State of the County 2020

Good evening Kern County! You may not have heard, but I am Supervisor Leticia Perez, and I am the Chair of the Kern County Board of Supervisors. Madam Chair, that is. Welcome tonight.

My friends, we have inherited one of the most difficult periods in this county’s history. Some difficult issues, indeed. And I’d like to address one or two these difficulties in this year’s State of the County after taking a moment to first point out that tonight, even if only for one night of the year, we are familia. So, I presume the right to talk as family for a few moments.

When I realized that within the County of Kern: we have two military bases, strategic oil reserves, globally reaching agricultural production, and the largest collection of veterans in the United States of America, well it becomes obvious that - national things, global things, have a way of trickling down into Kern County districts, Kern County neighborhoods, and Kern County backyards. For if our Kern County warriors lined their purple hearts up around this room tonight, this evening we would dine in a powerful lavender light. We are a county, after-all, powered and empowered by the lives of American Warriors, so we can say without an ounce of murky political spin.

“The American Creed” runs deep “way out here” - you only need visit our sacred memorials, our Monuments to our noble fallen to understand why we lift our glasses deserving high to debts that cannot be repaid but we honor and remember them, as we do as a County, where they forever lay.
We are forever grateful for them all.

If we are to address any real issue facing Kern County, then the question of Oil’s future in Kern is certainly the most pressing, and I realize that this national and global conversation has now found its way into our lap. So, I have some responsibility to share with you some insights, that I find to be the most compelling reasons as to why California should be “informed and measured” in language and policies regarding Kern County’s oil future:


You know, the kind of people like the two brothers that live close to me. They bought homes next to each other. One has a pool. Both have new trucks - one from Haddad Dodge. Young Families. You don’t see those men too much during the week, their trucks are gone before sunrise; they don’t pull back in ‘til sunset. They fly a flag out front. They are oil families.

But…they ain’t from my side of the political aisle, but they ARE helping stabilize my little eastside community. Can I say that? Can I say out loud that I appreciate every time I see those two wonderful families walking home from East Bakersfield mom and pop shops carrying grocery bags? We all should be saying it.

The stability of these families matters because they help economically and socially stabilize our larger county by being “upwardly mobile” and helping my eastside community step up as well. The meat of this conversation really is families - like these two brothers in local stores - good hard-working people in my neighborhood that are supporting jobs held by other members of my community who are also barbecuing the fat that has come from generations of Kern County families breaking their backs for their kids out on Kern county oil leases.

That counts for something, ladies and gentlemen!

The communities sustained by hard working families count.
And we shouldn’t forget them: Kern County families working their tails off together, trying to escape the hell of poverty.

I’m reminded of a piece of sticky duct tape stuck on top of a special washing machine. It’s an industrial sized washing machine, so it will cost you extra coins. You’ll need an extra coin, or a useless key on your key ring, to chip away at caked soap on the coin slots, but you get used to that.

That washing machine is in a little laundromat outside of the rundown motel that my husband, our pet-soulmate, Bull, and I, along with everything we owned, lived. That piece of duct tape had scrawled upon it the words, “oily clothes.” I could not understand the significance at that time - such a little moment that it seemed to me.

My husband was a service man, struggling to come home from war and stay home, Bird always said, “if it got rough,” he could go back to “the patch,”

So long as oil was there, he said, “there’s a Rig for a good-hand,” And if that “hand” is a returning serviceman, there was work in oil.

I’d like to reiterate that we were living in a motel.

So, from my perspective, as I chipped away at the caked-on soap covering the coin slots, where I was washing those oily work clothes -- We were living on a prayer! And I was convinced of it, as I spent the last coins we had to get those clothes ready for when my husband woke up in the dark to leave for his iron, mud, and oil existence, not to return ‘til dark.
Last load, Last coins, Payday, 5pm.

“We can do this...”

A small sandwich to get him through ‘til the evening. One more 105-degree day. Blistered in the sun, believing the American Creed still stands. We believed! We still do. One more day waiting with the other wives, children playing: Latinas, Whites, Blacks - those laundromats show that Kern County is
not short on strong families committed to the American Spirit!

I am proud to say that I had at one time, a basket full of oil clothes. I came to believe in the American Creed.

