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Prop Q follows budget maneuvering

Experts say reclassifying recurring costs as ‘one-time’ expenses skirts accounting norms

By Chaya Tong
STAFF WRITER

Austin voters today will determine the fate of a controversial ballot measure called Proposition Q which would raise the city property tax rate by more than 20%. If approved, the new rate would be about 57 cents per \$100

of assessed property value, adding more than \$300 a year to the average homeowner’s tax bill. While the vast majority of Austin City Council — 10 out of 11 members — ultimately agreed on that rate, the American-Statesman has learned that the road to that decision and the resulting tax-rate election was bumpy and involved accounting

INSIDE
Abbott urges ‘no’ vote on Prop Q. **A2**

tricks that experts described as concerning or even unacceptable. “There are all sorts of ways to make the budget look better, or make it look like it’s carrying out your goals, and this is one way,” said Michael Granof, a professor emeritus in accounting at the University of Texas and for-

mer Governmental Accounting Standards Board member, regarding the city’s accounting method. “Those judgments can conceivably rise to the point where they are clearly deceptive.” Back in August, the question on Austin City Council’s mind was not whether it would raise property taxes but by how much. A hike larger than 3.5% would automatically trigger a tax-rate election under a 2019 state law that local officials have

blasted as one of the main reasons the city is in a budget crunch to begin with. A range of proposals were introduced with various factions emerging in the debate. Mayor Kirk Watson proposed a middle ground with a budget that would translate to an 8-cent hike to the tax rate for voters to approve. A major concern among the more fiscally conservative members was maintaining the **Budget continues on A2**

Retired military brass keeping quiet out of fear



Washington Post/Getty Images
Army Gen. Mark Milley, a former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, became a vocal critic of President Donald Trump.

Officers refrain from critical remarks amid threat of legal retribution

By Sig Christenson
STAFF WRITER

The Trump administration’s moves to prosecute the president’s political adversaries have had a chilling effect on one particular group of influential Americans: retired senior military officers. Generals, admirals and other top commanders no longer in uniform are worried the administration might pursue criminal charges, tax investigations or other legal retribution against them if they speak out against President Donald Trump. For that reason, many of them are staying silent, despite their vehement disagreement with some of Trump’s actions, including his use of military force to kill alleged drug traffickers in boats in the Caribbean and his deploy-



Getty Images file photo
Trump has publicly excoriated Milley, blaming him for the chaotic 2021 American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Milley was quoted as describing the president as “a total fascist” and “the most dangerous person to this country.”

ment of the National Guard to cities and states led by Democrats. “The Trump administration is using the law as a weapon to go after its enemies, exact revenge and suppress dissent,” said Frank Kendall, who was secretary of the Air Force under President Joe Biden and has been sharply critical of Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. “James Comey and Letitia James are good examples,” Kendall said. “There’s no reason to think they won’t do the same to retired generals in civil or military courts.” Comey is the former FBI director whom Trump blames for pursuing an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, a controversy that dominated Trump’s first term. James is the New **Military continues on A4**

Special districts drive up tax bills

MUDs, others spread in fast-growing state

By Megan Kimble
and Benjamin Wermund
STAFF WRITERS

Gov. Greg Abbott recently told a room of GOP faithful that he is determined to stop cities and counties from raising property taxes, slamming Austin for proposing a rate hike to raise \$110 million to spend on parks, public safety and social services. “Do you think they’re spending your money in the rightful, conservative, judicious way right now?” Abbott said. “Of course not. What they need to do is start cutting what they’re spending, as opposed to continuing to raise your taxes.” It’s a pitch the Republican governor has rolled out often as he gears up to run for a record **Tax continues on A5**

SNAP to be partially funded in November

By Geoff Mulvihill
and Kimberlee Kruesi
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — President Donald Trump’s administration said Monday that it will partially fund SNAP for November, after two judges issued rulings requiring the government to keep the nation’s largest food aid program running. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, had planned to freeze payments starting Nov. 1 because it said it could no longer keep funding it during the federal government shutdown. The program serves about 1 in 8 **SNAP continues on A3**

