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President of the Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce
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Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this program today.

I'd like to introduce myself a little bit. First of all, I am **not** a native Mercedian. Unlike our mayor, I can't tell you what elementary, middle, or high school I went to in town.

I was born in El Paso, Texas and grew up in a little West Texas oil town called Fort Stockton. My dad owned the funeral home in town, and my mom taught high school English. I went to college at BYU and then to law school in Sacramento. During my first year at law school, I started dating my wife – who *is* a native Mercedian. We married soon after, and have lived in California ever since. We have four young children ranging from five to eleven years old.

While I had visited many times during our marriage, I did not become a resident of Merced until about four years ago. After nearly seven years practicing for a law firm in Stockton, in 2015, I decided to open up my own law practice here in Merced. While my wife's connection to Merced was significant, most important to us was that we were making a wise business decision about where to be long term. We investigated and saw that there was opportunity both (1) for my small business to succeed and (2) to have the kind of lifestyle that would suit our family. Four years later, Merced has been what we were looking for.

Which brings us to this morning. Since, opening my business and moving to Merced, I have become increasingly involved with The Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce. I believe the Chamber has an important role to play in Merced and I strongly believe in its vision. As its mission statement declares, the Chamber's goal is to be "the premier business resource [in Merced]; providing advocacy, education, networking, and community leadership to promote a strong local economy." At its core, the Chamber is in the business of promoting opportunity in Merced.

Promoting opportunity in Merced takes many forms. For me, the Chamber provided opportunity through the Leadership Merced program. For more than 30 years, the Chamber has been training aspiring residents to be Merced's future leaders. I was lucky enough to be a part of class 31, where I was able to develop and enhance leadership skills, form lasting relationships, and network with other talented, community-minded people. These benefits of Leadership Merced have been at the base of my success here.

If you listen to other alumni of the program, they will echo similar thoughts about the benefits of Leadership Merced. Leadership Merced alumni include past and present community leaders, business leaders, and a whole host of people who have dedicated their time and skills to make this a successful community. By training its future leaders, the Chamber is promoting opportunity in Merced.

The Chamber also runs a similar program for high school juniors and seniors called Junior Leadership Merced. I'm looking up in the balcony for future members of Junior Leadership Merced.

The Chamber also puts on numerous trainings over the year that we call Small Business University. In those events, we bring in experts to help Mercedians manage their businesses and succeed in their careers. Just three weeks ago, we brought in a specialized attorney to give an update on changes to employment law over the last year. We have also brought in digital marketing experts and worked with local employers on workplace literacy for their employees. By bringing experts who can help you succeed in your business or career, the Chamber is promoting opportunity in Merced.

Sometimes that opportunity is in the form of events, like the upcoming Burgers and Brews, the recent Vino and Tapas, our annual golf tournament, or LobsterFest. These kinds of events create opportunities for businesses to promote their products and reach new customers. They also provide opportunities for the community to network and to come together in wholesome ways that make Merced a more enjoyable place to live and work.

Sometimes that opportunity is in the form of events like the State of the City, where we partner with local government to allow businesses and residents to be better informed and have a voice in Merced. Did you know that members of the Chamber meet with representatives from every level of government on a monthly basis? We use those meetings to advocate for ways to strengthen our local economy and benefit our members. Through our government advocacy and relationships, the Chamber is promoting opportunity in Merced.

I could keep going on about the Chamber's work, but I know you all want to hear from our Mayor. As I'm sure you will hear, he – like the Chamber – has been working hard to promote opportunity in Merced. So take advantage of that opportunity – whether you (1) apply to be a part of the next Leadership Merced class (or Junior Leadership Merced), (2) attend one of the Chamber's Small Business University workshops, (3) participate in or sponsor one of the Chamber's events, (4) get involved with the Chamber's government

advocacy, (5) become a Chamber ambassador, or even (6) volunteer to be a member of the Chamber's board of directors like the talented people behind me.

Merced is a place of opportunity. I hope that each of us believes that and preaches it to our fellow Mercedians. It has been a place of opportunity for me and my family. There is opportunity here for you. And the Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce plans on being a part of that opportunity with you, your organizations, and our community as a whole.

Thank you.