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Governor Counsels Well on Spending

Governor Shivers, in his message to the Texas Legislature Thursday, emphasized properly the necessity for restraints on state spending while the nation is forging into a defense emergency of tremendous cost and prolonged duration. Particularly impressive was his counsel for state economy wherever possible.

At the same time, the chief executive recognized the practical requirement of additional taxes, if primary services are to maintain the level set by the preceding Legislature. Mr. Shivers correctly stated that the size of the state tax bill will depend on appropriations for state departments, the public schools and colleges, state hospitals and special schools, the prison system, welfare, highways and civil defense.

At this point, the governor pointed also to the fields for economy that would be consistent with the present world crisis. He cited specifically the increased spending for public school and higher education, and raised the pertinent question as to whether "we are substituting quantity for quality" in those fields. In these times, all inessentials and deferrables should be eliminated from functions supported by state government.

Additional taxes, equitably spread, are logical because the previous Legislature provided for recurring costs from a general fund surplus that is about gone. The extravagance rests on that assembly, but this should not mean that the door to reasonable retrenchment has been closed. We must test what we want from state government by our ability to pay for it, while we are being taxed heavily for national defense.

Governor Shivers would not cripple these essential functions of state government. In general terms, he called for

drastic reduction or elimination of every state project not necessary to building a strong, sound home front. One arbitrary restraint will come from the shortage of materials and manpower incident to defense.

A new item of state cost, submitted by the governor, was provision for civil defense, for which Congress has already made appropriation of federal aid. The governor would earmark the slender balance in the state general fund for this purpose. Presumably there will be something left in that fund by the opening of the next biennium in the fall. The governor also alluded to the impact of inflation on state salaries and deficiencies in the state probation system.

In the sphere of reform, Mr. Shivers listed such problems as redistricting; revision of election, water, criminal and insurance laws; stronger efforts for congressional action "to return our confiscated tidelands;" research for secondary recovery of oil; four-year terms for state and local officials, and enforceable controls of Communist Party activity. He would continue the state rural road program initiated by the previous Legislature, with money derived from the highway fund and not from general revenue.

It would be a mistake for the Legislature to warp the governor's message as an appeal only to "hold the line" on all state spending fronts. Pressure groups, which improvidently and selfishly brought about the state's financial predicament at the last session of the Legislature, should recognize the compulsions of changed times. When we all must tighten our belts for national security and survival, state government should do likewise. This part of the governor's message faces the world crisis squarely.