

STATE QUESTIONS MAY SURPRISE SOME VOTERS

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Some voters may be surprised on Tuesday when they receive their general election ballot.

In addition to deciding races for national and state offices, voters will be asked to consider approving a total of six state questions, three related to property tax reform and three others that have garnered much less attention.

State Question 670 would increase the number of signatures mandated by the state constitution to call a grand jury. Under current law, the number of signatures on a grand jury petition must equal one percent of the population of the county with a minimum of

200 signatures being required and a maximum of 500.

Under the terms of the state question, the number of required signatures will be equal to the number of signatures required to propose legislation by an initiative petition at the county level with the minimum number of signatures increasing to 500 and the maximum number increasing to 5,000.

Additionally, the proposed constitutional amendment requires the legislature to enact laws to prevent corruption in making, filing, circulating and submitting petitions calling for a grand jury.

The proposal was placed on the ballot in 1996 by SB651, by Sen. Larry Dickerson, D-Poteau, and Rep. Mike Mass, D-Hartshorne.

Speaking on the floor of the Senate, Dickerson called the proposed requirements "reasonable," saying that if the need for a grand jury is real that the petition circulators should not have a problem obtaining the additional signatures. Additionally, he said, the proposal might serve as a deterrent to what might be frivolous efforts to convene grand juries.

State Question 671, which arose from HJR1010, by Rep. Betty Boyd, D-Tulsa, and Sen. Angela Monson, D-Tulsa, would amend the state constitution to allow multi-year contracts not to exceed three years for school superintendents. Currently, school districts are limited to one-year contracts with their superintendents.

The problem, Boyd said on the House floor, is that school districts run the risk of losing good superintendents when they can employ them for only one-year at a time. An extended contract, the Tulsa lawmaker said, would help ensure continuity and would give

districts a way to protect their employment of highly sought after superintendents.

State Question 674 would establish constitutional rights for the victims of crime and the family members of victims of crime, including:

- The right to know the status of prosecution and investigation;
- The right to know the location of the defendant from arrest through the serving of a sentence;
- The right to be present at proceedings where the defendant has a right to be present;
- The right to be informed when a defendant escapes or is released; and
- The right to be heard at sentencing and parole hearings.

The question also authorizes the legislature, or the people by initiative or referendum, to enact substantive or procedural laws to define, implement, preserve and protect the right guaranteed to victims by the constitutional amendment, including the authority to extend any of the rights to juvenile proceedings and, if enacted by the legislature, youthful offender proceedings.

Rep. Wayne Pettigrew, R-Edmond, and Sen. Brooks Douglass, R-Oklahoma City, proposed the question in SJR24.

Many of the provisions included in the questions, Douglass has said, resulted from his own experiences as a victim of crime. Douglass' parents were killed and he and his sister were shot during a 1979 burglary of his parents' home. One of the perpetrators of that attack, Steven Hatch, was executed earlier this year. Douglass witnessed the execution under the terms of another bill he authored.

Passage of the questions requires majority approval by the voters.

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dren and families.

- "Federal funding sources are typically viewed as the domain of the state agency through which they pass, resulting in a loss of federal tax revenues returned to the state.

- "Oklahoma has some cutting-edge initiatives," the report said, "but public agencies are not always involved in them.

- "Fragmentation of services at the local level results in inefficiencies. Families involved with more than one state agency" are sometimes "required to meet mandates of agencies that are duplicative" or conflicting."

RECOMMENDATIONS

To solve some of the problems keeping Oklahoma from utilizing more federal funds for children and youth, the plan recommends:

- "All interagency planning and collaboration efforts should be coordinated through a single body. . . which should spearhead the planning process for each interagency effort.

- "Oklahoma should encourage local planning, collaboration and integration efforts through flexible funding for children and families, rather than categorical funding tied to specific program models.

- "Contract funding across agencies could be merged into a single pot," with constraints on the funds set into the contract between state and regional or district entity, the report said.

The recommendations concluded with, "With one out of five Oklahoma children living in poverty, federal fund maximization should be vigorously pursued.

"In conclusion, there is significant room for maneuvering within the current managed care waivers."

TAX REFORM FILLS THREE BALLOT SLOTS

By Shawn Ashley
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■(GIT) Oklahoma voters will end 1996 much the same way they began it — Talking about and voting on property tax reform initiatives.

On Tuesday, voters will decide the fate of three state questions — 675, 676 and 677 — proposed by the legislature and designed to provide what many say is much need property tax relief.

The questions' proposal, contained in HB2198, by Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore and Sen. Don Williams, D-Balko, developed from a series of recommendations

made by the Citizens Task Force on Property Taxation. Created in 1995, the 30-member citizens task force met for nearly a year and formulated a series of recommendations for legislative consideration.

The questions' consideration by voters comes after a heated campaign over another property tax initiative, SQ669. The proposal, which would have rolled back property taxes to 1993 levels, was soundly defeated in all 77 Oklahoma counties, thanks in large part to an aggressive campaign against the measure by some business and industry leaders.

Eight months later, the two sides that

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