

Siskiyou Community Forum

August 28, 2025

Fort Jones Community Hall, Fort Jones, CA



Sponsored by the Siskiyou Community Alliance

Speakers Summary

This event presents a multi-faceted community forum featuring key speakers from health care, education, avalanche safety, and agriculture sectors in Siskiyou County. Each speaker provides updates on current initiatives, challenges, and outlooks, highlighting local impacts of broader financial, regulatory, and environmental factors.

Jonathan Andrus, CEO Fairchild Medical Center

Fairchild Medical Center Expansion and Healthcare Challenges

- Workforce achievements: The physician and nursing workforce at Fairchild Medical Center have significantly improved patient experience scores, reflecting strong performance despite current challenges.
- Space constraints: The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted critical space shortages—not only in patient rooms but also for medical equipment and supplies, particularly in the emergency department.
- Expansion project:
 - Approved about a year ago by the hospital's board, this is the largest expansion since the hospital's construction in 1997.
 - Adding approximately 25,000 square feet, the new building will nearly triple the emergency department space.
 - Features include:
 - Private patient rooms.
 - Specialized accommodations for behavioral health patients and social challenges.
 - A dedicated decontamination room to replace the current cumbersome outdoor hose-down process.
 - Improved staff facilities, including restrooms and break rooms, to enhance recruitment and retention.
 - The hospital lab will be relocated to the second floor, freeing space for a significant surgery department expansion in the old emergency department area.
 - New services are planned though specifics are *not fully detailed*.
- Financial challenges:
 - Federal and state healthcare funding cuts loom, impacting rural hospitals community-wide.

- Medicare reimbursement will drop by 4% starting October 1, equating to over \$1 million annually in lost revenue for the hospital.
- Medicaid enrollment is expected to decline following previous growth from approximately 10,000 to nearly 18,000 enrolled individuals in Siskiyou County since 2014.
- Uncertainty surrounds California's hospital quality assurance fee program (provider tax), with federal approval pending for the 2025 version.
- Rural Transformation Fund: A \$50 billion federal fund over five years exists, but the hospital expects minimal direct benefit, considering half the funds are equally divided among states regardless of healthcare entities.
- State-imposed charge restrictions:
 - Governor Newsom's directive limits hospitals to a maximum 3.5% charge increase in 2026, despite rising costs in drugs and labor.
 - Penalties and enforcement details remain undefined.
 - This cap could reduce gross revenue by \$5–7 million, a significant hit given current margins are slim (~1–1.5%), with net income year-to-date approximately \$650,000.
- Outlook: Despite financial and regulatory hurdles, the hospital remains committed to serving the community and advancing its expansion project. Weekly updates and additional information are available on the hospital's website.

Allan Carver, Siskiyou County Superintendent of Schools

Siskiyou County Office of Education Overview and Challenges

- Organizational structure:
 - Alan Carver, county superintendent since January 2023, leads the office supporting 24 school districts and 2 charter schools encompassing 34 schools.
 - School districts have elected boards and superintendents; the county office provides oversight and support but does not determine local programs.
- Core responsibilities:
 - Credentialing teachers, fiscal oversight, compliance with the Williams settlement ensuring facilities and curriculum quality.
 - Differentiated assistance to struggling schools based on performance metrics like ELA, math, attendance, and expulsion rates.
 - Support for foster youth, homeless students, and compliance with state mandates.
- Support services provided:
 - Employs itinerant specialists (nurses, psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, adaptive physical education specialists) to serve multiple schools on a part-time basis.
 - Employs counselors and wellness coaches.
 - Expanded science education team (grown from 1 to 4 staff), including outdoor educators and a science coach delivering hands-on lessons and organizing field trips and outdoor camps.
 - Emergency preparedness director hired to enhance disaster readiness and training across county schools, especially important given recent fires and smoke issues.
- Funding and grants:
 - Mixed funding sources: local, state (majority), federal, and nonprofit grants.

