

***"Prop 1 is Good for West Texas"****Contribution by State Representative Drew Darby*

I strongly urge you to support Proposition 1 to boost the safety and maintenance funding for our West Texas road infrastructure.

Proposition 1 is a provision on your November ballot to harness a portion of the surging oil and gas severance tax dollars for the next ten years and put those dollars towards the construction and maintenance of non-tolled roads across this state. If voters decide to approve this measure, the Texas Comptroller's office projects an estimated \$1.7 billion, the largest single cash infusion ever, will be deposited into the State Highway Fund this year. While at the same time, those remaining severance tax revenues will boost the Rainy Day Fund to a whopping \$8.4 billion balance, the largest in its 26-year history. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is instructed by state law to use those highway funds in an established formula to increase the safety, maintenance and congestion capacity of our entire state's non-tolled road system.

Your vote is needed to start putting our road funding back on a pay as you go system and turning away from more debt and toll roads. But the question still may be asked: "What is in Proposition 1 for a driver in West Texas?"

We have a daily reminder of the rapid increase in truck traffic, fatalities and greater wear and tear on your vehicle due to crumbling roads. West Texas has some of the most dangerous roads in America. The oil production in this region that has spurred this truck traffic is why the state now sees a benefit to the Rainy Day Fund and state coffers. Thanks to those expanded revenues, last session the legislature put an additional \$450 million directly into state and county roads in West and South Texas. But convincing urban legislators to invest back into the areas that are producing the state's bounty was not an easy task despite TxDOT estimates that this level of truck activity requires \$1 billion annually for structural and safety improvements to the roads. Proposition 1 is a reminder to those urban Texans that if you neglect the areas of the state producing this wealth, you jeopardize further tax revenue by making production too dangerous and costly.

Some elected officials are proposing to cut general sales tax revenues from schools and healthcare to fund roads. Some want all severance taxes to be saved in the Rainy Day Fund. Under the current Texas Constitution severance tax dollars that are removed from the economy in West Texas go to Austin to sit in an account; untouchable without a super majority of the legislature approving a withdrawal. Those same constitutional provisions also require the fund to remain in cash earning minimal interest. It is fiscally irresponsible to keep stuffing more money under this account mattress when road debt payments and neglected maintenance are consuming the TxDOT budget.

Still others say more debt is the solution but I have been firmly against it. Since 2001, the Legislature through voter approval has issued over \$17 billion in transportation debt rather than using traditional means for funding roads. Voter-authorized transportation debt is going to cost our children and grandchildren some \$31 billion in principle and interest to pay back.

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Prop 1 is not a fee or tax increase. It uses no new debt issuances or toll expansions. It utilizes the funds under the existing transportation formulas to meet the safety, maintenance and congestion needs of the entire state. While Proposition 1 does not fully meet the additional \$5 billion most say is needed to maintain the current safety, maintenance and congestion levels on the state's highways and farm to market roads, it is a great first step.

The second step will be for the legislature to pass a budget next session that completely removes the Department of Public Safety (DPS) from being funded by State Highway Fund dollars. Last session, I led an effort to restore \$200 million annually back to the Highway Fund by paying for DPS with general tax revenue. Completing that mission will require the remainder of DPS' budget along with portions of the budgets at the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Attorney General's office, the Comptroller's office and the Texas Department of Insurance, a little more than \$800 million a year, to be paid from sources outside of the Highway Fund. All told, your decision on Proposition 1 coupled with the legislature's action on ending diversions could bring \$2.5 billion a year in new and non-diverted revenues available in the State Highway Fund.

I strongly urge you to support Proposition 1 to help our state's road infrastructure keep up with the energy and population demands placed on it and to help protect the lives of West Texans. Early voting begins October 20th with Election Day on November 4th.

*Rep. Darby represents Texas House District 72, which is comprised of Coke, Concho, Glasscock, Howard, Irion, Reagan, Runnels, Sterling, and Tom Green Counties. In the previous 83rd Legislative Session, he served as Chairman of the House Redistricting Committee, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Natural Resources, Business and Economic Development, and Regulatory Articles and as a member of the House Higher Education Committee.*