Texas Commission on Public School Finance testimony

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Our school finance system is due for some **renovations**!

But we need raw materials to get the job done.
Scrub tax code

Remove outmoded or wasteful exemptions

Example: “High-cost” natural gas special treatment

• Reduces tax rate based on drilling/completion costs

• Estimated value - $368 million in 2017 (Foundation School Fund receives 25%)
1989: exemption created when natural gas industry was weak and needed incentives to undertake higher-cost operations

2018: natural gas industry now strong, due to development of fracking, shale production

=> Incentive no longer needed.
Scrub tax code

Remove outmoded or wasteful exemptions

Another example:
Local Option Homestead Exemption (LOHE)

- Allows school districts to grant percentage homestead exemption (to 20%)
- Currently, state absorbs half of cost to Chapter 41 districts (under litigation)
- Estimated cost - $636 million in 2017
1981: property tax reform appraised all homes at full market value; exemption created to ease “sticker shock”

2018: exemption offered by fewer than 200 districts more than half of benefit goes to households >$147,000 income

=> Rationale for exemption no longer applicable
Example: Taxation of business and professional services

- Many business and professional services are not subject to the sales tax
- Estimated value - $3.4 billion in 2017 (health care excluded)

Examples:
- Legal services - $484 million
- Architectural, engineering services - $453 million
- Accounting, auditing services - $313 million
Modernize Sales Tax

1961: sales tax created, reflecting 20th Century manufacturing economy

2018: tax fails to reflect growth in 21st Century service economy

=> Renovation needed
Bring tax rates up to date

Example: Alcoholic beverages taxes

- Beer: 2017 revenue - $104 million ($6 per 31-gallon barrel)
- Liquor: 2017 revenue - $89 million ($2.40 per gallon)
- Wine: 2017 revenue - $16 million (20.4 cents per gallon if alcohol <14%)
- Malt liquor: 2017 revenue - $15 million (19.9 cents per gallon)

If taxes increased by 50%
=> potential revenue - $112 million
Bring tax rates up to date

1984: last increase in beer, liquor, wine, malt liquor tax rates (done as part of HB 72 school reforms)

2018: no adjustment for inflation since 1984
Another example: Gasoline/diesel tax

- Gasoline tax: 2017 revenue - $2.7 billion (20 cents per gallon)
- Diesel fuel tax: 2017 revenue - $857 million (20 cents per gallon)
- Total fuels taxes: 2017 revenue - $3.6 billion

If taxes increased by 50%

=> potential revenue - $1.8 billion
   (Available School Fund receives 25%)
Bring tax rates up to date

1991: last increase in gasoline, diesel tax rates (budget shortfall; Edgewood case response)

2018: no adjustment for inflation since 1991
All revenue estimates are for a one-year period.

All data is from Comptroller publications:

Field Guide to the Taxes of Texas, Dec. 2017

Tax Exemptions & Tax Incidence, Feb. 2017

Sources of Revenue 1972-2016, Jan. 2017

2017 Annual Cash Report