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As a new voice in our civic discussions, Fresno Citizens for Good Government (FCGG) plans to speak out on a variety of issues through a value-based prism that includes stewardship, fact-based decision-making, and commitment to resolving conflict.

The future of the Fresno Convention Center is an important current issue before the City Council that needs to be decided based on these values. Built 37 years ago, and with the addition of a new Exhibit Hall more recently, the Convention Center is beset by significant challenges:

- The City spends more than \$6.4 million annually to subsidize its operation. While most cities subsidize their convention centers, Fresno's subsidy is much higher than other comparable cities.
- The aging Selland Arena is badly in need of renovations estimated to cost \$10-12 million, requiring \$700,000 to \$900,000 in new annual debt service payments. Having lost its two principal tenants, the Fresno State men's basketball team and the Fresno Falcons hockey team, its fate depends on bringing many new events into the facility.
- The new Exhibit Hall, which opened two years ago at a cost of \$33 million, has generated only three more conventions per year, on average, and less than one-third of the revenue increases forecast when the investment was approved.

There is broad consensus that maintaining the status quo in the marketing and operation of the Convention Center is untenable. FCGG believes that the needed solution to the Convention Center problems must achieve three important goals:

- First, it must significantly increase the number and quality of events and conventions.
- Second, it must do so in the most cost-efficient way, so that General Fund revenues can be freed up to invest in renovation of the facilities.
- Third, clear accountability for results must be part of whatever solution is chosen.

On Thursday, the City Council will have an opportunity—and the responsibility—to make a decision that could produce long-term benefits for the entire community. The City Council will be asked to vote to hire an experienced, world-class firm to market and operate the Convention Center (commonly known as outsourcing). FCGG has examined this proposal and other alternatives, and we find this proposal to be eminently reasonable.

It is our hope that each member of the City Council will apply the following thoughts when taking action on this issue:

- They are elected to make decisions, particularly tough decisions, and this is one they should not delay or dodge.
- The long-term well-being of the community is of much greater importance than the short-term interests of particular constituencies.
- This issue should be decided on its merits, and there should be a re-focusing on the issue itself, rather than the surrounding pressures, tactics, and personal animosities.
- The Council and the Mayor can do their best work when they concentrate on building consensus based on an agreed-upon set of facts.

We understand that many issues elected officials must decide are not simple or easy, but we hope that they and the people who elect them will work together to (a) raise the standards used to resolve complex issues, and (b) insist on outcomes which serve the long-term interests of the public. If they fail to do so on the Convention Center issue, they will have squandered an opportunity to create revenue for private sector businesses, enhance job creation, support a major Downtown asset, make the best use of precious City General Fund dollars, and demonstrate to the community their ability to objectively decide an important public issue.