



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public Health Official Speaks the Truth

FRESNO—The Fresno County Democratic Party expresses its support for Fresno County Health Officer Rais Vohra’s recent comments on the dire impact that federal government inaction toward climate change mitigation has on the health and welfare of Fresno residents. It is unfortunate that Vohra later felt pressured to apologize for those true and accurate remarks.

Vohra’s initial comment was correct, that climate change is “a global poisoning event” and one that the residents of Fresno County are particularly susceptible to. Every sensible Californian can see we are hurting as we choke on smoke in the middle of drought.

Climate change is a direct threat to our health. The only way we can possibly stop this ongoing acceleration is by collective action on a scale larger than any prior undertaking, and for that to work the federal government needs to leap into action. The crucial policies included in the Build Back Better Act are just as related to Vohra’s mission of public health as seatbelt laws are.

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors and the County Administrator Officer Jean Rousseau should make some manner of public statement to avoid even the appearance that they are exerting inappropriate pressure on Vohra’s office. They need to make clear that the Board will not muzzle health experts in advocating for solutions to health problems, and the Board should in fact encourage Vohra to continue his education of the public on known solutions to known problems.

This is especially important as Supervisor Steve Brandau has made statements indicating he does not quite understand climate change when he expressed uncertainty that the rising CO₂ levels were caused by humans burning fossil fuels. The basic reality and danger of climate change is not a complex topic. It has been an elementary school level lesson for decades.

The right-wing majority on the Board of Supervisors cannot afford to create a perception that they are hobbling the County health officer while plague still grips our region disproportionately to much of the rest of California. It is not Vohra’s fault that the radical right wing in Washington has refused to back an economic recovery plan that would help improve our valley’s health and welfare. Their refusal does not change the reality of the threat we face from fire and smoke and drought, or the steps we need to take to protect ourselves.

Health advice does not abruptly become invalid just because one party has taken it upon themselves to choose death.

If the coronavirus pandemic has taught us anything, it is that when individuals in power try to stifle health experts advocating solutions, the public suffers. The Fresno County Democratic Party urges Vohra to continue fulfilling his duty of educating the public on health and further urges Rousseau and the Board of Supervisors to aid him in that mission.

For more information, contact the Fresno County Democratic Party at 559-495-0606 or dems@fresnocountydemocrats.org.