

# Property tax measure for seniors sails through

## Measure will reduce limit on school property taxes

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**Texans overwhelmingly voted Saturday to lower school property taxes by one-third for homeowners who are 65 or older or who get federal disability payments.**

The proposed constitutional amendment will give those homeowners a one-third reduction in the cap on the school property taxes they pay on their homesteads. It comes a year after lawmakers approved a one-third cut in the school property tax rates for other property and business owners. Most of that cut won't take effect until later this year.

School tax payments for seniors and people with disabilities are capped by a provision in the Constitution, so it takes a voter-approved amendment to give them a proportional reduction.

Nearly nine of 10 Texans who voted before election day backed the proposal. Incomplete returns from election day also showed widespread support.

Despite low turnout statewide Saturday, voting was brisk at a polling place in Sun City Texas, a community near Georgetown for residents 55 and older.

Audrey McDonald, elections judge for Williamson County Precinct 381, said voting was steady most of the day at the polling place — a spot in the city's clubhouse. It was probably more hectic than in previous local elections, she said.

"(The amendment) is the focal point and what's pulling people out," McDonald said. "They are concerned, and it affects them more than the rest of the population."

Gail Cotteleer, a 66-year-old Sun City resident, said the measure had her support.

"I'm on a fixed income, and it would help me a great deal," she said. "I thought it was very unfair we weren't given the break when everyone else got it."

Bill and Rita Enlow voted differently from one another on the proposed amendment.

"Young people have to carry too big of a load," Bill Enlow said. "I think older, wealthy people need to be paying their full share."

But Rita Enlow said, "I think there are a lot of elderly people living on Social Security and need the help they can get."

The constitutional ceiling is designed to prevent people who do not have growing incomes from being forced from their homes by rising taxes as their appraisals and tax rates increase.

Texans usually vote on constitutional amendments in November, but lawmakers scheduled the May referendum so seniors' taxes would decrease when the bulk of the tax cut takes effect for everyone else this year. Most of them already missed the first round of tax cuts because lawmakers could not schedule a vote before current tax rates were set.

Property owners who do not benefit from the amendment probably will see their tax payments inch back up as appraisals increase and as local school boards and voters raise tax rates.

The state would replace the money that school districts would lose from the seniors' tax cut, which is estimated at about \$775 million over five years.

The measure setting Saturday's vote sailed easily through the Legislature.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**