Affordable and Reliable Energy Key to a Healthy Economic Future

During his keynote speech on fueling the future economy at the Business Forecast Conference luncheon, Dennis Arriola spoke about balancing a clean environment with the needs of business. He began by thanking VICA for its support of the Natural Gas Policy Act of 2013. “I commend VICA and all its members for getting involved at the grassroots level, but especially in Sacramento," Arriola said. “Your voices are loud and influential.” He went on to share issues the Southern California Gas Co. is facing, such as the public perception of natural gas as a dirty fossil fuel, regardless of the fact that it is clean-burning, abundant and job-creating. Arriola called it a “foundation fuel” that helps the utility’s customers run their businesses economically. He touched on the challenges the Gas Company is experiencing in terms of ever-changing environmental regulations, updating aging natural gas infrastructure across the region, and educating a new workforce. “We believe that we can turn a good outlook into a strong one with natural gas and we look forward to working with all of you to make that a reality,” Arriola concluded. The luncheon was sponsored by The Walt Disney Company.

San Fernando Valley Winning the Race to Economic Stability

Every year at the economic forecast breakfast, VICA features specialists on the national, state, and local economies. Gary Schlossberg of Wells Capital Management emphasized the importance of lending as a driver of the national economy. He said that while the U.S. is still experiencing lingering fallout from the financial crisis, infrastructure, technology and the “energy renaissance” are helping the country recover. Jeff Kravetz of US Bank spoke about California’s steady growth, the erasure of its budget deficit and an improving jobs picture for the state, but added that growth and unemployment are more volatile in California compared to the U.S. Bill Roberts of California State University, Northridge lamented the lack of economic data on the San Fernando Valley. However, he predicted that the Valley would outperform the County, state and nation in regards to economic growth based on the data available. This year’s economic forecast breakfast was sponsored by California State University, Northridge and US Bank.
**Fight to the Finish**
*Moderated by Layne Lawson, Clear Channel Outdoor*
- Dan Schnur, Unruh Institute of Politics, University of Southern California
- David Siders, Sacramento Bee
- Parke Skelton, SG&A Campaigns
- John Thomas, Thomas Partners Strategies

Panelists covered all manner of subjects regarding the upcoming elections, from the top-two primary to campaign funding. It was agreed upon that the water bond is the most important of the November ballot measures.

**2035: A California Odyssey**
*Moderated by S. Gail Goldberg, Urban Land Institute Los Angeles*
- Kimberly Clark, Southern California Association of Governments
- Tim Draper, Draper Fisher Jurvetson
- Michael Turner, Metro
- Bill Watkins, California Lutheran University

The retirement of the baby boomers, a decrease in infrastructure spending and slowing population growth was among the panelists’ chief concerns. It was debated how the “Six Californias” initiative might change the state’s political makeup if it became a reality.

**The Road Ahead**
*Moderated by Coby King, High Point Strategies*
- Veronica Juarez, Lyft
- Los Angeles City Councilmember Paul Krekorian
- Martin Wachs, RAND Corporation
- Denny Zane, Move LA

Panelists discussed how regional rail might shape the state’s future, and debated how High-Speed Rail might be a contributing factor. New financing mechanisms for roadways, such as a mileage-based fee, were also considered.

**#privacy**
*Moderated by Kevin Tamaki, AT&T*
- Russel Buetow, SADA Systems
- Tanya Forsheit, Baker Hostetler
- Michael Lattimore, Southern California Edison
- Emily Schlesinger, Microsoft

Questions from attendees regarding cyber privacy prompted suggestions from panelists on how to use technology to a business’ advantage. However, the consensus was that there is no such thing as complete privacy.

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**Legislating with the Gavel**
*Moderated by David Goldberg, Armbruster Goldsmith & Delvac*
- David DeGroot, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hamilton
- Ed Howard, University of San Diego
- Kim Stone, Civil Justice Association of California

Discussion centered around cases dealing with employment, and it was said that wage and hour class actions have skyrocketed in the last ten years. Panelists advised attendees to seek legal counsel to avoid problems.

**What Were They Thinking?**
*Moderated by Steve Nissen, Comcast NBCUniversal*
- California State Assemblymember Tim Donnelly
- Stephen Frank, California Political News & Views
- John Myers, KQED
- Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

At this popular panel, speakers lamented recent decisions made by the Legislature and Governor, such as not passing any political reform efforts. Concerns about the single-use plastic bag ban and pension reform were also raised.

**More Tests Needed**
*Moderated by Michael Carter, Kaiser Permanente*
- Jay Hansen, California Medical Association
- Rich Hines, Covered California
- Dr. Harlan Levine, City of Hope Medical Foundation
- Manuel Mendoza, USI of Southern California Insurance Services

With 2014 as the official test run for the Affordable Care Act, speakers discussed the biggest implementation challenges businesses and individuals are facing. It was agreed that awareness and education have been major hurdles for healthcare providers.

**HR: Highly Regulated**
*Moderated by Stuart Jaffe, Kirsch, Kohn & Bridge*
- Susan Bendavid, Lewitt Hackman
- Mark Wilbur, Employers Group

Experts on human resources gave attendees an update on new labor laws, and answered questions about social media relationships between colleagues, cell phone reimbursement and the necessity of employee handbooks.