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***LOCAL COUNTY OFFICIAL SEEKS TO PROTECT TAXPAYERS  
FROM UNFUNDED MANDATES***

[Full name and title] supports allowing voters to decide if unfunded mandates from the state to counties should be reined in to protect taxpayers from being saddled with higher property taxes.

[Last name] joins county officials from across Texas in seeking a constitutional amendment that would limit state actions which mandate counties to spend additional funds, unless the state pays for its mandates.

“Our property taxpayers currently have no protection against state actions that force counties to raise taxes,” [Last name] said. “We believe a constitutional amendment would curtail many of the unfunded mandates. The mandates are often unintended consequences of legislative action or state administrative action. While legislators and state executives do not willingly intend to cause local tax increases, their actions too often result in tax hikes because they do not include statewide funding mechanisms to pay for the directives to counties.”

To initiate the effort, the Subcommittee on Unfunded Mandates of the Policy Analysis Group (PAG) met recently at the Texas Association of Counties (TAC) in Austin. The subcommittee decided to seek a referendum in both the Republican and Democratic Party primary elections next spring.

The referendum was proposed by Bee County Tax Assessor-Collector Andrea Gibbud and quickly approved by other members of the subcommittee who were present, including its Chairman and Brazoria County Commissioner Jack Harris, Fort Bend County Tax Assessor-Collector Marsha Gaines, Dallas County Commissioner Jim Jackson and Gibbud.

The referendum would give primary voters the opportunity to express their feelings on better protecting local taxpayers from state mandates through a proposed constitutional amendment. The referendum states: “For or against a constitutional amendment protecting taxpayers by prohibiting state mandates that require local property tax increases.” The constitutional amendment will be presented to the Legislature at its next session.

Subcommittee members noted that legislative budget actions during tough financial times often have a direct impact on counties and property taxpayers, even when legislators do not intend such a burden. During the 78<sup>th</sup> session that ended earlier this year, examples include cuts to health care, mental health and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) that have resulted in counties being forced to assume additional costs. Under-funded or unfunded mandates from previous legislatures have included the 1985 Indigent Health Care Act and the 2001 law mandating indigent criminal defense services.

TAC is composed of local elected officials from all Texas’ 254 counties. The PAG was formed in 1997, and its members selected issues upon which to focus, including unfunded mandates.