

Anti-crime proposals approved

Texans OK all amendments

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The overwhelming approval that voters gave two law-and-order proposals should help break up prison gangs and make certain criminals don't get off on technicalities, officials said Wednesday.

The other 12 constitutional amendments on Tuesday's ballot — including one providing \$500 million in bond money for farm and ranch loans — also won the voters' approval.

The results increase to 283 the number of changes that have been made in Texas' 109-year-old governing document.

One of the crime-related propositions authorizes the Texas Department of Corrections to transfer troublesome inmates out of state. Its sponsor, Sen. Ray Farabee, D-Wichita Falls, said that should help break up gangs by allowing wardens to move gang leaders.

"This is a simple tool that offers some help in dealing with the very complicated problems in our prison system," Farabee said.

In unofficial final returns, the prisoner transfer measure was approved 666,657 votes to 274,196, a 70.9 percent to 29.1 percent margin. Attorney General Jim Mattox also

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said it should give prison officials a hand, although, he said it isn't the only answer to prison violence.

"I think we may be able to end the gang wars," he said. "But I'm not at all sure we're going to end all the violence that's in the system."

The second law-and-order measure voters approved allows the Legislature to set standards governing the process of charging people with crimes.

It was pushed Sen. J.E. "Buster" Brown, a Republican candidate for attorney general, who said the amendment should prevent appeals courts from overturning convictions due to minor flaws in indictments.

A bill to implement the amendment requires defendants to object to defects in indictments prior to trial.

The unofficial final count showed the amendment passing by a 68.6 percent to 31.4 percent margin, 609,314 votes to 278,568.

"The public feels very strongly it's time to stop allowing convicted criminals to beat their case because of insignificant technicalities," Brown said.

"I think it's a victory for 900,000 victims of crime who suffer in Texas annually," Brown said. "It's a victory for those people who obey the law. It's a victory for Texas, because it sends out a message that we're going to make a serious effort to make the criminal justice system work right," he said.

Propositions 1 and 2, which together formed a \$1.43 state water program financing new projects and authorizing agricultural water-conservation bonds, passed easily.

The closest vote came on Proposition 10, providing \$500 million in bond money for loans to buy farm and ranch land. The proposal won 464,421 votes to 441,482.

Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower said the program should

help both young farmers and established operators wishing to branch out into more profitable cash crops.

"This is not an amendment that is going to save Texas agriculture by any means," Hightower said. "It does give us an additional tool that will help young farmers get a little start in the business and be of major importance in allowing farmers to diversify."

To be eligible for the Farm and Ranch Finance Program, a person must be a U.S. citizen, a resident of Texas for five years, a member of a household in which at least 35 percent of the gross income came from farming or ranching for the preceding three years, and have a net worth of less than \$250,000.

Proposition 8, authorizing another \$500 million for making \$20,000 low-interest home loans to Texas veterans, passed 602,934 votes to 328,185. Land Commissioner Garry Mauro called it the "best possible Veterans Day present."

The housing program is so popular that the Veterans Land Board made more than 21,000 loans during the first 17 months of the program. Approval of the amendment enables the board to make another 25,000 loans.

Cisneros requests Mexican aid funds

Associated Press

AUSTIN — Texans can build a lasting reminder of their help by raising \$5 million to construct a hospital and three schools in earthquake-ravaged Mexico City, Texas A&M Regent Henry Cisneros said Wednesday.

"The idea all along has been that Texans would feel better about giving to something where they could see the sum total of their contributions," Cisneros said. "Collecting money and funneling it to 100 recipient organizations and never being able to see any results is not as good as being able to see concrete projects."

Cisneros, San Antonio mayor, and Bob Krueger, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, are co-chairmen of a special committee appointed by Gov. Mark White to coordinate the Texas response to the September earthquake.

"What's at stake here is a lot more than just good will from Texas," Cisneros said. "What really is involved here is the practical long-term working relationship with a country that's very important to Texas."

The proposed, 144-bed hospital would cost about \$4 million. There is no target date for construction. The need is immediate, said Krueger, who visited Mexico City two weeks ago.

"Mexico lost some 5,000 hospital

beds in this earthquake," he said. "They are using the facilities that remain and stand. They lost the most important research hospital facility that exists in Mexico."

School needs also are acute, Krueger added.

"There are some 600,000 schoolchildren in Mexico out of school because of damage done to school buildings," he said. "In other cases they are being taught in garages and other makeshift buildings. We believe the people in Texas can assist in rebuilding these schools and we want to help."

For \$1 million, Texans could build three schools or build one and help repair damaged schools — which number 732, according to

Krueger.

The \$5 million for a hospital and schools would be in addition to approximately \$5 million in cash and goods already sent from Texas, he said.

The committee met Wednesday and put Houston school superintendent Billy Reagan in charge of the school-building project. Dr. Ron Anderson of Dallas, chairman of the State Board of Health, was put in charge of the hospital project.

Fund-raising grows more difficult as time passes, Krueger and Cisneros said.

