

Nevada business leaders want clear plan for economic diversity

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A member of the panel charged with helping diversify Nevada's economy and create jobs said he wants to make sure the state plan developed to achieve these goals is a practical working document.

"I hope we have concrete definitions that go beyond buzzwords," said Sam Routson, a member of the state Board of Economic Development.

The plan needs to be a working tool that the public can easily understand, he said. Routson is the chief administrative officer for the agricultural company Winnemucca Farms.

Routson's comments were in response to a report prepared by the Brookings Institution and SRI International that was delivered to the panel in early November. The report, intended to help the state with its economic diversification efforts, identifies seven economic sectors, some already in existence such as gaming and tourism, and some emerging, such as clean energy, where Nevada should focus its efforts.

The report has come in for some criticism for failing to offer clear definitions of the economic sectors the state should be focusing on to diversify the state economy.

Ray Bacon, executive director of the Nevada Manufacturers Association who testified in the public comment section of the meeting of the panel, which includes Gov. Brian Sandoval and several private sector appointees, said he would have sent the report back because of a lack of clear definitions.

The report discusses advanced manufacturing, which used to be called high tech, but it lacks specifics, Bacon said. Other sectors, such as clean energy, are not defined either, he said.

"We can't get there until we know what the definitions are," Bacon said.

Steve Hill, executive director of the Governor's Office on Economic Development, said the intent is to produce a state plan that is a working document and one that is "direct and to the point."

The plan is being developed now and is expected to be released in January.

Board member Kathleen Drakulich asked Hill if the Brookings/SRI report provided enough detail to prepare the state's plan.

Hill said the report has provided a great deal of depth, but that the state's plan won't be prepared based solely on the information. Hill said he is reaching out across the state to get comment for the plan.

Because it is being generated so quickly, Hill said the first draft of the plan will not be a complete answer to Nevada's economic diversification efforts. As the board and state officials learn more about what works, the plan will be updated to reflect that knowledge, he said.

After the meeting Thursday, Sandoval said the criticisms are welcome.

"Now Mr. Hill, who is writing that plan as we speak, has heard some of the concerns of folks with regard to the Brookings report," Sandoval said. "That report was never supposed to be the end-all, be-all with regard to economic development in the state of Nevada. It was going to identify our strengths, our

weaknesses, which clusters we should be focusing on and essentially provide the foundation for our state economic development plan. And I think it accomplished just that.”

The state’s plan of action will be a business plan with the measurements needed to ensure accountability, he said.