

Texas courts understaffed

United Press International
AUSTIN — Texas courts are overworked, understaffed and run under archaic laws that stifle and delay the legal system, the chief justice of the state supreme court says.

Chief Justice Jack Pope told makers that additional funds be needed to handle the "State of the Judiciary" of cases that will grow through the end of the century.

Pope said legislation last year conferred criminal jurisdiction on 14 appeals courts formerly limited to civil cases "was most significant change" in the court system in a century. However, he cautioned that a backlog of criminal cases still exist and that some cases being

resolved in the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals are four or five years old.

"Thus, delay continues to be one of the outstanding characteristics of a criminal case on appeal," Pope said.

Aggravating the problem, he said, is society's increasing tendency to settle differences in court.

"It is my duty to report to you that one of the most bountiful crops in Texas is court actions," Pope said. "The equivalent of one person in 15 in the last two years went to the courthouse."

To ease the backlog of cases, more staff persons and improved technology are needed in all courts from the district level up, Pope said. Those improvements would cost money, he said, but not as much as if the

problems were ignored.

He also called on lawmakers to consider the "judicial impact"

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of the hundreds of bills they pass each session.

"Courts cannot and never were intended to be the place where mankind resolves all of its problems," he said. "Every legislative session generates new causes of actions, remedies and crimes. Some judge must eyeball every person who violates the new law."

Pope said comprehensive changes are needed in Texas' laws dealing with trial venues and court jurisdiction because outdated statutes delay and frustrate the legal system at the expense of both government and citizens.

The poor citizens of Texas

also demand attention because the bad economy and federal budget cuts have endangered their constitutional right to effective counsel and equal access to the courts, Pope said.

"Low income Texans must have equal access to the courts but we are not providing that access," he said.

Pope said Texas could ensure that the poor receive their right to counsel by instituting a program that uses the interest from lawyer's temporary trust accounts to pay for legal services. Similar programs already exist in 10 other states, he said.

Big agency budgets may increase taxes

United Press International
AUSTIN — The Texas Research League says the state legislature may have to raise bond issues by \$700 million to \$3 billion in the 1983-84 fiscal year to meet budget requests filed by state agencies and departments.

The league's report came after the state comptroller Bob Bullock's projection last week that revenues would be \$1.5 billion less than he originally projected for the 1983-84 fiscal year.

Even though he revised his revenue estimates downward, Bullock said the Texas Legislature would have an additional \$4 billion to spend during the period.

Bullock apparently based his prediction on the assumption that there will be a substantial improvement in the overall economy beginning in the fall of 1983, the league said.

But the league predicted the Legislature may have to raise taxes by \$700 million to \$3 billion

to meet the demand for state spending.

John Moore, an aide to Bullock, declined immediate comment on the league report.

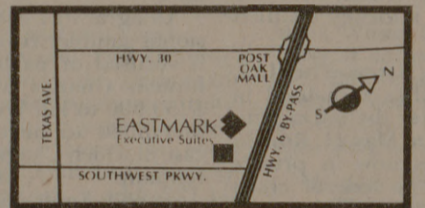
Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby has said that the Legislature should pass a \$1.5 billion tax bill, but House Speaker Gib Lewis and Gov. Mark White have hedged on the question and said spending should be cut to match revenues.

Former Gov. Bill Clements told lawmakers last week that a tax hike was not necessary.

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