



Forum offers economic input

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By June Woods

Madera's last minute Jobs and Economic Forum on Tuesday attracted a larger than-expected gathering of business and civic leaders who expressed concerns to do with water and agriculture, roads and dams, and streamlining regulatory processes for small businesses.

The forum, held at the Workforce Assistance Center, is among many being held across the country to provide input on the economy. "We are among the first to hold one of these forums," said Charles Banks-Altekruse, a representative of North Fork Rancheria, which partnered with Madera Economic Development Commission and Madera Workforce Investment Board to organize the forum.

"We had a good cross-section from the community," Banks-Altekruse said. "We were really under the gun; 34 people is pretty good for so short a lead time."

The tribe was told last week that the White House wanted a report by Friday.

A forum is scheduled in Fresno on Thursday, and several leaders from Fresno attended the Madera forum, including representatives from the Picayune Rancheria of the Chukchansi Indians.

Elaine Craig, executive director of Madera County Workforce Department, leads a discussion with, from left, John Chavez, Mayor Gary Svanda, Supervisor Tom Wheeler and Rick Farinelli during an economic forum Tuesday.

The Obama Administration reached out through tribal governments to organize the forums. "One of our goals was to get it done quickly and be at the front of the queue by the end of the week..." Banks-Altekruse said. "I think if there's support for a follow-up meeting, we could consider holding another."

He said people may still provide ideas to get the economy growing locally by calling him or one of the organizational groups. "I think there was a feeling in the room that we (in the Central Valley) don't get our voices heard enough in Sacramento and Washington," Banks-Altekruse said, "and we have this opportunity, and we should take it."

Banks-Altekruse said there also were suggestions about making it simpler for California businesses to compete with businesses outside the state by adopting similar standards to create an even playing field.

Organizers plan to compile the suggestions and post them to cities' and county Web sites by early next week. "I think it's important we get this out to the public and elected officials," Banks-Altekruse said, "so we can continue this dialogue and get additional input." To contact Banks-Altekruse with suggestions, call (510) 913-3669.



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