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Our View: United front a smart idea

One Voice Delegation on assignment in Sacramento to help ensure funding for local priorities

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We're on a mission and let's hope it pays off. About two dozen Merced County civic and government representatives are winding up a two-day visit to Sacramento today where they have been lobbying influential politicians and bureaucrats for needed financial help for this area. It's a smart move that should yield dividends for years to come.

It pays to have one voice and there's no coincidence the name of the local group is "One Voice Delegation." This group has enjoyed considerable success in the past marshaling resources for Merced. Last year "One Voice" went to Washington, D.C. and was successful in getting \$500,000 for the Campus Parkway project.

While formal lobbying efforts always are essential and must go on all-year-round, it's hard to beat the one-on-one personal contact and relationships that are formed between local individuals and government bureaucrats, representatives and their aides. This more personal touch gets the attention of influential people in Sacramento or Washington and they know where Merced is on the map. We're glad to see the Merced County Association of Governments take a lead role in the campaign.

"One Voice Delegation" members are hoping to advance projects to make Highway 99 six lanes in this county in the next eight years, make sure gas tax funds go specifically to meet transportation needs, keep the Campus Parkway project on the front burner and finance a highway bypass around Los Banos. All these endeavors are vitally needed and an extra push should prove worthwhile.

Like a team getting ready to play in the Super Bowl, local delegation members huddled five times in

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the past year to firm up their battle plan in approaching Sacramento's officials. That shows unity and resolve and these qualities are bound to be noticed by those in the state capital.

Extra efforts like the "One Voice Delegation" are particularly important considering a few important -- and sobering -- statistics about this area. Merced County gets a third less from the state than other parts of California and 42 percent less from Uncle Sam than other areas. We've got to make things more equitable and speaking up is bound to help.

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The Valley's average income is lower than Appalachia and that should get attention from many corners. With campaigns like "One Voice" perhaps the momentum finally will shift to our side.

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