



A Holistic Approach to Budget Cuts

06/25/11 by Agustin Gurza

Erik Kramer, a 6th grade teacher from Bakersfield, grew up having to understand two opposing sides to one of California's most contentious issues, the battle to unionize farm labor. He was raised in Delano, the son of a family rancher in the Central Valley town made famous as the headquarters of Cesar Chavez' Farm Workers Union. At home, his father expounded on the growers' arguments. In the fields, he saw the other side first-hand while picking grapes shoulder to shoulder with the workers in his father's vineyards.



Now, as a union employee himself, he urges his fellow Californians to look at both sides of another contentious issue, the fight over cutting the state budget. He knows it's easy to target education, which consumes the lion's share, overall. "A lot of people see that big chunk of the pie and say we'll shave another billion," says Kramer, 39, who's been teaching for 13 years. But when those cuts trickle down to his small Rosedale Union School District, they cut to the bone.

When originally interviewed as a candidate for the Deliberative Poll, the issues that most intrigued him, not surprisingly, were taxes and the budget. Those are hitting close to home, just like the farm worker fight once did. For Kramer, who does missionary work teaching vacation Bible study in Mexico and elsewhere, political discussions have never been just theoretical.

But he's dead serious about what he sees as the uncertain future of California.

"I want to make sure my son has a California he's able to enjoy as much as I have," he says.

Agustin Gurza is a reporter for California Forward.