The Texas Response effort has, so far, netted \$200,000 in cash, said Krueger and Cisneros.

Drugs case brings three guilty pleas

Associated Press

DALLAS — Sentencing has been set for Dec. 12 for three people who pleaded guilty to charges stemming from an international cocaine and marijuana ring operating out of Addison Airport.

Brenda Kay Baxter, 27, a Dallas real estate agent, pleaded guilty Tuesday to one count of possession with intent to distribute marijuana. The U.S. attorney's office dropped three other charges in return for her plea. She faces a maximum of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Antonio Rodolfo Garza, 49, an Austin architect, pleaded guilty Tuesday to one count of possession with intent to distribute cocaine after federal prosecutors dropped three other charges. He faces up to 20 years in prison and \$250,000 in fines.

They were arrested last May along with Dallas oilman Joe Bill Bennett, 39, who pleaded guilty Monday to two cocaine charges.

Taxpayer halts payment of city's debt

Associated Press

RIO GRANDE CITY — Starr County officials on Wednesday planned to retire a 50-year-old \$1.8 million debt, but a taxpayer who filed a last-minute appeal temporarily stalled the payment.

Last month officials raised the \$1.8 million in an emergency court-approved bond sale and were scheduled to give the First National Bank of Rio Grande City a check for that amount.

But Leonel Lopez, a migrant farmworker with eight children, had been fighting the bond sale. State District Judge Ricardo Garcia, who granted the bond sale, ruled against Lopez on Oct. 28 and Lopez filed an appeal on Oct. 31. For about five hours on Wednesday, Lopez, county attorney Heriberto Silva and county judge Blas Chapa discussed the appeal.

Lopez, insisting that county officials curtail spending, decided to dismiss his appeal, said Silva.

"I think that on technicalities it would have been dismissed," Silva said of Lopez's appeal. "He didn't follow procedures."

"As far as any legal obstacles right now, they should be all clear," Silva said.

In return for dismissing the appeal, Lopez will get an opportunity

to address county commissioners about his grievances, Silva said.

But the delay cost county officials a day of interest at the bank. Chapa said county officials would attempt to get the \$1.8 million check to the bank later this week.

Earlier Lopez said, "I will drop it if they promise to cut expenditures and keep within the budget."

On Wednesday morning, county auditor Guadalupe Villareal wrote a check for \$1,816,479.31.

"This \$1.8 million is the accumulation of debts over the last 50 years," he said. "As of now, we're not going to owe anybody anything."

He was ready to deliver it to the bank but then was told about Lopez's appeal and that the money would not be wired from an Austin bank.

"It will be more now because of the interest," Villareal said.

If Lopez had not dropped his appeal, the district judge would have had to rule on a bond in order for it to go to an appeals court. But the judge is a traveling judge and was not scheduled to be in Rio Grande City until Tuesday.

Also, Lopez had filed papers stating he is a pauper and cannot afford an attorney or pay court fees.

Lopez also contended that the procedure county officials used to obtain the bond was not proper because it was not approved by voters.

But the sale was legal.

County officials knew a referendum would be defeated since county residents repeatedly have voted down tax-rate increases and even approved a tax rollback.

But officials knew they needed the money.

They went to the attorney general's office, which came up with a legal way to sell the bonds.

The bond proposal had to be approved by the Legislature or a district judge.

It drew opposition from Lopez, Domingo Arredondo and the Starr County Taxpayers League.

After a month-long battle, the proposal seemed to end the county's debt. But because of the appeal, it delayed the payment.

The bond will be paid off in the next 20 years with a 3-cent increase per \$100 property valuation, Villareal said.

But Villareal, Chapa and other officials said the suits and recent articles describing the county as a drug-smuggling mecca hurt the county in the bond sale.

He said the county changed its fiscal year from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 to Oct. 1 to Sept. 31. He said county agencies and departments now would have to have a purchase order approved by him before making purchases.

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Born on September 27, 1838, in Bentonsport, Iowa, Lawrence Sullivan Ross was brought to Texas before he was a year old. He attended Baylor at Independence and graduated from Wesleyan at Alabama in 1859. In 1861 he joined the 6th Texas Calvary and served as private and later as regimental major. In addition, Sully was promoted to Colonel and eventually to General of a brigade consisting of various Texas regiments. Furthermore, Sul Ross served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1876 and became a state senator in November of 1881.
In 1886 Ross ran for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination and easily defeated several opponents. Sul Ross also won by a wide margin over the Republican candidate, A.M. Cochran; Governor Ross served until 1891. His administration improved the system of selling and leasing public lands and reformed the Railroads Commission.
Lawrence Sullivan Ross became President of Texas A&M in 1891, at a time when the survival of the institution was uncertain. Ross can be credited for the early success of A&M. Lawrence Sullivan Ross died at his home near Bryan on January 3, 1898. As stated by the "Galveston News" Ross "...exhibited a character so exalted that he commanded at all times not only the confidence, but the affection of the people."
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