



ASU economist predicts WV boom

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The West Valley's economy is going to boom, an Arizona State University economist predicts.

"This is where the growth is going to be," said Stephen Happel.

He was speaking to Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce members on Thursday at a luncheon.

"There's going to be growth in Gilbert. Tempe's run out of room. Mesa's not going to do anything. So where's the growth going to be? It's out here. And it's going to boom," he said.

Happel described himself as a free-market economist who votes in presidential races for Republicans.

"At ASU, we think the vast majority of growth over the next 10 years, populationwise, may be not in absolute numbers, but percentage terms: West Valley, West Valley, West Valley.

"So as the U.S. economy booms, Arizona's going to boom. And, you're going to boom out here. You have a very optimistic person standing before you today," Happel said.

He is optimistic about the U.S. economy because of what he called "a Mexican standoff," with the Democrats controlling the legislative branch and the Republicans the White House.

That means neither side can accomplish a lot. He believes that near-stalemate keeps the government from hurting the economy.

He said he laughs when he reads magazines that say Vermont and Maine are the best places in the country to live.

"Arizona is the best place in the country to live. Where are people moving?" he said.

"But quality of life, oh no, that's Maine and Vermont. That's why so many people are moving there," he said, sarcastically.

He noted that the United States is a growing population - with 400 million people projected by 2040.

"And of course, you know, that a large chunk will be here in Arizona, in the West Valley," he said to laughter from the audience.

One reason that he is optimistic about the U.S. economy is the number of baby boomers in the 45-50 age group.

That group, he said, has the highest levels of discretionary spending.

And the second highest levels are people in their early 20s, which also is a huge group.

"You couldn't have more favorable demographics in the United States than you have right now."

Reach the reporter at (602) 444-6513.