

ECONOMY

Aguilar meets with business community

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RANCHO CUCAMONGA » Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Rancho Cucamonga, held a roundtable discussion with the area's business community on Wednesday at a job center where they shared issues relating to regulatory difficulties, and the need to train young people for important sectors of the Inland Empire economy, among other concerns.

"It was a great discussion about things we can do at the federal government to help the Inland Empire," the former Redlands mayor said after the private roundtable discussion, "and we talked about the regulatory structure holding businesses back and we talked about a skills gap that exists within the community."

Aguilar, who has been



Aguilar

on the job for six weeks, said he's already helped co-author a bill to reduce a federal tax on craft beer breweries, and another for a grant

to fund a job-training program for veterans.

The San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board, which held the meeting at America's Job Center in Rancho Cucamonga, has been involved in regional efforts to better train young people and the unemployed to meet the needs of the local economy, of which health care and logistics are major sectors in need of new employees.

Aguilar said the point of the meeting was to have a conversation about job creation and an opportunity for him to hear what issues the business community is experiencing and to develop future plans to deal with those issues.

B.J. Patterson, CEO of the Ontario-based Pacific Mountain Logistics company and chair of the Inland Empire Logistics Council, was among those in attendance.

"I think the biggest thing is job-skills training in the high schools and funding that," Patterson said before the meeting. "We need to make sure everyone's in tune with life-skills training for potential

employees. That seems to be lost in the mix. We need to fund that education."

Another issue to Patterson is the slowdown of goods movement at the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, which officials said stems from a labor dispute between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association.

Patterson said the slowdown has reduced the logistics business in the region by about 50 percent since December.

"The ports drive the Inland Empire economy, particularly from a logistics standpoint, so it's really important," Patterson said. "It's costing jobs every day, and it's costing commerce every day."

"It's important Congress understand the impact that has on the Inland Empire. It's amazing that the majority of the freight coming in and out of these warehouses is international in nature and it's coming in from the ports, so whenever that freight stops, the jobs stop, so it hurts the economy of the Inland Empire."

