

# A wickedly crazy but best-for-Fresno mayoral race idea

By Bill  
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It's the universal cliché of mayoral campaigns, including Fresno's: (Write in candidate's name) is running because of a great love for (write in city's name) and the belief that he or she can make the city better.

I don't doubt for a second that most candidates say these things with great sincerity. But what if these now obligatory statements were *really, really* true? And what if the top candidates in the still nascent Fresno mayoral race were willing to put such pronouncements of civic love and loyalty – which they all have made – to the ultimate test?

What I am about to propose is radical. But if Lee Brand, Henry R. Perea and H. Spees were to commit to my idea, they would generate positive national attention and maybe knock Donald Trump off the front pages – for one news cycle, anyway.

Moreover, they would stamp Fresno as one of the most innovative and collaborative cities in America, and position our city to finally, after decades of fits and starts, realize its potential.

(By the way, I didn't run my proposal by the other members of The Bee editorial board, which will make a recommendation in the mayoral race.)

So, what is this wickedly crazy but ultimately best-for-Fresno suggestion?

That the Big Three in the race to succeed Ashley Swearingin hold a news conference Thursday – four days before vote-by-mail balloting begins – and announce that they have come to an agreement they want voters to endorse.

I can already hear all three of them saying: 'What has this guy been smoking?'

Brand and Spees jointly announce that they are recommending Perea for mayor. Perea, in turn, says that Brand will be his city manager and Spees will be his deputy mayor.

It will never happen, of course.

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But bear with me.

One of the big questions about Brand is whether he can put forth a vision for Fresno that unites residents and elevates our quality of life. Brand is a down-in-the-weeds technocrat, and also might be the best City Council member in Fresno history.

It was Swearingin and Brand together who led the effort that pulled City Hall from the precipice of municipal bankruptcy and positioned the city for better days. And it has been Brand, with his legislative "acts," deep research, well-reasoned analysis and council leadership, who has supplemented Swearingin's vision and Mama Grizzly tenacity.

Brand would be the perfect city manager for Fresno's next administration. And, in fact, in his younger days Brand dreamed of becoming a city manager – not that such a post would be his dream job today. Believe me, he would put together a business plan that would grow Fresno's economy by leaps and bounds and, in the process, increase the general fund.

Why, then, Perea as mayor?

If they gave master's degrees in political jiu-jitsu, Perea would have one. He is experienced in rough-and-tumble politics, and he can best articulate where Fresno needs to go to become a big city with a big-city quality of life minus fewer of the big-city problems, such as crime and poverty, that are holding us back.

In addition, Perea, by virtue of being a Democrat in a state dominated by the Democratic Party, has the Capitol connections to ensure that Fresno finally will get its fair share of state revenue for infrastructure, transportation and other vital projects. Plus he understands high-speed rail inside out and would leverage Fresno's role in the project so that it returns maximum dividends for the people of our city.

All three candidates have told me that the next Fresno mayor will have to 'think outside of the box' to improve the economy, put more police on the streets, beautify the city, build more parks and improve the skills of our workforce. We'll see how far outside of the box each of them is willing to go.

Spees would be special envoy of both Perea and Brand.

He would coordinate efforts among the local school districts and State Center Community College District to ensure that local career technical efforts are cutting edge and focused on jobs that are available in our area. He would be in charge of teaming with Fresno County officials to reduce homelessness and improve mental health services. And he would be City Hall's eyes and ears as to what is happening in the neighborhoods.

Running for mayor requires a big ego. You have to want the job and believe that you are the best person for it. Thus, my suggestion will never be realized.

But, if a candidate truly loves Fresno, would he not sacrifice ambition and ego for the chance to be part of a powerhouse team that could do great things and cut deeply across the grain of business-as-usual politics?

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