

Voters To Decide Fate Of Constitutional Amendment

For Transportation Funding

Proposition I

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The constitutional amendment providing for the use and dedication of certain money transferred to the state highway fund to assist in the completion of transportation construction, maintenance and rehabilitation projects, not to include toll roads.

Texas voters in the November 4 general election are faced with only one proposed constitutional amendment—Proposition I—which, if approved by a simple majority, would use revenue drawn from the state's economic stabilization fund to address the state's growing transportation needs.

Senate Joint Resolution 1 (SJR1), approved during the third called session of the 83rd Texas Legislature last year, proposes amending the Texas Constitution to require the state comptroller of public accounts to allocate funds for building, maintaining, rehabilitating and acquiring rights-of-way for pub-

lic roadways—specifically excluding toll roads.

The source of funding is the state's economic stabilization fund—better known as the Rainy Day Fund—which was established by voter-approved constitutional amendment in 1988 to offset unforeseen shortfalls in state revenue. It is essentially a savings account that allows the state to set aside excess revenue for use when unexpected shortfalls occur.

Money in the Rainy Day Fund comes primarily from oil and gas production tax revenue. Each year, if these state's oil and gas production tax revenue exceeds the amount collected in fiscal year 1987, the comptroller transfers 75 percent of the excess into the rainy day fund. The remaining 25 percent is retained as general revenue. In addition, the fund receives half of any unencumbered general revenue left over at the end of each biennial state budget cycle.

According to projections made by the state comptroller earlier this year, the Rainy Day Fund is expected to have a least \$8 billion this fall. Coupled with an anticipated \$2.5 billion surplus from the prior legislative session, the Rainy Day Fund balance is elected to be the target of the proposals for increases in spending, including tax relief and public education.

Arguments For Proposition I

Proponents of Proposition I cite the effects of a booming state economy on its transportation infrastructure, saying that a growing population, increased traffic, and the wear and tear caused by the oil and gas industry have taken a toll on the state's aging highway system. Deteriorating public roads could pose an impediment to future economic growth, they argue, saying the Rainy Day Fund would provide a stable source of additional highway funding

and allow for long-term transportation planning.

They also contend that because the Rainy Day Fund does not rely on raising taxes or fees, and has no effect on the money allocated from the fund, it poses no additional burden on taxpayers.

Arguments Against Proposition I

Opponents of Proposition I say that funding transportation is a key responsibility of the state government's appropriations process—a responsibility that should not be delegated to the voters. They contend that the oil and gas production taxes are volatile, and should not be considered a reliable source of revenue for transportation planning. Opponents also argue that the amount of funding allocated by Proposition I is only a fraction of the amount needed to keep up with the growing demand for transportation infrastructure.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Since the state constitution's ratification in 1876, the legislature has proposed 666 amendments, of which 662 have gone before Texas voters. Of those, 483 have been approved, and 179 were defeated.

School Receives Grant

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Board, where he currently serves as chairman. Supt. Ken Rosser said that Clevenger had told him that he would serve again.

Business Manager Teresa told the Board that there are 23 students who pay for their cafeteria meals at a charge of \$1 per meal, and she said it costs the district \$953 annually to feed these students. She suggested raising the charge to \$1.15 a meal. The board took no action on this.

The Board approved the improvement plans for the elementary and secondary campuses, as well as the District Improvement Plan.

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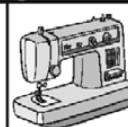
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