Coalition for a New Century

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"Campaign for a New Century" Seeks Improvements Near LAX

Coalition Calls for Investment in Tourism Industry, Higher Standards for Hotel Workers and Community Role in Development

A broad-based coalition today announced a major effort to improve conditions for workers, communities and the tourism industry near LAX and the Century Corridor.

The "Campaign for a New Century" is seeking higher job standards for thousands of hotel workers on Century Boulevard, city investment in the long-neglected LAX tourism industry and a central role for adjacent communities affected by problems of poverty, crime and overcrowding.

Coalition leaders have begun circulating a petition calling for a Plan for a New Century, and expect to gather thousands of signatures in the coming weeks. The petitions will be delivered to city officials, who will be asked to consider a public policy proposal to address conditions in the Century Corridor. The coalition will also ask the hotel industry to support the campaign.

"Century Boulevard is the gateway to Los Angeles—the first view that many visitors have of Los Angeles," said Rev. Altagracia Perez, pastor at Holy Faith Episcopal Church in Inglewood and one of many religious leaders that have joined the coalition. "It should be a place that reflects the best our city has to offer. Yet it is plagued by low-wage jobs, high crime rates, strip clubs, and poverty."

Leaders of the coalition – which includes churches, community-based organizations, educators, labor unions, workers and residents – cited a report by the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, which documents conditions in the Century Corridor (http://www.newcenturycoalition.org/).

The report notes that Century hotel workers earn far less than their counterparts in the rest of L.A. County, and that the nearby communities of Lennox, Inglewood and Hawthorne, where a large number of these workers live, suffer high rates of poverty, crime and overcrowding. One in four residents in these communities lives below the federal poverty line, a measure of extreme poverty, while more than 40% of children come from poor households. Median household income is 25% lower than in L.A. County as a whole.

High poverty and low incomes have translated into severe social problems for those who live in these communities. The violent crime rate in the area is five times higher than that of L.A. County. In all three communities, the percentage of overcrowded homes is higher than in L.A. County, and in Lennox it is eight times higher.

“Every day we see families who cannot pay the rent, who cannot put food on the table, who cannot take their kids to the doctor,” said Father Gene Buhr of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Lennox, one of the largest congregations in the Western U.S. “We know that the high crime rates and overcrowding in our community are linked to the poverty-wage jobs of the hotel industry. We believe that these jobs are vital to our community and to the economy of the city. But it’s time for us to work together to make these good jobs so that we can finally begin to lift our community out of poverty and into the middle class.”

The report also finds that the City of Los Angeles has invested less in the tourism industry as a proportion of total economic output than have other comparable cities, despite the fact that tourism ranks as the region’s fourth-largest industry.

“We see the problem as a lack of investment,” said Kurt Petersen, organizing director at UNITE HERE Local 11. “Century Boulevard is home to the largest concentration of hotel rooms in the city. But the city has failed to invest in the area’s tourism industry. The hotels also have failed to invest in their 3,500 workers, many of whom live in the community. The poverty wages workers receive contribute to a vicious cycle of low-wage jobs, disinvestment and poverty.”

Anna Mendez, a banquet worker at the LAX Hilton, called upon the hotel industry to join with workers in improving conditions. “We know the hotels can do better. We know that they can pay us enough to support our families in dignity. We are proud of our work and we want the hotels to do well. That’s why we are not only asking the hotels to invest in us, but for the city to invest in the hotels.”

Coalition members emphasized that they are seeking a partnership with both industry and city leaders.

“We are hopeful that the hotels and the city will join with workers and the community in creating a Plan for a New Century,” said Perez. “Together we can improve conditions for our families, our communities and the tourism industry.”

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