

Trump visit unfolds as political rally

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President Donald Trump spoke about his efforts to help farmers during his visit to Bakersfield to sign his administration's reworked of environmental regulations that will direct more of the state's water to farmers and other agriculture interests in the Central Valley. Alex Harvath/The Californian

Important water issues took center stage, but Wednesday's visit by the president of the United States was much like Trump rallies held in other states.

There was pointed criticism of political rivals, use of familiar labels like "Crooked Hillary," boos for cable news channel CNN and chants of "U-S-A! U-S-A!"

Clearly there was some political benefit to be had, as Trump lent strong support for former three-term Congressman David Valadao, a Hanford farmer and Republican hoping to reclaim his California 21st Congressional District seat by beating Fresno businessman T.J. Cox in November.

"He's an incredible guy," Trump said of Valadao, who prior to the president's arrival worked the crowd inside the large hangar where the rally took place.

"He's going to be fantastic," the president said. "We really need him badly in Washington."

Several local speakers — Republican politicians, three farmers and a federal official — took the stage briefly to offer their thanks for Trump's actions on behalf of his supporters in the Golden State.

One of the invited speakers was Shafter farmer Larry Starrh, who told the president it was a great honor to "have him in our home."

Starrh said his family was considering selling its farm a few years ago but that his late father, Fred Starrh, said not to sell it now that Trump had been elected to office.

"He said, 'He's our hope,'" Larry said.



House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy and President Donald Trump react to farmer Larry Starrh's praise of the president's efforts on behalf of farmers. The president visited Bakersfield to sign his administration's reworking of environmental regulations that will direct more of the state's water and other agriculture interests in the Central Valley

The audience was a colorful group dressed mostly in red, white and blue. Young and old wore red "Make America Great Again" baseball caps.

For many, the event entailed considerable standing around. The large JACO Hangar where the event took place next to Meadows Field opened to the crowd at about 10:30 a.m. and was mostly filled by noon, even though the president didn't appear until about 3 p.m.

During the interim, attendees were treated to rock 'n' roll anthems — more Rolling Stones than anything else but also Queen, Pink Floyd and more Neil Young than might be expected at a gathering of conservatives.

The event seemed very much targeted at Central Valley farmers, which made sense given the focus on Trump administration actions to increase water deliveries from Northern California.

As many in the crowd held up their cellphones to better record the president's visit, Rep. Kevin McCarthy kicked off the event by distinguishing the Central Valley for Trump.

"We want to make sure that our president understands that all of California is not alike," McCarthy said. "It's great to have a president who understands farming is not easy. And isn't it great to have a president who keeps his promises?"



An attendee snaps a selfie while waiting for President Donald Trump's visit with local farmers about efforts to improve the supply and delivery of water in California and other Western states at Meadow Field Airport. Alex Horvath/The Californian

During the course of the roughly 45-minute rally, Trump took shots at state political leaders, California's high-speed rail project and the city of San Francisco.

"Lot of people speak badly of your state. I love your state," he said. "I understand your state. But you need the right government."

He noted that the rail project is projected to cost billions of dollars more than originally anticipated even as its proposed length has diminished under Gov. Gavin Newsom. "Pretty soon it'll be, like, a mile long," Trump said.

San Francisco, he said, is "worse than a slum."

"What they've done to San Francisco is a crying shame," he said. If city leaders don't clean it up, he said, "the federal government's going to have to step in."

Trump ended the event with effusive praise for farmers, calling them hard-workers, "incredible people" and "smart as hell."

He closed by saying he would get California farmers more water and put pressure on their governor.

"God bless the American farmer," he said, "and God bless America."

Then he left the stage and the giant hangar was filled with the Rolling Stones' song, "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

https://www.bakersfield.com/news/trump-visit-unfolds-as-political-rally/article_9cf512d2-5380-11ea-8c02-db e16ab8a8b0.html