



Austin Landline Report November 2017

Early voting continues through Friday, November 3rd for the November 7th election for costate constitutional amendments. None of the proposed amendments have received any strong opposition. Various local jurisdictions have also placed bond proposals on the ballot.

Everyone in the state's political world seemed to be stunned when House Speaker Joe Straus announced that he would not seek re-election. That announcement triggered announcements of candidates for the speakership position, with many more sure to follow. There will also be a debate within the Republican caucus on whether or not its members should agree on a consensus Speaker candidate, thereby negating the participation of Democrats, who mostly supported Straus throughout his tenure. Any agreement to that effect within the caucus would have no legal status, however.

Another bit of surprising news right before press time was the announcement that U.S. Congressman from San Antonio Lamar Smith would not seek re-election. That announcement will also undoubtedly attract a slew of candidates and possible vacancies down the political food chain from office-holders who want a promotion.

On the Hurricane Harvey recovery front, despite their disagreements, Straus and Patrick issued similar interim charges for committees to review Hurricane Harvey disaster relief funding, spending and flood prevention - in addition to a review of the emergency response. Lawmakers continued to explore the practical impacts of Harvey last week.

The Texas Senate Finance Committee aired exasperation at the slow pace of recovery work and pressed state and federal officials to expand and accelerate their efforts, especially as it relates to housing displaced families and debris removal. Lawmakers at a conference explored the implications of Harvey for the physical and mental health of Texans, including attempting to gauge how much is yet unknown.

Last week, Congress and President Donald Trump enacted a \$36.5 billion emergency supplemental spending bill to aid Puerto Rico, Florida, Texas and areas hit by western wildfires. U.S. Senator John Cornyn obtained a commitment for funding for Texas when the next hurricane response bill is considered in November. Governor Abbott is pressing for an additional \$61 billion in federal recovery funds for Texas.