

Job creation: Not one issue, but every issue

By Sean Karafin

Since releasing the Regional Jobs Strategy Final Report last week, we have repeatedly been met with the same response: “Well... what’s the one thing we can do to create jobs?” The truth is there isn’t just one thing. But you probably already knew that.

We talk about focusing on the issues that matter most for job creation – education, tax rates, and infrastructure. We talk about leveraging and replicating programs that are already working in our communities – the Workforce Partnership’s Connect2Careers and Junior Achievement’s job shadow program. Somehow, the notion that job creation is hard work requiring a relentless commitment to incrementalism and responsible policy-making is always a bit of a dissatisfying reality check.

Every civic decision we make impacts jobs, sometimes it’s direct and sometimes it’s hidden. What’s important, is recognizing the cumulative impact that several dozen decisions

may have on issues like housing, trade, our environment, or our innovation economy.

Housing. This is possibly the largest bottle-neck holding our regional economy back. Our affordability crisis is putting us at a disadvantage when competing for even home-grown talent. Even when there are local career opportunities for recent grads, it is often more attractive to look to another part of the country where those opportunities come with a similar pay check and much cheaper housing. We won’t solve the housing crisis any time soon, but we can make significant progress this year if we are committed to reforming the system that has dug us into this hole.

Trade. Our border with Mexico may be the most substantial opportunity for job creation before us. Continuing to build community across that political line dividing one region will allow our economy to grow in a way that Portland, San Francisco and Boston just can’t. We’ve created a secure and efficient border that unlocks the potential of a binational region. This is our region’s most fundamental opportunity.

Our weather and recreational opportunity. Leveraging our strengths is the low-hanging fruit. We have more acres of parkland per 1,000 inhabitants than any of our competitor metropolitan areas and the perfect weather in which to enjoy them. Mission Bay, Mission Trails, Balboa Park, and miles of coastline are huge assets that we should use to retain and attract talent. When millennials want to locate here, so do the companies dependent on young and ambitious talent.

The innovation economy. Cleantech, Blue Tech, Cyber Security, and a number of other industry clusters that are part of the innovation economy are not only defending us against the major threats to our regional economy such as climate change and cyber-attacks, but they do



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it while creating jobs. San Diego companies are developing an expertise in these industries and are serving clients around the world. Those consulting fees and other revenues are being funneled into our regional economy. Those dollars then create jobs in everything from business services such as accounting and janitorial services, to our restaurants and entertainment. When San Diego leads, our economy benefits.

We know what works. We know what we must focus on. Our goals are shared and commitment is broad. We’ve created San Diego’s first ever Regional Jobs Strategy with nearly 70 partners. As a business and civic community, we are now more aligned than ever.

If one thing has become clear over the past

year it is that ‘jobs’ are not just another issue, but every issue. Jobs are about diversity in the workforce, access to parks, and the opportunity for women to advance in the workforce. When we talk about jobs, we’re talking about keeping families together as they grow and neighborhoods strong. When we commit to creating jobs, we are committing to San Diego.

To sum up the Regional Jobs Strategy succinctly: Creating jobs is hard work, but we’re not in it alone. The Chamber, and all of our partners, are building our economy together.

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