

Darius Assemi: Why do I care about politics? To build a better Fresno

By DariusAssemi

“Why do you care?” Time and again over the past few months, countless people asked me this question.

“Why do you care who gets elected to school boards or judge or district attorney?” After all, they can’t affect any of our development projects or farming interests.

“Does it really matter who becomes sheriff or mayor or member of the City Council or Board of Supervisors?” And the most common question, “What’s in it for you?”

My answer: After living and working in Fresno for more than 35 years, I have seen firsthand the challenges that face our community, the difficulties placed before small businesses, the opportunities lost to other cities, chronic high unemployment and underemployment, crumbling infrastructure, poor planning decisions, a lack of political will, an absence of responsible stewardship of our natural resources, and an overall degradation of civic discourse which harms our health, our prosperity and our future generations.

For all of these reasons, our company, Granville Homes, has become more involved politically in recent years. Our primary focus will continue to be on producing tangible, meaningful results for our residents and neighbors. However, we will increase our attention and emphasis on policy and the promotion of good leaders.

This community has been good to us, and we have been blessed to have a great team of the best and brightest in Fresno on our staff, working together in our endeavors. My family and I are grateful to have been given the ability to serve this community through a number of charitable and philanthropic endeavors both here and abroad. Working hand in hand with our employees, we have also been fortunate to accomplish much in our industry, and I want those same opportunities of upward economic mobility and a thriving middle class for all residents of Fresno. However, I fully recognize that in the end, good public policy is the best philanthropy. And the best place to start changing and improving public policy is at the local level.

Throughout our city and county, we have good elected officials — and some, to be generous, who need improvement. We have community activists and business leaders who truly want to see sustainable neighborhoods, safer streets, better schools and improved services. And we also have those who simply want to “hit and run” —write an inflammatory letter to the editor, troll on social media, disrupt meetings and forums, and disparage any and all in positions of leadership. Unfortunately, the latter tend to be louder, more vocal and less tolerant.

Those in public service are easy targets. And they should be held to a higher standard. Our elected officials, community activists, business leaders — all of us — need to stop the bickering and name-calling. We must work to find areas of collaboration and cooperation. When we can be partners, great; when we can’t, we can still be respectful of one another. Compromise is nearly always preferable to confrontation. Honorable people can disagree without becoming enemies.

Furthermore, our elected officials and their families deserve our gratitude when they sacrifice their own peace and quiet, not to mention evenings and weekends, to try and make this a better place for all of us to live. Do they always succeed? No, but the good ones deserve our help and support as they fight the good fight.

I consider it an obligation to work together with our citizens to elect the best among us to the Fresno City Council, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, and other critical offices. I will strive to ensure they understand that prevention is always preferable to punishment, that early childhood education is better than adult incarceration, that preventing

an unwanted pregnancy is more desirable than an unwed teen mother.

I commit myself to finding leaders who will aggressively combat government waste and transfer those savings to ensure public safety, improve social services, and maintain and expand our vital infrastructure. I will search for individuals — Republicans, Democrats and independents — who want a civic environment where businesses can flourish, transparency can thrive, natural resources are protected, culture and art are elevated, education is valued and families are prosperous. I invite you to join us in this endeavor.

My pledge to Fresno is this: We will invest the time and resources, do the research, seek out partners who wish to work toward solutions, find the best candidates for leadership, and unapologetically, fundamentally and comprehensively support them in their quest — in our quest — to make a better Fresno.

Why do I care? Because I do.

Darius Assemi of Fresno is a developer, farmer and philanthropist.

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