Date: October 3, 2019

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator

Re: Persistent Mischaracterization of Pima County’s Economy

It is important that Pima County support and strengthen all of our employment sectors and continue the diversification of our regional economy in light of forecasts of a national economic recession likely occurring in the next 18 months to two years. It is also important that we discourage the perpetuation of false economic information that is detrimental to economic development, site selection activities and business confidence in Pima County.

One of the most bizarre and persistently repeated falsehoods is that Pima County is the fifth (or sixth, or eighth) poorest county in the nation; or that Tucson is the fifth (or sixth, or eighth) poorest metropolitan area in the nation. None of this is true.

In Attachment 1, I have provided a graphic representation from the United States Census Bureau that shows county poverty rates for the period 2013-2017, which is the most recent five-year estimate of county poverty data available from the Census Bureau. Clearly, Pima County is not one of the most impoverished counties in the US. It should be noted that comparative poverty data for counties is generally represented in graphical format due to the sheer number of counties and county-equivalents in the US. I have never seen a ranked list of poverty rates that encompassed all 3,142 counties and county-equivalents that exist in the US.

In Attachment 2, I have provided a 2018 graphic representation from the Census Bureau of the percentage of people in poverty categorized by comparative metropolitan area. Again, Pima County is nowhere close to being the fifth (or sixth, or eighth) poorest metropolitan area in the country. Pima County’s poverty rate (which was 19.2 percent in 2013 and 16.6 percent in 2018) is less impoverished than most of the counties in Arizona and only 3.9 percent higher than the 12.7 percent national poverty rate that occurred in 2018.

Some of this misinformation may stem from the higher poverty rate located within the incorporated boundaries of the City of Tucson where the rate was 24.1 percent in 2018, or nearly twice the national rate. Urban cities tend to have more poverty and the City of
Tucson’s percentage of people in poverty is only 3.2 percent higher than the 20.9 percent rate found within the incorporated boundaries of the City of Phoenix.

Economic facts and statistics for Pima County are readily available from reputable sources such as the United States Census Bureau, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity and the University Of Arizona Eller College of Management’s Economic and Business Research Center. All of these sources indicate Pima County possesses a robust economy and the County continues to make significant gains in terms of employment, wages and our region’s prosperity.

CHH/dr

Attachments

c: Jan Lesher, Chief Deputy County Administrator
    Carmine DeBonis Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
    Dr. Francisco Garcia, Deputy County Administrator
    Dr. John Moffatt, Director, Economic Development
    Patrick Cavanaugh, Deputy Director, Economic Development
American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
County Poverty Rate for the United States: 2013-2017

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
For more information, visit <census.gov/acs>