**Winnemucca Futures explores possibilities**

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(left to right) Nevada Governor’s Office of Economic Development Executive Director Michael Brown, Northeastern Nevada Rural Development Authority Executive Director Sheldon Mudd and Humboldt Development Authority President Patrick Gray speak on a panel at Winnemucca Futures.

Editor’s Note: The annual Winnemucca Futures economic development forum took place on Jan. 30, and featured Humboldt County’s industry and government leaders. What follows is the second of a four-part series.

**Economic Development Initiatives**

Winnemucca Futures 2020 boasted seven panels seated with three participants each. The Economic Development panelists included Michael Brown, Executive Director with the Governor’s Office of Economic Development (GOED); Sheldon Mudd, Executive Director of Northeastern Nevada Regional Development Authority (NNRDA); and Patrick Gray, Board Chairman of the Humboldt Development Authority (HDA) and owner of Century 21 Sonoma Realty.

The panel highlighted the challenges and the milestones the region has encountered, as well as the state of Nevada’s challenges looking forward to the new decade.

Michael Brown started off by taking the pulse of the region and the state and what GOED is currently working on. Brown said the information presented at the event has affirmed research GOED has been conducting as his office tackles economic development plans for Nevada.

Brown talked about the current state plan which was “released in 2012, written in 2011, based on 2010” data. He said the document isn’t current and that GOED is in the process of redrafting it. “We'll be looking at three parts of the state: southern, Reno corridor, and rural Nevada.

Brown said Winnemucca Futures 2020 has been informative for his office and much of the information presented by other panels and through discussions will be incorporated into the new plan.
Brown also talked about the state’s incentive package. “The Amazon deal has caused a rethinking of

economic development incentives across the nation.” Last year, Amazon was in the process of looking for a location for its second headquarters. The company had chosen Long Island City in New York but resistance to Amazon’s proposal led the company to withdraw from the deal.

Brown didn’t elaborate on what changes might result, but he did speak about the state’s tax system as it relates to school funding. “I’ve traveled the country,” he said, “and had people ask, ‘you have a school system that's in crisis, why are you abating on your school taxes?’ So, that's something we're going to look at deeply.”

Brown laid out additional challenges the potential businesses see within the state as a whole and rural areas in particular. He said the research indicated that businesses are concerned about connectivity throughout the entire infrastructure. “It's about connectivity of rail, connectivity of roads, and connectivity of broadband in our communities.” Additional research also shows that the state has a growing problem with health care providers and resources in Nevada. “The 50,000 Californians that have moved to Nevada did not bring their doctors, their dentists, and their ophthalmologists and so you can see that we're going to have to make more of an effort in the health market,” he said.

He said that GOED research indicates that large numbers of retiring Baby Boomers will be coming to Nevada. His office projects that peak retirement will occur in 2029. Brown said Governor Steve Sisolak has asked Brown to form a series of sub-cabinet groups to research the impacts these events will have on the state. Brown identified several as it relates to retirees including senior healthcare and services as well as stress on Medicaid programs. “The next decade will be a challenge for the state,” Brown said. “These sub-cabinets are going to do a deep dive into what kinds of challenges this is going to bring to the state.”

Northeastern Nevada Regional Development Authority (NNRDA) Executive Director Sheldon Mudd spoke about his organization’s efforts to improve the economic well-being of the region. “We are an economic development organization that has brought together through the collaboration of six counties in Nevada and seven incorporated communities.”

Mudd said NNRDA is responsible for the economic development pursuits of 55,000 square miles in Nevada which is 46% of the state.

Mudd talked about some of the components related to economic development. He emphasized that economic development isn’t just about recruiting businesses to locate in an area. It’s also about building community capacity to create an environment for businesses to locate and thrive. Community development capacity building includes, among other things, workforce development, affordable housing construction and a community’s capacity for growth by developing infrastructure, housing, workforce for future companies. “That's huge because we can't say that for all of our communities within northeastern Nevada,” Mudd said. “Some are in various stages of development but this community [of Humboldt County] is way ahead of the game. We have great cooperation here between the city and the county that's made those things happen.”

In the same vein, Humboldt Development Authority (HDA) Chairman Patrick Gray said it’s going to take the whole community to build the diversity the area needs to for economic growth. “In 2012 [HDA’s] goals were shared abundance a community that is fully diversified,” Gray said. “We have hi-tech, manufacturing, value-added resource companies, a vibrant and responsive community and we're on our way to achieving those goals.

Gray said the county is beginning to see diversification beyond the traditional economic drivers of mining, agriculture, tourism, and gaming. Gray said with companies like Lithium Nevada, renewable energy projects and manufacturing, the county’s economic portfolio is slowly achieving diversity.
Gray also said that the region needs to take advantage of this economic momentum by committing to a path of growth.

In looking to the future, all the panel members see tremendous economic gains to be had. But the state and the county also face tremendous challenges over the next decade. “Some of the challenges we have are coming from the success of the economic programs,” Brown said. “But we will rise to meet that challenge.”

**Area Businesses**

Rebel Creek Ranch Owner and Humboldt County Commissioner Ron Cerri said that 80% of land in Humboldt County is federally owned and that mining, agriculture, tourism and businesses depend upon public lands for success.

Cerri said the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) enacted in 1970 makes it difficult for businesses and industries to move forward with projects due to the 10-15 year time frame it can take to accomplish an Environmental Impact Study (EIS).

Cerri said that NEPA is the most litigated law that the federal government has right now. He said that as a rancher, he supports current proposals by the department of environmental quality to streamline and update NEPA to allow processes to be done in a more timely manner.

“Our county is what you call a cooperative agency with the federal government; if any business is interested in moving to Humboldt County, using private lands and is having a problem or would like county participation look up the county manager or one of our commissioners. We will help you in any way we can to help you get permits or whatever you need with the federal government,” said Cerri.
NV Energy Business Development Johnny Hardgrove said he fishes for economic development opportunities every day in his current position.

Hardgrove said that as a state, Nevada has several economic advantages such as no personalized income tax, inheritance tax, inventory tax, franchise taxes, and a common sense energy approach.

Hardgrove said Humboldt County is “fishing” for diversity and new companies to come into our area.
Kayla Simons of Desert Design/Carpet One shared the story of how Desert Design began and came to Winnemucca, with Demetria Gordon selling blinds from the trunk of a Honda Accord from California.
Simons said Gordon moved here to be with her husband who had realized an opportunity in agriculture and ranching.

Simons said Gordon didn’t see herself in construction, but saw that Winnemucca had a need for the industry. Gordon grew the business from the back of her Honda Accord to where it is today, with one location in Elko and a 15,000 square foot facility in Winnemucca.

Simons said that Desert Design was able to flex and grow to be successful because of all the support they had within the community.

“A community plus ideas equals opportunities is what Demetria says,” said Simons. “If you’re not seeing the opportunities here then you’re not looking hard enough.”