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Texas Report

# Comptroller offers \$4.5 billion in savings in new audit

**Associated Press**  
**AUSTIN**—Legislators on Thursday were given 400 money-saving ideas worth \$4.5 billion as Comptroller John Sharp issued a new audit of state government operations.

Sharp said the ideas — from eliminating from license plates to recognizing state bureaucracies — could salvage vital services, avoid a tax increase and make the government more businesslike.

"We want state government to run a lot more like how Southwest Airlines operates in Texas and a lot less like how General Motors functions out of Detroit," he said.



Sharp

It is the second such audit in two years as cash-strapped lawmakers try to balance the state budget.

In 1991, Sharp proposed nearly 1,000 ideas that would have saved \$4.2 billion. That year, the Legislature enacted about two-thirds of the recommendations for \$2.4 billion in savings and raised taxes by \$2.6 billion.

Lawmakers today face a projected deficit of more than \$3 billion,

despite state revenues growing by \$1.8 billion. The governor and legislative leaders have vowed, however, not to raise taxes.

Sharp said the 800-page audit, entitled "Against the Grain," gives lawmakers the tools to avoid such tax increases.

"Obviously, state government is strapped for cash again," Sharp said. "Our purpose is to provide the legislators with a full range of options — some easy, some hard. But the former legislator said voters want lawmakers to make the hard choices."

The people of the state of Texas don't believe they're getting what

they pay for at the government level," Sharp said.

The audit's recommendations range from simple to complex. For example, it says the state could save \$160,000 by halting the planned name change that would reduce the Department of Health as the Department of "Public Health."

The largest single cost savings, about \$1.4 billion over the next two years, would come from a completed reorganization of the Medicaid program. That program provides funds for hospitals that carry a large burden of uncompensated

and indigent care.

The audit also recommends ways the state could obtain more federal money for numerous health and human services programs.

It suggests eliminating about 3,700 state jobs, including 1,600 through incentives offered for early retirement.

Gov. Ann Richards, who attended Sharp's briefing Thursday, hailed the audit and its emphasis on improving efficiency.

"John Sharp is doing exactly what government ought to do," she said.

The governor's own budget proposal issued this week counted on

at least \$750 million in audit savings being enacted, although it didn't specify which ones.

Anticipating outcry from some agencies and other special interests, Sharp said he and his staff were prepared to back up every proposal as the Legislature considered his report.

"We will debate anyone at any time on any one of these proposals," he said. "When going to defend every single one of them."

However, he declined to predict how many recommendations or how much total savings the Legislature might adopt.

## BRIEFS

### Council reads condom ordinance

**HOUSTON (AP)**—The Houston City Council is preparing an ordinance to require bars and nightclubs to install condom machines hearing information about sexually transmitted diseases.

Councilman Ben Reyes, who sponsored the proposal, said it would make condoms and information available to those most in need: bar and club patrons who have unprotected sex.

The City Council voted 8-6 Wednesday to direct the city's Legal Department to prepare an ordinance for vote, possibly as soon as two weeks.

Mayor Bob Lanier voted against the proposal, saying the plan advances "the machinery of government into bathrooms and bars."

### Storage tank fire kills one

**HOUSTON (AP)**—One man was killed and another injured Thursday when an explosion believed to have been caused by a welder's torch blew the top off a chemical storage tank.

"One of them was welding on top," Fire Chief Eddie Corral said. "That's what caused the explosion."

A four-alarm fire generated by the blast was brought under control within an hour but dozens of residents who live near the primarily industrial area were advised to remain in their homes.

Corral said the tank held sodium sulfide, which becomes hydrogen sulfide when it burns. It is a low to moderate hazard.

# Senate approves continuing 'Robin Hood' plan

**Associated Press**  
**AUSTIN**—The Texas Senate approved a proposal Thursday to continue shifting local property tax money among school districts. Senators acted after hearing sharp warnings that action is needed to avert a school shutdown this summer.

"We have an obligation — an obligation even if it's political suicide — to keep the schools open," said Sen. Bill Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant.

The Texas Supreme Court has set a June 1 deadline for lawmakers to come up with a constitutional funding plan. If they don't, a state judge has said he will halt state funding for public schools.

Ratliff's proposed constitutional amendment would legalize the current "Robin Hood" funding system, which has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

The measure was approved 27-4 and now goes to the House, where it



faces an uncertain future.

The measure could be changed and end up in a House-Senate conference committee. It also could die in the House, where Republicans previously blocked a similar school funding amendment.

