

San Antonio Express-News

Editorial: Support S.A. workforce, pre-K, transit propositions

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While the national focus this election is on the presidential race, consequential local decisions will be made this year. At the bottom of the ballot are propositions on funding an ambitious workforce development program, improving public transit and continuing Pre-K 4 SA, the city's groundbreaking early childhood education program.

We strongly recommend voters vote **for** all three propositions. Taken together, they have the potential to meaningfully address endemic poverty in San Antonio and hasten our economic recovery from the pandemic.

Let's begin with Pre-K 4 SA, listed on the ballot as Proposition A for the city of San Antonio.

In 2012, San Antonians voted for a **1/8**-cent sales tax to create Pre-K 4 SA, the city-run education program whose four centers offer free and reduced-tuition prekindergarten education, grants for students in other programs and professional development for educators. The tax expires in June, and San Antonians must vote for it to be renewed for another eight years to continue the program.

We support its renewal. Pre-K 4 SA has not only been a local success but is a national model. Numerous studies, including one conducted last year by the Urban Education Institute at UTSA, have shown its effectiveness in raising children's skills in cognition, mathematics and language, and preparing them for kindergarten.

The UTSA study also found students who attended Pre-K 4 SA in its first year attended class more frequently in later grades, performed better on state exams and were less likely to need special education services.

All children deserve to have their imaginations and love of learning stimulated and to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that may come to them. Renewing Pre-K 4 SA for another eight years will offer more children the education they deserve. The workforce development proposal, listed as Proposition B for the city of San Antonio, addresses many of these same issues, but at the adult level.

One of the most enduring images of the pandemic in San Antonio is that of thousands of vehicles queuing at a food distribution at Traders Village in April. The San Antonio Food Bank has been serving about 120,000 people a week during the pandemic, but before the pandemic, when unemployment was low and times were good, the Food Bank was still serving 60,000 people a week.

This proposition seeks to change this dynamic. Under the plan, the city will dedicate a **1/8**-cent sales tax toward workforce development and training. This will generate about \$154 million in sales tax revenue through 2025, and has the potential to assist 40,000 people in gaining new skills, certificates and finishing two- and four-year degree programs in sectors such as manufacturing, aerospace, bioscience and health care. We strongly support this use of precious sales tax dollars because it will assist adult workers in gaining new skills to work in meaningful careers.

This brings us to improving transit in San Antonio, a related measure. If voters approve Proposition A for the Advanced Transportation District, the **1/8**-cent sales tax dedicated to workforce development would shift to VIA Metropolitan Transit in 2026.

VIA is woefully underfunded compared with other major transit authorities, operating mostly on a ½-cent sales tax while many other similar transit systems receive a full penny. This vote addresses that disparity. Better funding for VIA will increase bus frequency and support a possible north-south rapid transit line.

San Antonio is frequently ranked as one of the most economically segregated cities in the nation, and it's also one of the fastest growing. Improving public transit has the potential to take drivers off our roads and to better link disparate parts of our community.

The **1/8**-cent sales tax proposed for workforce development and transit has been dedicated to aquifer protection and greenway construction. But voters need not worry about these programs, which will continue. City Council recently approved a \$100 million funding plan for Edwards Aquifer protection. As for completion of the Howard W. Peak Greenway Trail system, Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff recently drafted a letter expressing his support and commitment.

Early childhood education, workforce development and better bus service are substantive ways to invest in our community. We strongly recommend San Antonians vote **for** each of these propositions.