

Ruth Musser-Lopez, Democratic candidate for State Assembly, 16th District

1. Nearly a quarter of Kern’s population (24.4%) is at or below the federal poverty level, according to the California Poverty Measure, but ranks 23 in the state in terms of eligible residents’ utilization of CalFresh—an estimated loss of \$73.6 Million in federal nutrition benefits. What policies would you support to boost participation among the currently eligible population for a program that has a \$1.79 economic multiplier for every \$1 spent?

Senate District 16 includes portions of three counties, Kern, San Bernardino and Tulare. This is an excellent question to ask every candidate for County Supervisor in this district because it is to the county’s advantage to boost participation, bring in the federal dollars that support this assistance program and stimulate the economy. Local businesses benefit from regular injections of federal dollars into the local economy; children and the elderly benefit from nutrition and relief from hunger.

It may come as a surprise to some, but many elderly in our communities are suffering from malnutrition having to choose between food and medication, yet enrollment in CalFresh among the eligible seniors is very low. California has done a good job in de-stigmatizing the federal program by changing the name from “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” (SNAP) to “CalFresh” but more needs to be done. I support Governor Brown’s signature on Assembly Bill 69 authorizing the county to utilize data from the Social Security Administration to reach out to those living on Social Security and teach them about how to get CalFresh and provide in-home assistance with applications without being stigmatized. Transportation barriers, visual impairments, the burden of applying, misinformation about benefits and not knowing that they are personally eligible are all factors in keeping the elderly from applying.

I would further support more modern and efficient approaches carrying less potential for stigma such as automatic enrollment in SNAP along with SSI using shared information. We can learn from New York State’s “Combined Application Process (CAP)” and consider extending such data sharing using Medicaid, Medicare and Covered California accounts. Other potential approaches to consider would be to use telephonic signatures, voice rather than face-to-face interviews, self-verification medical and shelter expenses and self-verification of income. Targeted outreach to seniors through mail and public service announcements would also likely boost participation.

2. California’s current three-year drought is the worst in at least 100 years. Consequently 428,000 acres have been fallowed, and over 17,000 jobs lost. What policies would you propose to build on-farm resilience in the face of climate change and a more sustainable use of Kern’s water?

Steve Collup, Arvin-Edison general manager was recently quoted as saying that the drought has created the need to change the way business is done. Surface water banking and transfers between counties Kern, Tulare and Merced are what kept some crops alive this summer and I would support local grown solutions such as this.

To ensure that these transfers are safe, environmentally sound, and fair, regulatory control is needed. "I think this water transfer shows that nobody can be isolated from the rest of agriculture these days," Collup was quoted as saying and he is right. Because of the need for water transfers across county lines to keep crops alive, the state is the right level of regulatory authority to oversee such exchanges. This summer’s exchange involved many approvals including federal and LA’s. With climate change and drought, surface water is no longer a “local” issue. We need to continue to

distinguish between surface and groundwater however when it comes to local control and not attempt to pump down groundwater aquifers supporting economies in other places.

Crop water runoff, collection and gravity flow reuse on crops below is another policy that I would propose for the purpose of building on-farm resilience during drought. This method is effectively being used in Idaho. Here a policy would also be needed for disclosure and regulation of what chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides are being used to protect against contamination of crops in neighboring fields, in particular, organic crops downstream. Many of the water conservation policies geared toward “on-farm resilience” and “sustainable water use” which I have been advocating for during the past 6 months of my campaign are now being addressed in Measure 1 on the ballot. Yes on 1 manages and prepares for droughts by investing in water conservation and enlarging two reservoirs and more on a case-by-case basis. The bond would provide funding for practical improvements to the state's aging water infrastructure and add storage so that in wet years, we can better prepare for dry ones. Since the bond measure will provide funding for yet to be proposed projects, I would support a policy that would encourage approval of flood protection measures in Kern County that are designed to direct runoff into ground water aquifer recharge zones which could replenish farm well water while putting subsidence in check. In coastal regions, I would strongly support projects that involve the collection and recycling of rainwater runoff thus lowering the demand on imported water.

While Proposition 1 calls for prioritizing storage projects, it targets the first investments in the ones offering the greatest benefit. It's possible that groundwater storage, for example, could collect more water for less money. I would support a policy of empirical analysis giving reliable data as to which storage projects will be the most efficient and get the biggest bang for the buck. I hope recycling and other strategies move to the top of the priorities list, since dammed water evaporates and is less efficient than ground storage. But the state does need additional water storage for the years when storms provide bigger runoffs than they have lately. Proposition 1 lays out a plan to do this intelligently.

Yes on 1 supports a comprehensive state water plan for safe drinking water in all communities. The target is to recycle water 10 times or more. This target is impossible to achieve if water is beyond recycling due to toxic and radioactive contamination so I would support policies that reduce or eliminate the attitude that the “solution to pollution is dilution” in our drinking supply.

