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The Saint Louis Zoo: A City Treasure

As residents of the City of Saint Louis, we know all too well what an amazing facility the Saint Louis Zoo is and the positive impact it has on our local economy. The Zoo has been a city treasure for a century this year, and if you haven't seen the new "Zootennial" exhibit that commemorates this fantastic occasion, I highly recommend you make it a part of your next visit. It's an interactive walk through time that brings many of the Zoo's best moments to life.

One thing that hasn't changed over time is free admission to the Zoo. Saint Louis showed tremendous foresight by becoming the first city in the world to support the Zoo through a public tax. The recently released book, *Animals Always - 100 Years at the Saint Louis Zoo*, chronicles this city's love affair with the Zoo, including how local school children collected the pennies to purchase Miss Jim, the circus elephant. Free admission to the Zoo has lasted through prior economic turmoil, such as the Great Depression. It has always been a priority for the people of this city to keep this attraction accessible, and as a result three million visitors per year enjoy one of the best Zoos in the entire world.



This past session, legislation was introduced that would have harmed the grand tradition of a free Zoo. [Senate Bill 903](#) would have allowed institutions of metropolitan Zoological park and museum districts, like Saint Louis and Kansas City, the opportunity to charge admission to nonresidents. I was vehemently opposed to this idea, because I believe the free admission keeps the Zoo the desirable family destination it has been for a century. The public support of the Zoo is unmatched, and despite the current economic difficulties every family is experiencing, there is no need to jeopardize attendance at this point in the Zoo's history. I'm proud to tell you that the bill did not make it far in the legislative process.

The Zoo has generated untold millions, probably billions, in revenue for our city's hotels, restaurants, gas stations, and much more. Visitors to the Zoo often end up becoming members that financially support the facility. The free admission keeps the Zoo accessible to all, and as a result, many young children get the opportunity to have their world opened to the wonderful creatures Mother Nature has to offer.

Generations throughout our history have kept the Zoo free so that the generations after them may also feel the wonder of seeing a bear or elephant up close.

There is no way you can put a price on that thrill, and there is no way that we should even try.

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