

LOS ANGELES – In order to gain a first hand account of the economic impact of our current national crisis, Representative Xavier Becerra (CA – 30) took a bus tour of Hollywood’s business and tourism district on Monday, October 29.

“I came here today to get a direct look at how our current economic and national crisis has affected local businesses in Hollywood,” Becerra said.

The tour kicked off at the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, where Rep. Becerra met with Johnny Grant, the Honorary Mayor of Hollywood, to discuss the state of business and tourism in Hollywood. From there, the congressman, joined by Hollywood Chamber of Commerce President Leron Gubler, walked across Hollywood Blvd. to the nearby Shelley Café. David Wong, Shelley Café’s owner, met with the congressman to discuss how his restaurant is coping with the lack of foot traffic along Hollywood Blvd.

“Business is down to a point where I have had to reduce my staff by half,” Wong said. “At this rate, I can only stay open four or five more months.”

From Shelley Café, Rep. Becerra walked down to the Hollywood Wax Museum where he conferred with Raubi Sundher, the museum’s owner. Sundher shared distressing news that business has dramatically declined. “On September 10th, we were on track to have a record September. Since the attacks, business has been off by 40 percent.”

After the Wax Museum, Rep. Becerra visited the Pig ‘N’ Whistle Restaurant where he heard from restaurant owner Chris Breed. Next, Rep. Becerra boarded a Starline Tours tour bus and headed to the Ramada-Hollywood Hotel. While on board the bus, Rep. Becerra conferred with Starline Tours owner Farid Sapir on the state of his company. Sapir acknowledged that his company was facing slow sales, but remained optimistic about his company’s continued success. At the Ramada-Hollywood, Rep. Becerra met with the hotel’s general manager, Jeff Zarrinam. Zarrinam admitted that the Ramada-Hollywood depends on Hollywood tourism to fill the beds and has thus, experienced a dramatic decline in sales.

Rep. Becerra’s bus tour ended at the Pantages Theatre where he met with David Green, senior vice president and chief financial officer of Nederlander West Coast, and Alan Levey, senior vice president and general manager of Disney Theatrical Productions. The economic outlook of

the Pantages Theatre, where Disney's the Lion King continues to reign as the king of Los Angeles Theatre productions, was strong, and as Green pointed out, showing no signs of slowing down. "Disney continues to demonstrate its confidence in Hollywood and has extended the Lion King through March," Green said.

The congressman's tour of Hollywood ended with a press conference in the entryway of the Pantages Theatre. There, he shared his findings from the tour and also discussed his ideas on how to help stimulate Hollywood's tourism-dependent economy.

"After touring small businesses like Shelley Café and the Hollywood Wax Museum, I remain steadfast in my belief that the government must work to pass a strong economic stimulus package that gives our economy short-term assistance to ensure the economic effects of the Sept. 11th attacks do not cripple our long-term financial outlook," Becerra said.

The congressman did, however, state that no amount of economic stimulus would benefit Hollywood until proper airport security measures are imposed to bring people to Los Angeles.

"We must get this country, and indeed, the rest of the world, flying again safely," Becerra said. "To do that, we must enhance airport security. If we can't get this nation flying again, then no amount of stimulus will get tourists here to Hollywood Blvd. to spend money."