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Texas comptroller eases estimate of state cost to address Harvey damage

By **Peggy Fikac** Updated 4:39 pm, Friday, December 1, 2017

AUSTIN — Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar, who initially estimated the state would have to spend **at least \$2 billion** to address Harvey-related damage when lawmakers next meet in regular session, said Friday that the tab looks to be a smaller \$1.5 billion.

Hegar, who cited the figure during a speech at the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association annual meeting, said afterward that the change is due partly to costs for public schools coming in lower than first anticipated.

But that doesn't mean lawmakers can breathe easy when they return in regular session in January 2019.

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They're expected to have to cover \$2 billion in additional Medicaid costs, plus make up \$563 million funds allocated for public education and retired teachers' health-related costs.

That adds up to \$4 billion before lawmakers start addressing other needs in the next two-year budget in 2019, Hegar said.

Lawmakers' spending flexibility also is limited by past decisions to cut taxes and voter-approved propositions allocating billions of dollars directly to transportation that otherwise would be available for general spending.

The state share of the cost is far from the total expense of addressing the devastation wrought by Harvey, which Gov. Greg Abbott has put at \$180 billion. Billions of dollars have been approved in federal aid, but state officials are pressing for more, calling the effort so far insufficient.

pfikac@express-news.net | Twitter: @pfikac

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