

EDITORIAL: Vote 'yes' on Measure Z

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By The Bee Editorial Board



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FRESNO BEE FILE

Looking ahead to the November general election, we believe there is an item that should be a slam-dunk "yes" for voters: Measure Z renewal for the Fresno Chaffee Zoo.

The tenth-of-a-cent sales tax has fulfilled promises its backers made to Fresno County voters when they passed the first Measure Z with 73% support in 2004.

And let's not forget that approval of Measure Z — which adds just one penny for every \$10 spent on taxable goods — paid dividends even before the taxes started rolling in.

Fresno then was in danger of losing its zoo accreditation because of a backlog of maintenance items and much of the facility not meeting modern standards. Without accreditation, the Chaffee Zoo would have lost its large animals, meaning that the facility would have become little more than a petting zoo for small animals.

But upon hearing that Fresnans had passed the sales tax, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association granted the zoo a one-year extension to meet accreditation standards. That was because AZA officials knew that there would be adequate money to fix the problems and upgrade the zoo for the betterment of

the animals and visitors.

Over the past 10 years, the community and zoo officials have teamed to build and staff an educational attraction that we all can be proud of. And they have done it without raising ticket prices.

Two-thirds of Measure Z funds have paid for popular features such as Sea Lion Cove, Stingray Bay and the reptile house renovation that includes the King Cobra exhibit. Measure Z also is paying for the 13-acre "African Adventure" that is now underway and will add African elephants, lions, cheetahs and meerkats. The remaining one-third of the estimated \$100 million in taxes has gone to staffing.

Zoo attendance was holding steady at about 350,000 a year before Measure Z. Two years ago, 580,000 went through the turnstiles and last year the zoo shattered the previous record with 691,320 visitors.

A glance at car dealer license plate frames in zoo parking spaces suggests that families are coming from all over the San Joaquin Valley to enjoy the zoo. This is good for our economy and for our civic pride. It's also a reminder that Fresno is the anchor city of the Valley — a community that is expected to lead the way in arts, entertainment and education.

If you doubt the value of how much a tenth-of-a-cent sales tax can deliver, take a child to the zoo. See their eyes sparkle while watching the sea lions or the four Malayan tiger cubs. Yes, you can see tiger cubs on television and DVDs. But that isn't the same as seeing them up close — in person — as they frolic together.

Measure Z is a huge success. Let's keep the winning streak going on Nov. 4 by voting "yes" on its renewal.

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