From my husband’s perspective, we were living on a near Covenant between this community and oil - and that is the truth of the matter!

When my battle worn husband left for war - and returned four years later to Kern - opportunity for a living wage for my Wounded Warrior? Oil did that!

So, I’d like to leave you with these few personal insights on Kern County’s oil future.

Families are pulling themselves up by their bootstraps across this county - mud in their teeth - contorting and breaking their bodies on the deep wells of this county. Half a mile of iron pulled from the earth Kern County families grit their teeth.

The sun beats down.
The rigs growl.
One more day
And payday!

We ought not forget them.

So, finally, I get the push back, from those “not-from-around these parts.” I’ve read their recent criticisms, their witticisms about Kern County industries.

I wonder about that. I wonder about the intentions. The disinformation. Especially from those in my own community who say or write such things. Perhaps they are uncomfortable with this narrative, as it points out what should be obvious, and taken into strong consideration: our industries have played a substantial role in giving the Latino community, right here in the home of the Si Se Puede spirit,
opportunities to achieve the promises of an honest handshake and a Kern County Dream.

It is hard to count the number of Latino families in the Central Valley that have rejoiced at their dinner tables for the cooperation between our protesting community leaders demanding equal opportunity, and our local industries responding to those demands by making increasing opportunities available to an ever increasing number of Latino families.

Our energy industries are part of the pipeline of economic opportunities for my community to achieve a living wage. Many finding such opportunities out of the Central Valley’s agricultural fields, after picking the cornucopia, the breadbasket fillings of our global food orders, now on their way to the oil fields that are fueling the automobiles of most of those who criticize us at our peaceful town halls. We are just asking why we are being pushed around in such a very big state.

So many counties. So many pressing problems. They come a long way from their backyards, you see, to come to our backyard, way over here, to critique our hedges, our lawn clippings, and what nots.

I am sure those other parts of California have their own scorecards from their own county backyards, demonstrating what it takes to climb out of their own social, economic, and environmental challenges, but the last time I checked we were the unrivaled champions of renewables across the State of California. So, our critics’ home counties are at best - well, not first in this matter. It’s the old divide and conquer strategy. Pick on oil, be silent on our renewables. Good cop, bad cop. Who knows? If we had been the kind of people in Kern County to be looking in other peoples’ backyards, we might point out that we didn’t ban wind energy, like Los Angeles. Oh no we didn’t. we lassoed the winds across our county, like we do livestock at these rodeos.

We harnessed the winds and spurred its power to ensure that we were always on the cutting edge of what was needed in a globally changing environment. We didn’t wait for disastrous policymaking from global actors to force our minds and hands to the diversification of our energy sources. We didn’t get all “rowdy” because we heard a podcast, YouTube video, or Twitter alert from a Hollywood actor either. Getting people all “rowdy.”
Energy isn’t a political fad around here, we have looked expertly to the future for generations with the prophetic eyes that made us the leaders of the very fields of science, technology, and general energy know-how, now desired by our beloved brothers and sisters from other parts of this state.
We love showing our portfolio on renewables to critics. To those that think we are inept - dozens of EIRs under Ms. Oviatt, represented by the finest of County Counsel offices, and a razor-sharp CAO and team beg to differ on the matter.

We are ready to talk, not in politically opportune hit pieces, but with pride in our real, very real, numbers. We know that Kern County is doing most of the work, as it pertains to the subject matter of renewable energy, for the entire State of California, but we are told we didn’t build that. We’ve built the very renewables that are used across the globe to demonstrate California’s renewable prowess to world leaders. Kern did that. We did that.

But we are not the bragging type –
In our backyards, we are the experts.
We are renewables.
We are the leaders of sensible, responsible, and forward-thinking energy production in California.
We can be a little rough around the edges when we take our backyard politics to Sacramento or Washington, DC on what are too often “diplomatic missions.” But we continue to extend our honest, though calloused, Kern County hand to our neighbors across the state, and across the aisles, offering peace pipes, battle tested experts, and planning geniuses to the statewide oil conversation.
We opt out of the divisive, politically driven, discourses which muddles productive possibilities in this conversation, and we offer instead our unglowed hand in peace to our state’s Governor and our other statewide leaders recently engaged in the matter.

God bless you all. God bless Kern County. Good night.