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Texas Special Session Will Address Property Tax Reform

By Foy Mitchell, Dallas

On June 6, Governor Greg Abbott called a special session of the Texas Legislature that will begin on July 18. The session will continue for 30 days.

By law, only the Governor can set the agenda for the issues to be considered by the Legislature. Also by law, no other issues may be raised for consideration by the Legislature unless the issue is germane to the topic assigned by the Governor.

Among the various items included on the agenda are property tax reform and caps on state and local spending. Both of these items are of concern to the interest of fair and equitable taxation.

TAX REFORM

Property tax reform is a very broad topic and offers many possibilities for Legislators to introduce any number of issues claimed to be related to “property tax reform.” Therefore, the agenda must be watched carefully because the ideas of some about what is constructive and meaningful “property tax reform” may not sync with views of others.

Too often the idea that homeowners are beset with burdensome taxes carries with it the assumption that business and industry are not paying their fair share. We have seen this manifest itself in the past with the passage of homestead exemptions, caps on residential values, and other devices created to reduce the homeowners’ burden. Each of these created a shift in the tax burden to those properties not shielded with similar special treatment, mostly business and industry.

SPENDING CAPS

The second issue raised and related to property taxation is the concept of caps on state and local spending. This should be a generally acceptable idea. However, we can expect local governments to oppose this idea with all their resources. They have enjoyed a long run of unrestricted access to sales and property tax revenue and will

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resist every effort in this vein, as they did at the regular legislative session when similar proposals were made.

POER strongly supports good government. We believe that when communities are sufficiently funded to provide public services, such as good schools, fire, police, recreational and planning activities, it creates a healthy atmosphere for growth.

A growing community is a prosperous community and in such an environment, business and industry prosper. However, we have seen some communities abuse their powers of taxation and it is because of these offenders that we support reasonable limitations or safeguards against irresponsible spending. We hope that this special session will effectively address these issues and help Texas continue its unparalleled growth and prosperity.