- State-level community schools funding obtained via a consortium model, easing compliance burden on districts.
- Early Head Start program faced funding freezes at the end of a five-year grant cycle, forcing layoffs of about 25% of staff temporarily before funds were restored.
- Forest reserve funding (\$1.9 million) is at risk due to delays in state legislation, with potential significant impacts on school budgets.
- Federal funding through five restricted titles totals approximately \$2.76 million annually. Proposed federal budget discussions could threaten these funds, potentially reducing total funding near \$4.6 million when combined with state funds.
- Student demographics:
 - Approximately 5,600 students countywide, a decline of about 10–12% over the past decade and more than 25 years overall.
 - Decline attributed partly to housing losses from wildfires and slow rebuilding processes.
- Outlook: The office is prepared to support schools and welcomes community growth to reverse enrollment declines.

Casey Glaubman, Executive Director at Friends of the Mount Shasta Avalanche Center, Mount Shasta City Council Member

Mount Shasta Avalanche Center and City Council Update

- Speaker background: Casey Glowman serves as executive director and education coordinator for the Friends of the Mount Shasta Avalanche Center and is a newly elected Mount Shasta City Council member.
- Avalanche Center:
 - Established as a nonprofit supporting the Forest Service-run avalanche forecast center for about 25 years.
 - Conducted over 400 free avalanche safety classes last winter, funded through donations, fundraisers, and grants.
 - Faces current funding challenges due to federal grant freezes; although most funds are expected, timing impacts program operations.
 - Unable to replace a forecaster who left, but expects to maintain 7-day-a-week daily avalanche forecasts.
 - Observed reduction in NOAA's weather discussion presence since February 2023, with uncertain impact on forecast accuracy expected in the upcoming season.
 - Maintains five public weather stations providing real-time data to augment forecasts.
 - Website attracts 250,000–300,000 annual visitors, reflecting significant community and visitor engagement.
- City Council perspective:
 - Tourism, especially winter-based, has grown and is vital to the local economy.
 - Road closures on the Ever Memorial up to Bunny Flat last winter (approx. 50–60 days) caused substantial economic losses estimated between \$5,000 and \$20,000 per day, impacting service industry workers and tourism revenue.
 - County and city are collaborating to improve road maintenance and keep access open for winter recreation.
- Outlook: The Avalanche Center plans robust programming again this winter with community education events starting December.

Jim Morris, Scott Valley Rancher

Agriculture in Siskiyou County: Challenges and Perspectives

- Speaker background: Jim Morris is a sixth-generation rancher near Scott Valley, raising livestock (cattle, sheep), hay, grain, seed crops, and vegetables.
- Agricultural economy:
 - Nearly 50% of agricultural income comes from nursery crops (strawberry and raspberry plants).
 - Livestock accounts for about 25%, field crops 13%, vegetable crops 8%, and timber 7%, with timber significantly reduced compared to historic levels.
- Local agency involvement:
 - Participates in Scott Valley Irrigation District (county entity), groundwater sustainability agency advisory committee, and county water master district, which manages local water distribution authority delegated by the state.
- Key challenges:
 - State water regulations and sustainability efforts are contentious and impact farming operations.
 - Rising input costs: electricity for pumping, equipment, fertilizer, seed, crop protection materials.
 - Poor commodity markets for most crops, except cattle, which remains profitable.
 - Labor dynamics in nursery crops shifting from primarily migrant labor to resident workers, with increased mechanization.
 - Aging farmer population with difficulty attracting and retaining younger generations.
 - Overproduction leads to market oversupply, suppressing prices.
- Federal support:
 - Farm Service Agency (FSA), a USDA program, provides disaster assistance, conservation programs, credit, and loans targeting family farms, minorities, and youth farmers.
 - Locally, FSA experienced operational disruptions during the pandemic but retained staff with some temporary layoffs.
- Crop diversification efforts:
 - Exploring higher-value, value-added crops rather than low-value commodities.
 - Interest in building local processing facilities (e.g., seed cleaning) to increase product value and local employment, though funding is still being sought.
- Trade concerns:
 - About 15% of California's hay is exported, notably to China.
 - Chinese tariffs use exclusion of genetically modified alfalfa (Roundup Ready) as a barrier.
 - Potential resolution of these trade issues could open markets.
- Outlook: Optimistic but cautious given regulatory, labor, and market challenges.

