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## State: Lawmakers weighing impact of stimulus participation

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*Editor's note: This weekly report on the state legislature is compiled from daily informational reports supplied by Richard Lee and other sources.*

The state's portion of the economic stimulus bill signed Monday by President Barack Obama will be about \$17 billion, including about \$5 billion for Medicaid and almost \$4 billion for public and higher education.

State lawmakers are weighing the cost of participation in the stimulus, while many cities have projects ready to go that, if funded, could immediately add jobs to the economy.

"We need to be careful on how we use one-time funds, so that we're not painting ourselves into a deficit in 2011," Lt. Governor David Dewhurst told lawmakers this week during the 81st Texas Legislative Session.

He warns that some of the federal money could come with strings attached. Lawmakers will look further into the 1,100-page bill and consider how federal provisions could affect state policy.

Cities were invited to submit projects to the U.S. Conference of Mayors that reflected their unique local infrastructure needs, produced jobs for their residents, and contributed to future economic development. The projects have been compiled into a wish list, should federal funding be provided for projects.

Locally, Carrollton submitted three projects totaling \$14 million and Flower Mound submitted two totaling \$1.536 million to the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Dallas, Fort Worth and Irving all submitted in excess of \$1 billion in projects. The projects would all need federal approval to be funded before they could begin. Seventeen Metroplex cities submitted projects to the mayor's report.

Gov. Rick Perry reiterated this week that the weight of government on small business should be reduced. He noted his support for raising the business margins tax exemption to \$1 million and the need to continue investing in state incentive programs like the Texas Enterprise Fund (TEF) and the Texas Emerging Technology Fund (ETF).

"I think we can do more to make Texas the best option for companies that employ Texans, which should include taking a close look at the reformed business tax we implemented a few years ago," Perry said. "We need to do everything we can to reduce the weight of government so that employers can have the breathing room they need to make it through these uncertain economic times."

Keeping toll revenue dedicated to transportation is the aim of a constitutional amendment filed by Sen. Chris Harris (R-Arlington) and Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Plano).

Senate Joint Resolution 25 would protect current and future toll revenue for transportation

projects.

Currently, only taxes on motor fuels and lubricants, vehicle registrations and federal reimbursements under the state constitution are specifically dedicated to fund acquiring rights-of-way, constructing, maintaining, and policing public roadways.

A routine medical examination would include a blood test for HIV under a bill filed Tuesday by Sen. Rodney Harris (D-Houston).

Senate Bill 877 would require doctors to offer patients an HIV test. Patients would retain the option to decline the test. The cost of the test averages about \$25 and would be covered under the bill by existing health plans, as well as Medicare and Medicaid. Texas already requires testing for ingoing and outgoing inmates in Texas prisons, and for pregnant women.

More than 62,000 Texans are HIV positive. A disproportionate number of these cases occur among African-Americans, more than four times the infection rate among whites. Texas ranks fourth among states in the number of HIV cases.

Gov. Perry has requested the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) waive, or extend for 180 days, the deadline to file proof of loss requirements for flood insurance policyholders whose homes were damaged by Hurricane Ike. Proof of loss requirements were waived following Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

A bill creating a scholarship program for college students pursuing degrees in math and science is aimed at relieving the shortage of teachers qualified to teach secondary-level courses in those subjects.

Senate Bill 816, introduced by Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston) and Sen. Shapiro, would provide each recipient with an annual scholarship of up to \$5,000 for four years. Upon graduation, the graduate would be required to teach math or science for four years in underserved areas of the state.

High school science teachers' shortages have increased 80 percent since 2004. More than one-third of high school science teachers are not certified to teach science.

"For Texas to remain competitive in a global economy, we must provide our students with math and science teachers of the highest quality and strongest content knowledge," Shapiro said.

The Texas Classroom Teachers Association noted its support for the bill.

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