



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 16, 2021

Positive School Renaming

FRESNO_ The Fresno County Democratic Party applauds the Fresno Unified School District's decision to rename the former Forkner Elementary School to H. Roger Tatarian Elementary School.

Roger Tatarian's decades of work for the public good with Fresno State and the *Fresno Bee* warrant this recognition. As the executive director of Fresno State's Institute for Media and Public Trust and executive editor of the *Bee* following his tenure as editor-in-chief of United Press International, he demonstrated an admirable commitment to our city by returning to his hometown to enrich our community.

It is also welcome that Tatarian is the first Armenian name to grace one of our local schools, and his story as a child of immigrants raised and educated in Fresno can be an aspirational example for the many students of Fresno Unified who are also part of the immigrant experience.

The name Tatarian is replacing also represents Fresno but instead harkens to our darker past that we still strive to overcome. The original J.C. Forkner was a wealthy property developer whose company implemented strict racial covenants to prevent anyone perceived as a lesser ethnicity from living in the Fig Garden area.

Indeed, Tatarian's family would have been banned, as the documents explicitly refused sale to "Asiatics, Mongolians, Hindus, Negroes, Armenians or any natives or descendants of the Turkish empire." In this racial exclusion, Forkner represented the kind of endemic racism that has shaped our country but now must be overcome.

Renaming Forkner Elementary to honor Tatarian is a small step in a good direction. Combating racism does not only mean that we should prevent new offenses, but it also necessitates identifying and, where possible, taking steps to rectify old harms. There might be some people who disapprove of changing the name of Forkner Elementary out of a sense of nostalgia or a hesitancy toward any change, but no good can come of keeping Forkner's name on the school.

For more information, contact the Fresno County Democratic Party at 559-495-0606 or dems@fresnocountydemocrats.org.