

EDITORIAL: Three cheers for Fresno's automatic-aid fire agreement



Fresno Fire Department personnel discuss a series of fires that were burning in the downtown area just south of freeway 180 between H Street and Van Ness Avenue on June 23, 2014. They were under investigation but were termed suspicious and similar in nature to multiple fires set the day before near Highways 180 and 41.

MARK CROSSE — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

We interrupt this maddening season of negative campaign ads and scare tactics to remind voters that government, on occasion, can put aside petty jealousies, political turf protection strategies and do something right.

Thursday provided an example when the Fresno City Council approved an agreement that calls for the closest available firefighters and emergency medical personnel from the Fresno Fire Department and Fresno County Fire to respond regardless of jurisdictional boundaries.

The goal behind the deal: Get crews where they are needed as fast as possible because every second counts when there's a fire or someone needs life-saving medical help.

Mark Johnson of Fresno County Fire called the agreement "a great opportunity to do what is best for the people and everyone involved."

And Kerri Donis, chief of the Fresno Fire Department, hit the nail on the head when she said, "People who call us don't care what badge is there. They just want people to show up quickly to manage their emergency situation. That's what we're there to do — to serve."

The Editorial Board, the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and many local citizens long have called for better coordination of services among city and county public-safety agencies. These advocates believe that government can serve people better and save tax dollars by removing ages-old jurisdictional boundaries that don't reflect today's realities.

But too often those who are supposed to serve us — elected and appointed officials alike — look to take care of themselves first, and residents second. “Consolidation” — a word often used to describe the sharing of responsibilities and funding — has been demonized by opponents and portrayed as something that most assuredly will backfire.

Instead of identifying common concerns and seeking solutions, these enemies of consolidation look to whip up opposition and stonewall progress. The result: Fresno's county and city governments remain stuck in the past, doing many things the way they always have and complaining about not having enough funding to provide needed public services.

Three cheers for Johnson and Donis. This week they showed that local agencies don't have to act like the Hatfields and the McCoys.

Real leaders look for answers and are willing to make changes. Poor leaders make excuses and defend the status quo even when the facts call for trying something new. Remember that when marking your Nov. 4 ballot.

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