Community Q&A and Panel Interaction Guidelines

- The moderator emphasized:
 - Politeness, respect, and brevity during Q&A.
 - Introduction of oneself and context before questions.
 - Time limits to maximize the number of questions answered.
- Community members posed questions on:

- Special education impacts and funding (workability programs, transition services).
- Effects of funding cuts on the Avalanche Center and the City of Mount Shasta.
- Declining student enrollment causes, including wildfire housing losses and population shifts.
- Agricultural labor impacts on nursery crops and mechanization trends.
- Economic effects of road closures on tourism and local businesses.
- Specific hospital closures in neighboring counties and critical access hospital designation criteria.
- Panel responses provided insights consistent with their prepared remarks, often highlighting ongoing uncertainties and community collaboration efforts.

Clarification on Hospital Closure in Glenn County (**Jonathan Andrus, CEO Fairchild Medical Center**)

- Glenn County Medical Center is closing due to losing its critical access hospital designation.
- Critical access requires:
 - No more than 25 beds (Glenn County's hospital had 33).
 - Average patient stay under 96 hours.
 - Location at least 35 miles from another hospital (Glenn County's hospital is 33.5 miles from nearest hospital).
- The hospital appealed the loss of designation but was unsuccessful.
- Closure is not directly related to recent federal healthcare acts but reflects long-term operational struggles, including recruitment difficulties and limited service expansion.
- The community is concerned about emergency coverage, currently limited to one ambulance, with efforts underway to find solutions.

Closing Remarks and Community Engagement

- The forum organizers expressed gratitude to speakers and attendees.
- Participants were encouraged to complete surveys via QR codes or paper forms to provide feedback.
- Additional community resources and newsletters are available through the organization's website.
- The event was supported by local donations, including refreshments, and recording services by Jay Martin of Siskiyou News..
- The forum emphasized grassroots, community-driven efforts to inform and connect residents on critical local issues.

Summary Table: Key Quantitative Data

Topic	Data / Figures
Fairchild Medical Center Expansion	+25,000 sq ft; nearly triple emergency dept. space
Medicare reimbursement cut	4% reduction starting Oct 1; > \$1 million annual loss

Medicaid enrollment in Siskiyou Co.	Grew from ~10,000 (2014) to ~18,000 currently
Siskiyou County Schools	24 districts + 2 charters; 34 schools; ~5,600 students
Decline in student population	~10–12% drop over last 10 years; total loss > 5,600 kids
Avalanche Center classes (last year)	>400 free avalanche safety classes
Avalanche Center website traffic	~250,000–300,000 annual visitors
Estimated economic loss from road closure	\$5,000–\$20,000 per day; ~50 days closed (~\$4 million low end)
Siskiyou County agriculture income by sector	Nursery crops ~50%; Livestock ~25%; Field crops 13%; Vegetables 8%; Timber 7%
Federal funding to schools	~\$2.76 million annually

Key Insights

- Healthcare infrastructure is expanding significantly at Fairchild Medical Center to meet growing and complex community needs, but financial and regulatory pressures threaten operational sustainability.
- Education in Siskiyou County faces long-term enrollment declines largely due to housing losses and population shifts, but the county office actively supports districts with specialized services and grant management.
- The Mount Shasta Avalanche Center plays a crucial role in community safety and outdoor recreation support, facing funding uncertainties but maintaining robust education and forecasting programs.
- Agriculture remains a vital but challenged sector in Siskiyou County, grappling with regulatory water issues, rising input costs, labor changes, and market pressures, while seeking diversification and value-added production.
- Community engagement through forums and Q&A sessions helps address local concerns transparently, fostering cooperation amidst uncertainties.

This comprehensive summary reflects all factual content presented in the transcript without speculation or unsupported information.