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Legislative Interim Studies

The Texas Legislature meets for a regular session of 140 days during odd-numbered years. During even-numbered years, the legislative committees conduct studies, prepare reports, and draft proposed legislation on issues submitted by the Lt. Governor and Speaker. Because the Governor called three special sessions and COVID cases increased, the interim studies have been delayed. Interim charges will be released soon, and these studies will provide a preview of issues for the next legislative session in January, 2023. Leadership changes will affect these studies. The retirement of Rep. Garnet Coleman, Chair of County Affairs and Rep. Chris Paddie, Chair of State Affairs will create a void of knowledge and experience in county issues. In the Senate, retiring Sen. Jane Nelson will be replaced by Sen. Joan Huffman as Chair of Senate Finance, with responsibility for the state budget.

In addition, the Sunset Advisory Commission will convene during the interim to review and make recommendations on the future of several state agencies. Among those under review are the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Juvenile Justice Department, Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, Public Utility Commission of Texas, Office of State-Federal Relations, and Texas Water Development Board.

Special Session Legislation Requirements

After quorum attendance issues derailed all legislation in the first special session, the second and third called sessions passed 35 bills and resolutions and two constitutional amendments. Several of these bills have imposed new requirements and unfunded mandates on county government.

The proposed constitutional amendments will provide some school tax relief for homeowners. However, the legislature ordered that these amendments be submitted to the voters on May 7, rather than the November ballot. This will require a special election at the expense of county taxpayers.

The election integrity and security legislation imposed new requirements on the election process including mail ballots, early voting, and ballot verifications. These changes have resulted in confusion among election officials and voters. Without any state funding, these changes will also impose additional costs on county taxpayers.

Finally, the bond reform bill adopted needed restrictions on personal bond for violent felony offenders. Unfortunately, this legislation also imposed unnecessary cumbersome procedures and training requirements for all bail bond proceedings, including A&B misdemeanors. Beginning April 1, all magistrates must have received new training and passed an examination to conduct bail proceedings. New criminal history reports must be obtained from the Office of Court Administration before bail can be set. These changes will likely increase the county jail backlog and will require additional funding at county taxpayer expense.

The legislature convenes in January with a record budget surplus. We need to remind legislators of these costs and request state funding for these mandated county tax increases.