsons has dropped some indication of a few businesses that are currently considering locating here. While we don’t know the details of these prospects, they are encouraging for the diversification goal.

Back to the issues before us, I have to ask about a couple people declaring that we shouldn’t allow the casino because of our water problem. Will you also object to the building of 20 new homes this year because of the potential increase in water use? Do we have a building moratorium here? No, we don’t. If a new restaurant wants to come in, will you oppose the new restaurant due to new water use? If someone comes in and wants to put a business into one of our empty commercial buildings, do we say no because of potential new water use? If one wants to use water as an important consideration of any new business, where do we draw the line? I’m not saying water use shouldn’t be a major consideration (it should). Again I ask, where do we draw the line?

How many new employees should the base bring in before it’s too many? How many new homes should we allow to be built, before someone decides it’s too many? What business should we let start up, before someone wants to stop it? How many times should we have these fights over new business, before any potential new business sees the resentment here, and just walks away not wanting to fight it? Should a business be appropriate in a community? I believe it should. It should also conform to all building codes and local laws. If it does, then it should be permitted to move forward. Any potential new business should be given a chance to be considered. I ask these questions based on our freedom. After all, everyone has rights under the Constitution, which includes business.

Small business is important to our community, state, and country. Small business is the backbone of our economy. In Ridgecrest, we need business employment diversity. Should it be appropriate for our community? Of course. We need to consider the pros and cons of the proposed business. We need to consider the freedom to start and run a business, if that’s what one decides to do. Freedom is our most important right. Consider that in the decision of employment diversity. I hope the council allows and participates in the discussion. I hope they don’t just sit there like they do so often. They sit and listen. Then they turn off public comments and then they finally start saying what they think. Then the public is not allowed to come back and offer any further discussion. Discussion is supposed to go two ways. Not, we talk first, and then they talk. Then discussion is over. That is not how meaningful discussion works. A discussion is a back and forth between the parties to the discussion. It’s talking back and forth. Whether the public speaks first is not the issue. It’s that the council allows the public to speak after the council has offered some of their comments. Have a back and forth discussion, then make the decision. If a councilmember has a discussion with someone at the podium, that’s great. It’s ok to do that. It provides everyone insight into the decision process. This is how government should work.

In conclusion, for 30 years most people have said we need employment diversity in Ridgecrest. What does diversity mean to you? Should freedom be a major component in the decision process? Our freedom depends on that belief.

Also on Wednesday afternoon starting at 4pm, a special live Ridgecrest Talk with the casino developer, exclusively, right here on KZGN TV.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. I’d like to know what you think. If you have any comments about this editorial, or would like to discuss or recommend a topic, I’d like to hear from you. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.