

Recent Texas Constitutional Amendment: Proposition 5 (2019)

In November of 2019, Texans approved Proposition 5, a constitutional amendment that would dedicate revenue generated from the existing sales tax on sporting goods to the Texas Parks Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission. This amendment aimed to solve a dire problem of underfinanced state parks and historic sites by not allowing the legislature to divert funds for purposes other than intended. Compared to some other amendments, Proposition 5 was small in light of the larger picture it held within state governance and resource management.

The amendment process for the Texas Constitution is very involved, requiring both legislative approval and public ratification. Proposition 5 started as House Joint Resolution 39, by Representative John Cyrier and Senator Lois Kolkhorst. The resolution was a result of the general concern about how state parks were being funded inconsistently, which had hindered maintenance and long-term planning. HJR 39 passed the Legislature with overwhelming bipartisan support. Supporters said state parks and historic sites are public resources that enhance tourism, preserve the environment, and build communities. They also said consistent funding would enable the department to better maintain and improve the facilities. Critics warned against dedicating funds in the constitution because they say it limits legislative budgeting flexibility.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the resolution passed both chambers of the Texas Legislature with the constitutionally required two-thirds majority. The bipartisan, broad support demonstrated the overwhelming agreement on preserving the appropriation of funds for state parks and historic sites.

After the Legislature approved it, Proposition 5 went to the November 2019 general election ballot. Public awareness campaigns were primarily conducted by advocacy groups like the Texas Coalition for State Parks, highlighting the amendment's potential benefits in preserving natural and historical resources.

Media attention and public debate focused on the desire to establish a reliable funding source for state parks and historic sites. Proponents framed the amendment as a way to preserve Texas's cultural and natural heritage, while opponents remained critical of the idea of constitutional earmarking. In the end, Proposition 5 received broad popular support, winning the approval of nearly 88% of the voters, among the highest rates of approval ever received by a constitutional amendment in Texas.

The ratification of Proposition 5 has brought both short-term and long-term effects on Texas governance and resource management. In the short term, this amendment ensured a steady revenue stream for TPWD and THC, thus enabling these agencies to address projects in dire need of both maintenance and development. For example, state parks that had been suffering due to deferred maintenance began to receive funding to improve infrastructure and enhance visitor experiences.

Long-term, Proposition 5 has helped in the long-term preservation of Texas's natural and historical resources, furthering environmental sustainability and cultural education. Economically, the amendment has helped tourism-a major industry in Texas-by keeping state parks and historic sites appealing to visitors. Politically, the success of Proposition 5 showed how effective bipartisan cooperation with public involvement can be in the constitutional reform process for an issue.

Proposition 5 was that kind of amendment that showed how particular amendments to the Texas Constitution would facilitate the resolution of vital questions of governance while allowing direct participation by the public in the legislature. With secured funding for state parks and historic sites, the amendment has significantly impacted resource management, tourism, and environmental protection in Texas. Less discussed, but very important to Texans, the overwhelming public support for Proposition 5 underlines how the proposition will help protect the state's natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

Works Cited

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