

Part 8 of 9

New charter empowers local government

Associated Press
AUSTIN — Texas voters will say Nov. 4 whether a special separate article on local government should be added to the Texas constitution.

In the current much-amended constitution provisions concerning cities, counties and the hundreds of special governmental districts are scattered throughout the 63,000 word document.

The proposed new constitution gathers everything together in one article called "Local Government."

Supporters say the proposed article is perhaps the most far-reaching of the entire constitution. The most important section on

groups want to keep what they have now.

The Texas Municipal League, the statewide organization of city governments, has endorsed the article, along with the rest of the new constitution.

The Texas AFL-CIO says it cannot accept the local government article, along with the judiciary article, but will endorse the rest.

Organizations passing resolutions against the local government article include the Texas Association of counties, the Panhandle Judges and Commissioners Association, the Gulf Coast Judges and Prosecutors Association and the Dallas County Democratic Executive Committee.

"It removes too much authority from the people and puts it in the hands of the legislature," said the resolution passed by the Panhandle officials.

"The many groups for the local government article are happy and excited because of the limited home rule provisions for counties," said a spokesman for the Citizens for a Texas Constitution. "They like the ordinance making powers for counties, and the idea that voters can restructure the makeup of county officials."

Local government provisions in the new constitution that are not in the 1876 version include:

— Allow county voters to create additional offices, combine the duties and functions of present offices, or eliminate offices.

— Enable county voters to grant ordinance-making power to the county commissioners court or governing body of the county.

— Lower the required population for home-rule cities from 5,000 to 1,500.

— Establishes a \$2 maximum property tax rate per \$100 assessed valuation for cities, not including taxes for debt service. Counties would have a \$1.25 per \$100 valuation ceiling. The legislature would be required to fix debt limits for cities, counties and school and community junior college districts.

The new constitution would retain the present elected county officials as set out in the 1876 constitution and provides for a general statement of authority for the legislature to provide for special districts and authorities by general or local law. Cities and counties also could establish special districts within their boundaries if authorized by the legislature. Political subdivisions would be able to contract with other government units from various services and functions.

San Antonio Major Lila Cokkrell, president of the Texas Municipal League, said that "cities have much to gain fiscally through passage of the new charter, as a consequence of its repeal of present constitutional limits on municipal debt... because it removes

the 'tax-limited bond stigma from the general obligations of municipal governments it will save Texas cities \$30 to \$40 million in unnecessary interest costs."

The Texas AFL-CIO said it opposed the local government article because it would allow continued "proliferation" of special tax districts.

Jim Brigrance, Brazoria County commissioner and incoming presi-

dent of the Texas County Judge and Commissioners Association, said the document would "give the legislature almost unlimited authority over nearly every phase of our lives not already regulated by the federal government."

Speaker Bill Clayton told the Texas Association of Counties it was making a mistake by opposing county home rule provisions which would allow voters to change the

structure of county government. "Are you afraid to let the people do something for themselves?" he told the association.

Clayton warned if county officials help kill this new constitution they risk future adoption of a "liberal" one as Texas grows more urban.

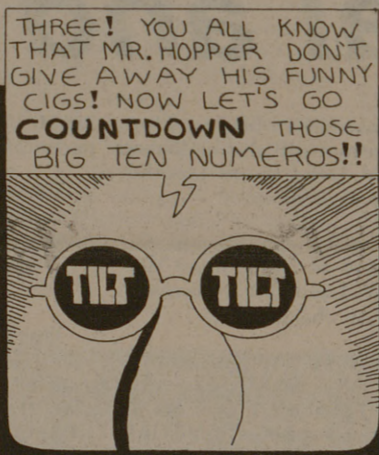
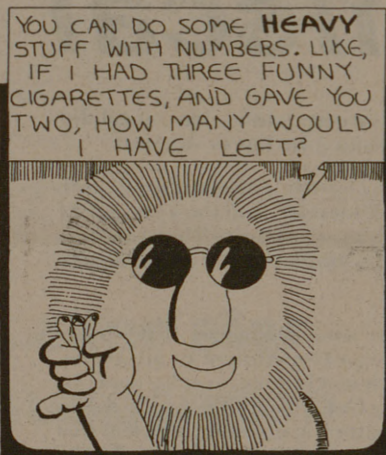
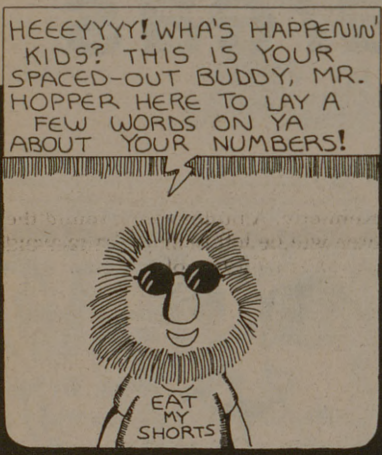
Tuesday: Proposed changes in the general provisions.

Special News Analysis Series

Local government in the present constitution, on home rule for cities, was added in 1912. Since then Texas has changed from a primarily agricultural state to a major urban state.

Opponents say leave the constitution the way it is, any move will cost money.

Feelings on the local government article are widely separated, with a number of urban groups favoring adoption while many rural



The Battalion

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