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Key To Increasing Voter Engagement is Ending Dog Days of Summer Elections

*Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform takes testimony on increasing voter participation
"If you want higher mid term election turnout end summer election distractions"*

Austin - The Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform has been charged by Lt. Governor Dan Patrick to recommend ways to enhance voter engagement in local government decisions around budget and property tax rates. A recent study discussed in the Houston Chronicle (<https://bit.ly/2PQxQFX>) argued that Texas ranked last in the nation in voter turnout. Attached data that the committee analyzed highlighted that in Texas urban counties (Travis, Bexar, Dallas, Tarrant) the Democratic Primary is the high water mark for voter turnout. Multiple different things were discussed, including adding simplicity to the process, the role of personal responsibility, and ending dog days of summer special elections. In one case an election had only 1% turnout. Chairman Bettencourt noted, **"The only thing less than 1 is 0."**

"If you want to increase election turnout then end the distraction of elections in the dog days of the summer," said Chairman Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston). **"The committee heard person after person testify that the answer is holding one election in November."**

After an excellent presentation by Sam Taylor, the Communications Director for the Texas Secretary of State, of everything that they are doing to increase voter participation, Chairman Bettencourt asked a simple question: **"Are summer elections low turnout elections...yes or no?"** Mr. Taylor responded, **"Absolutely (yes)."**

Senator Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville) told a poignant story during the hearing about the importance that his father placed on voting and how that impacted his own life. In one particular story he told of missing voting in an election due to a bus being late as part of a school event, and that he was so embarrassed by the fact that he did not vote it was several days before he could face his father. **"One of the greatest rights and responsibilities is voting,"** added Senator Lucio.

Another witness recalled a story of working in the garden with his grandfather and being told, **"you always vote."** When he asked why it was so important to cast your vote he was told, **"Because men died so that you would have the right to do so."** Well spoken from someone who lived in the "American century".

"Rather than fatigue voters with multiple special elections, we should encourage voter participation in our traditional November elections, where voters are used to voting, to ensure the public has an opportunity to evaluate and decide on these questions," concluded Chairman Bettencourt. **"A study of 4 years by the committee showed the average November election from 2012-2016 had a 34.31% turnout and the primaries discussed only a 9.61% turnout, roughly 3.5 times higher."** (chart attached)

Chairman Bettencourt has previously pledged to file legislation that will require property tax elections to be on the November General Election ballot and the committee is working on several proposals for 2019.

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