

August 21,2006

Message From The Chair Emeritus—Dick Johanson

Three months from now we'll be going to the polls to determine our future. One of the biggest challenges we face as voters is to get up to speed on local candidates for public office. We took a big step in that direction recently with an informative session on Fresno Unified School Board candidates. Those who were there had an excellent chance to hear presentations from Board Chair Luisa Medina and immediate past chair Pat Barr. My former colleagues have done tremendous jobs in helping to turn around the school district. They were not only most candid in discussing what is currently happening in a revitalized system but were also equally candid in responding to questions from those in attendance. Both gave kudos to new superintendent, Mike Hanson, and his revamped administrative staff. Both were extremely complimentary to the site principals, teachers and support staff for their renewed energy in committing to the delivery of a quality education for all of our kids. Knowledgeable and supportive board leadership is fundamental to an effective and lasting turnaround. While the FBC does not endorse candidates as a body, we are composed of insightful members who care deeply about this place. If you weren't there, find somebody who was and have a chat with them. If you will dig a little bit you will discover an inverse ratio between the size of a campaign budget and our individual opportunity to make a difference

Innovation, Collaboration, Interdependence & Stewardship

These four words are very broad concepts and when applied to action are the cornerstones of the transformation going on in our community. "The Economic Future of the San Joaquin Valley" published in 2000 laid out two very different futures for our region. The first, a low cost, singularly focused economy that would continue to yield what we had—high unemployment, high levels of chronic poverty and the many social ills resulting from it and an exodus of knowledge workers seeking higher paying jobs. The second, an economy based upon added value, innovation and diversification with a promise of greater prosperity and an improved quality of life for everyone. The Fresno Business Council opted for the second future and set about putting into motion currents of change that would ultimately create a more prosperous and sustainable economy. Recognizing that critical issues are interdependent, the FBC has focused on two primary agendas—diversifying and strengthening the economy and improving education. Measurable outcomes stem from embracing new ideas, changing expectations, and taking action. Remember when people thought double digit unemployment was inevitable, our only economic strength was agriculture, poor kids couldn't learn and downtown Fresno was a lost cause. Saturday's Bee announced a record low jobless rate of 7.7% crediting a diversified job market, test scores are inching, up and downtown continues to revitalize. Argue for your limitations and they are yours. Choose to believe in possibilities and help to transform your community. Everyone has a choice.

Worlds Apart; Futures Together—Conference Set for September 6

For the past several decades, voices across the United States have posited that economic regions, not traditional political jurisdictions, are the real organizing forces in our communities. Call them worksheds based upon commute distance; industry clusters, or natural topologies, communities within specific regions share one another's fate. Learning to work together to leverage strengths and resources in an increasingly competitive global economy is no longer a good idea, it is an urgent necessity. Every region has assets and every region has deficits. One of our greatest challenges is chronic deep pockets of poverty resulting from longstanding federal, state and local policies concentrating like a perfect storm in the Valley. Resources other communities can invest in economic infrastructure and amenities are used for law enforcement, social services and security systems. Our region is not the only one facing these challenges and there is a growing body of best practices from across the country. Fresno Works For Better Health has recruited an impressive assortment of national speakers with expertise in dynamic regionalism—National columnist, Neal Peirce, founder of PolicyLink, Angela Blackwell, Brookings scholar, Alan Burube and president & CEO of the California Endowment, Dr. Robert K. Ross. Professor Manuel Pastor, author of numerous research studies on the impacts of concentrated poverty on the economy, will facilitate. For more information go to <http://www.fwbh.org/events/>