Two-thirds support of the Legislature is required to put a proposed amendment on a state ballot for voter approval, and Republicans number 58 in the 150-member House, head of the GOP House caucus, has said the group doesn't support Ratliff's plan.

Ratliff, who wore a red tie with a yellow school bus on it Thursday,

said he was open "to a lot of negotiation" on the issue.

He and Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock said a proposed amendment must be approved by lawmakers no later than Feb. 20 in order for voters to consider it on a statewide ballot May 1.

"We've all got to wake up that we're on the verge of the public schools closing — We've taken the first step to keep them open," Bullock said.

Voicing against the plan were Sen. John Leedom, R-Dallas; Jane Nelson, R-Lewisville; Florence Shapiro, R-Plano; and Bill Sims, D-San Angelo.

"County education districts and state court mandates are not the solution to public school finance. In short, the voters must first get the courts out of our classrooms," Ms. Nelson said.

## CAPITOL ALMANAC

### Settlement Urged

Minority legislators are urging the attorney general to quickly settle a three-year battle over state district court elections. A federal appeals court on Wednesday struck down an unconstitutional at-large judicial elections in eight large Texas counties.

The Senate unanimously approved and sent to the House bills to:

- Say that alcohol and tobacco manufacturers could not be sued by persons claiming that they were injured through a design defect or that the companies

### Jackpot

Ajunta Morris, 37, of Caldwell, who claimed the \$17 million Lotto Texas jackpot drawn Wednesday, said she wants to build three big houses for her family, her parents and her husband's parents.

**Quote of the Day**  
 "It's time to party" — David Morris, husband of Lotto Texas jackpot winner.

# Families of murdered girls sue yogurt shop

**Associated Press**  
**AUSTIN**—The families of four teen-aged girls killed in a yogurt shop are suing the I Can't Believe It's Yogurt chain and the owner of the shopping center where the slayings occurred.

The suit claims lax security measures by the chain, its parent, Dallas-based Peter Foods Inc., Rockwood Plaza Associates Ltd., and Charles Morrison of Morrison Properties, contributed to the slayings.

The owners of the yogurt shop knew of the security problems, the suit alleges, but "they did nothing to protect these children."

The killings occurred about 11 p.m. on Dec. 6, 1991, at I Can't Believe It's Yogurt in north Austin. Firefighters discovered the bodies of Jennifer Hiestrich, 17, her 15-year-old sister, Sarah, Eliza Thomas, 17, and Amy Ayers, 15. Each had been shot in the head, and the shop had been set on fire.

The lawsuit was filed by Austin attorney Jeff Rank on behalf of the families of the four victims. Rank declined to discuss the specifics of the lawsuit.

The suit alleges that the owners and managers of the store and shopping center should have increased security because of several crimes in the area and because the yogurt shop was open late and staffed by teen-aged girls.

"Other businesses within the shopping center had found it necessary to take such security measures as installing security cameras, hiring security guards (and installing burglar bars," the suit stated.

"We are not going to be making any comment on this," a Peter Foods spokeswoman said.

**Krewe of Aquarius "Broadway on Parade"** — The greatest free show in Texas. On February 13th, the Krewe of Aquarius will kick-off the festivities with the largest daytime parade of Mardi Gras 1993. Parade time will be 12 noon on beautiful Seawall Boulevard. The best way to enjoy the party is with plenty of good food. This year's Aquarius parade is brought to Galveston by Burger King of Galveston and Miller Lite. The parade route will travel along Seawall Boulevard from 14th Street to 57th Street. Following the Parade, there will be an awards ceremony with trophies for the winning entries at Stars on the Seawall. Judging will be held at Benno's on 25th and Seawall Boulevard. The parade will consist of 60-plus units with an abundance of souvenirs for the spectators. Remember, the best way to get a shower of beads, printed cups, doubloons and certificates is to yell out "Throw Me Something Mister." Thousands of coupon doubloons will be thrown by a multitude of collectible Miller Lite doubloons. The Aquarius parade is for young and old alike; come out and get in the spirit of Mardi Gras... it's exciting! Again, our special thanks to Diemut Distributing Miller Lite for being a major donor, and to Burger King, Galveston for being a major sponsor of the parade. Stock up on plenty of good food at Burger King on 61st Street and Burger King on Broadway. This year's event is going to be a **whopper!**

**On With The Show!**  
 Jim Manlove, M.C. for Mardi Gras Aquarius Ball, Sat., Jan. 30 at Hope Arena.

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 Deadline: Friday, Jan. 29!

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