

Mr. Mario Arroyo
Part owner
Arroyo's café
Stockton, Ca.

Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on Strengthening the Ownership of Private Property Act of 2005

In May of 1999 property that my family business stood on for 29 years was taken by our downtown redevelopment agency in Stockton, Ca through the use of eminent domain. The three main objectives of the agency were to; eliminate blight, preserve viable business, and to encourage citizens from outside the area to visit downtown.

Our business met all three criteria. We were never a source of blight always maintaining a safe and clean environment for our patrons. In fact the developer that received the rights to our land was a major contributor to problems in the area through a pool hall on his property he leased out as well as a liquor store he still owns.

Secondly, we were a viable business as 29 years at one location should attest. In fact in a March of 1993 draft report the Consultant Firm of Keyser, Marston and Associates, recommended that Arroyo's Café should be retained and to avoid relocation of said business. The firm was hired by the redevelopment agency.

Thirdly our patrons came from all over Stockton and outside of our city some to dine in our restaurant others to dance in our club area or both.

Our case received media attention as local news stations aired segments on the process. Most impressive to me was the amount of letters to the local newspaper (The Record) supporting our cause to stay at that location.

The deputy city manager at the time came to us with three proposals to that would allow us to remain on part of the property. One was agreed upon she later returned to say the developer wanted all the property. In my view this was done to allow more time for the developer to secure tenants for their project.

I understand that at times eminent domain may be necessary, for public good. But our business a successful restaurant my father started in 1946 and at one location for twenty-nine years was relocated to provide for a gas station with a fast food chain restaurant inside of it was nothing short of a land grab. With no concern for private harm.

I feel that allowing developers with deep pockets to use and abuse eminent domain is contrary to what many Americans feel is their right, to own land without the fear of losing it.