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## The Pennsylvania Legislature should heal itself

By **Antony Davies & James R. Harrigan**

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Pennsylvania's House of Representatives recently voted to begin the lengthy process to reduce its size, which at 253 members is the second largest in the nation. This would be a good time to ask what we are — or are not — getting for our money.

Government is so entwined in our daily lives that it is nearly impossible to determine its worth relative to its cost. But a revealing approach is to compare Pennsylvania's Legislature with the Texas Legislature.

Almost everything is bigger in Texas. Geographically, Texas is almost six times the size of Pennsylvania. Its economy is more than twice as large as Pennsylvania's and is growing at more than twice the rate.

Texas has more than twice our population, almost seven times our road mileage, four times the number of counties and three times the number of public schools.

But Texas has only 181 state legislators. And as shocking as that might be, it barely scratches the surface of the difference.

Unlike the Pennsylvania Legislature, which is in session 23 out of every 24 months, Texas' 181 legislators are in session for only 140 days — every other year. In other words, Texas has the equivalent of less than 40 full-time legislators.

And if Texans can manage a state that is far bigger than Pennsylvania by employing the equivalent of just 40 full-time legislators why are Pennsylvanians paying 253 people, not to mention their staffs?

Pennsylvania legislators are paid, on average, around \$80,000 a year, which is more than four times what their Texas counterparts are paid. Add in state-paid benefits and Pennsylvania taxpayers end up shelling out well over \$100,000 per year per legislator. According to the Commonwealth Foundation, reducing our Legislature by the proposed 50 House members and a dozen senators would save the average Pennsylvania household \$40 per year in taxes. And reducing the size of the Legislature also would reduce the size of the legislative staff, which, at 3,000 people, is the largest among the 50 states. But this is peanuts.

The real savings come in reducing state government's very ability to legislate. Reducing the number of legislators is a good first step. The obvious second step is to address how often they are in session. With fewer legislators in session for less time, our politicians would be forced to concentrate their limited time on governance that matters rather than on governance that micromanages our lives.

We should reduce the size of our Legislature, not by 62 seats, but to 62 seats. On a per-capita basis, our Legislature still would be three times the size of Texas' Legislature. But with a change like this, we could answer the original question — "What are we getting for our money?" — with the best answer of all: a pretty good deal.

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