Our bond money will be paying for “improved local water supplies through toxic ground water cleanup and by cleaning and recycling polluted rivers and streams.” Such a proposal begs one to ask, why aren't the corporate polluters paying for that? This summer billions of gallons of water were contaminated so badly in hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) operations. This poisoned water can't be recycled and is thus sent down into old deep oil wells. California state regulators shut down fracking wells with incomplete analysis showing that “3 billion gallons of wastewater were illegally injected into central California aquifers and that half of the water samples collected at the 8 water supply wells tested near the injection sites have high levels of dangerous chemicals such as arsenic, a known carcinogen that can also weaken the human immune system, and thallium, a toxin used in rat poison” (DeSmogBlog.com).

I would support regulatory disclosure (which we do not currently have) of what chemicals the oil companies are using in fracking operations above the Central Valley aquifer. I would support regulatory prohibitions, penalties and requirements for clean up paid for by the polluters, not the people. I would support a moratorium on fracking due to the vulnerability of the drinking water and farm water supply.

People are surprised when I tell them that PG&E's poisoned Chromium 6 water was (and still may be being) transported by liquid waste haulers from Needles superfund site and released into deep wells around Bakersfield. With

the extremely high potential of seismic faulting and underground leakage via fissures, I would support a moratorium on such practices until empirical unbiased studies are completed guaranteeing the safety.

Another potential source of ground water pollution is from the import of Los Angeles County waste into Kern County even after citizens voted against it. I would support policy change with regard to integrated waste management and waste dumping across county lines where a vote of the people cannot be ignored. Water that can be protected against toxic contamination is freed up for farming.

Finally, I support policy that would implement SB1168 and the conservation measures it lays out. I would support incentives for the installation of drip irrigation on farms, night sprinkling and the planting of drought tolerant crops to conserve water. I would support a policy discouraging the planting of fruit and nut tree crops by those with junior water right or who do not have a guarantee of a water supply during drought conditions. Hopefully, all of these measures will reduce the pressure to charge into the twin tunnel plan while at the same time, buy us time to wait for a wet cycle.

3. We estimate that 17.2% of the California's workforce is in the food system, including production, processing, distribution, retail, and service industries. According to the KEDC, nearly a quarter (24%) of Kern's private sector jobs are food system-related, yet many of the workers are undervalued and are more likely to experience substandard working conditions. What labor issues in the food chain are you most concerned with, and how would you address them?

When it comes to labor and food production, we need to level the playing field on imports from other states and countries. I am very concerned about laws outside of California that do not provide the same level of protection for humans and animals as we have in California and products made in those conditions are then being allowed to imported here: meat, poultry and eggs for consumption. These cheaply produced products using inhumane practices are undermining our own market and ability to compete. I would support laws in California that require imported products to be produced under the same animal protection laws and labor standards as required in California... if the laws are not enforced or are not equal or better than California's then the imports would not be allowed. I would support laws that require corporate headquarters to be located in California if they are to have franchises in California and that California labor, production and liability laws are complied with.

While many consider a national \$10.10 minimum wage standard, adjusted for inflation, to be too low, it is a good start and an improvement on what we have now, though is still poverty level. An added benefit to raising the minimum wage is that studies and the facts have shown an improvement in the economy in the states where the minimum wage has been increased. During my campaign for the Senate seat, when discussing the \$10.10 minimum wage, it was said to me, "Ruth, haven't you ever heard of supply and demand." I was shocked to learn that they were seriously talking about the human supply of workers and the absurd idea that if the demand for labor was low, employers should not be required to pay even a minimum wage. A human life should never be treated as an inanimate object and we already have prohibitions against slavery... sub-poverty low wages amount to slave wages... just enough to buy food to eat and put a roof over one's head.

4. The Kern Food Policy Council is pursuing the creation of a comprehensive, county-wide food system assessment that will help us create new relationships between policy and action, as well as explore the potential for community-based pilot projects directly addressing the physical and economic health and well-being of Kern County residents. In what ways, if any, would you support this effort?

I would not only support this effort, but I would be willing to help take it beyond all expectation. The "physical and economic health and welfare of Kern County residents" has much to do with access to home loans and affordable homes in communities with quality education and programs for job and career training, college success and the participation of banks and creditors in reinvesting in the community. We can learn much from the City of Claremont, California which selected the bank they utilized by applying the ratings of banks from the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), a Federal law designed to encourage banks to help meet the needs of the borrowers in all segments of the community.

The city conducted a reasonable and logical analysis and selected a bank that worked closely with many community-based groups and participated in financial advisory capacity for numerous organizations. The bank employees served on a variety of boards and finance committees providing technical, managerial and financial expertise to many organizations specializing in small business development, services benefiting low-income and disadvantaged individuals, economic development and community revitalization, affordable housing, health, wellness and education. The bank provided bi-lingual foreclosure counseling and strategies including both temporary and permanent loan modifications.

Long overdue is reversing the mission of banks to enslave their customers with debt. The 16th Senate District is prime territory to start that reversal. We could start by grouping together all the cities in the entire Senate District (the "John Steinbeck" corridor), not just Kern County, complete an assessment of which banks reinvest most--then let's watch what happens. Banks will change their marketing strategy and then actually do what their mission statements say they'll accomplish.