



Gov. candidate visits UC Merced 0:41



Gubernatorial candidate Antonio Villaraigosa recreated a photo he took in a UC Merced cap in the late 1990s. He visited Merced on Thursday, May 11, 2017. - sjansen@mercedsunstar.com

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# Villaraigosa tours UC Merced, talks med school, diversifying Valley economy

BY THADEUS MILLER

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Gubernatorial hopeful Antonio Villaraigosa stopped in at UC Merced on Thursday to get a closer look at the plans to double the campus' footprint.

The former mayor of Los Angeles met with Chancellor Dorothy Leland, Merced Mayor Mike Murphy and others inside school's library overlooking the construction going on for the 2020 Project.

He touted his role in bringing UC Merced to the central San Joaquin Valley, saying the project was the "baby" of former members of the state Assembly Dennis Cardoza and Cruz Bustamante.

Villaraigosa was the majority leader of the state Assembly in the late 1990s, so he was tasked with "getting the votes" to put the university in Merced, he said.

"I get who lives here. I get this is a place that hasn't had enough in the way of representation," he said. "And, I understand how important the ag economy is to the country."

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**ONE OF MY GOALS IS TO HELP THE VALLEY DIVERSIFY ITS ECONOMY.**

Antonio Villaraigosa, a gubernatorial candidate

University officials showed off the 2020 Project plans and the school’s demographics. UC Merced is 48 percent Hispanic, 71 percent first-generation college-students; 35 percent come from the Valley and 61 percent receive Pell Grants, a statistic often used to count students from low-income families.

“One of my goals is to help the Valley diversify its economy,” he said. “If it’s going to diversify its economy, it’s going to do it with UC Merced and Fresno State and look at Stanislaus and Bakersfield, and figure out how we leverage economic development.”

He also said the “Valley needs a med school and I think it’s got to be” at UC Merced.

The presentation also highlighted the \$1.3 billion expansion of the campus, which it is doing through a public-private partnership never used on a project of that size, according to university leaders.

“This could have other applications,” he said about the partnership. “We’re not going to do it just with taxes. The state government is not going to be able to do it all. The federal government clearly is not. We need to look at innovative financing like this.”

The 64-year-old Villaraigosa is a Democrat who served as mayor of L.A. from 2005 until 2013.

The candidate faces stiff competition for the governor’s seat.

Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, his Democratic rival and the leader in early polling, took in nearly \$3.1 million over the last nine months, bringing his cash reserves to more than \$11.9 million.



With \$3.2 million in campaign contributions, Villaraigosa also trails another Democrat, state Treasurer John Chang, who has \$4.9 million in his coffers.

Villaraigosa has sought to stay visible in California through a number of efforts, appearing in TV ads and slate mailers to Latino voters and lending his support to the successful \$9 billion school facilities

initiative to re... He is a strong... moves forward... cleaning up aquifers and underground storage, and looking out for the interests of farmers.

*The Sacramento Bee contributed to this report.*

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Former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, right, meets with University of California, Merced Chancellor Dorothy Leland, left, inside the Kolligian Library on the UC Merced campus in Merced, Calif., on Thursday, May 11, 2017. Villaraigosa is currently running for Governor of California. **Andrew Kuhn** - akuhn@mercedsun-star.com

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