

TEXAS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE 1/24/2017

BUDGET

Despite all of the bathroom talk dominating the news, and, as you probably know by now, the only bill that must be passed each legislative session is the budget. Starting out, the House and the Senate revealed their base budget proposals last week, and they are starting very far apart - \$5.3 billion in spending, with the House having the higher amount. The House built in funding they must provide, i.e., \$1.2 billion for Medicaid just to complete the current fiscal year. The Senate did not include this amount. The House also increased funding for public education and higher education. In contrast, the Senate requires a 1.5% across-the-board cut to all items except the Foundation School Program.

The House put an additional \$1.5 billion more in public education above the increase that will be required for enrollment growth and formula spending. In a speech to the Texas Association of Business members, Speaker Straus noted that the additional \$1.5 billion will only be spent if there is agreement on revisions to the way we fund schools. He noted that the Robin Hood school funding plan worked well when the program started but that it has become so big it picks up school districts like Houston ISD and no longer serves its original purpose. Lt. Gov. Patrick agrees that something needs to be done with school finance but thinks the issue is too big to tackle during a regular session.

Both bills include increases for Child Protective Services, but neither bill addresses the shortfall of \$1.3 billion in the Teacher Retirement System, the health care program for retired teachers. Neither budget fully funds the Medicaid program for the upcoming two years.

Obviously, much work remains to be done. Each House must rework the proposed budget in their respective committees (House Appropriations and Senate Finance), pass their own budget from their own chamber, then appoint a conference committee with 10 members to hammer out the differences and find a compromise. While it may switch sides, and the two proposed budgets some years are closer in overall spending than in others, former Appropriations Chairman Rob Junell used to say there is always one side that files a “Cadillac” budget and one side that files the “farm pickup budget” with no extra bells and whistles. In the end only one state budget is passed.

SENATE COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Also, last week, Lt. Gov. Patrick announced the Senate Committee assignments for the 85th Legislative Session. Most committees remained the same. The one exception was appointing Sen. Lois Kolkhorst as Chairman of the Senate Administration Committee. She is the first female senator to chair the committee that handles administrative matters for the upper chamber. The complete list of Senate committees and membership is listed below:

<p>Administration: Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) Chair Sen. Konni Burton (R-Colleyville) Vice Chair Sen. Dan Huffines (R- Dallas) Sen. Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola) Sen. Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville) Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas) Sen. Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo)</p>	<p>Agriculture, Water & Rural Affairs: Sen. Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) Chair Sen. José Rodríguez (D-El Paso) Vice Chair Sen. Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe) Sen. Bob Hall (R-Canton) Sen. Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (D-McAllen) Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) Sen. Borris Miles (D-Houston)</p>	<p>Business & Commerce: Sen. Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) Chair Sen. Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe) Vice Chair Sen. Donna Campbell (R-New Braunfels) Sen. Craig Estes (R-Wichita Falls) Sen. Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville) Sen. Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) Sen. Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) Sen. John Whitmire (D-Houston) Sen. Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo)</p>
<p>Criminal Justice: Sen. John Whitmire (D-Houston) Chair Sen. Joan Huffman (R-Houston) Vice Chair Sen. Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury) Sen. Konni Burton (R-Colleyville) Sen. Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe)</p>	<p>Education: Sen. Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) Chair Sen. Eddie Lucio, III (D-Brownsville) Vice Chair Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) Sen. Donna Campbell (R-New Braunfels)</p>	<p>Finance: Sen. Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) Chair Sen. Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (D-McAllen) Vice-Chair Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) Sen. Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury)</p>

<p>Sen. Sylvia Garcia (D- Houston) Sen Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola) Sen. José Menéndez (D-San Antonio) Sen. Charles Perry (R-Lubbock)</p>	<p>Sen. Bob Hall (R-Canton) Sen. Don Huffines (R-Dallas) Sen. Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola) Sen. José Menéndez (D-San Antonio) Sen. Charles Perry (R-Lubbock)</p>	<p>Sen. Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) Sen. Joan Huffman (D-Houston) Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) Sen. Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville) Sen. Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) Sen. Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo) Sen. Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) Sen. Carlos Uresti (D-San Antonio) Sen. Kirk Watson (D-Austin) Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas) Sen. John Whitmire (D-Houston)</p>
<p>Health & Human Services Sen. Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) Chair Sen. Carlos Uresti (D-San Antonio) Vice Chair Sen. Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway) Sen. Konni Burton (R-Colleyville) Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) Sen. Borris Miles (D-Houston) Sen. Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) Sen. Van Taylor (R-Plano) Sen. Kirk Watson (D-Austin)</p>	<p>Higher Education Sen. Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo) Chair Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas) Vice Chair Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) Sen. Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway) Sen. José Menéndez (D-San Antonio) Sen. Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) Sen. Kirk Watson (D-Austin)</p>	<p>Intergovernmental Relations Sen. Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville) Chair Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) Vice Chair Sen. Donna Campbell (R-New Braunfels) Sen. Sylvia Garcia (D- Houston) Sen. Don Huffines (R-Dallas) Sen. José Menéndez (D-San Antonio) Sen. Van Taylor (R-Plano)</p>
<p>Natural Resources & Economic Development: Sen. Craig Estes R-Wichita Falls) Chair Sen. Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo) Sen. Konni Burton (R-Colleyville) Sen. Sylvia Garcia (D- Houston) Sen. Don Huffines (R-Dallas) Sen. Jose Menendez (D-San Antonio) Sen. Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo) Sen. Van Taylor (R-Plano)</p>	<p>Nominations: Sen. Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury) Chair Sen. Kirk Watson (D-Austin) Vice Chair Sen. Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway) Sen. Craig Estes (R-Wichita Falls) Sen. José Menéndez (D-San Antonio) Sen. Borris Miles (D-Houston) Sen. Van Taylor (R-Houston)</p>	<p>State Affairs: Sen. Joan Huffman (R-Houston) Sen. Bryan Hughes (R- Sen. Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury) Sen. Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe) Sen. Craig Estes (R-Wichita Falls) Sen. Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville) Sen. Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) Sen. Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) Sen. Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo)</p>
<p>Transportation: Sen. Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville) Chair Sen. Bob Hall (R-Canton) Vice Chair Sen. Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe) Sen. Sylvia Garcia (D-Houston) Sen. Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) Sen. Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (D-McAllen) Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) Sen. Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) Sen. José Rodríguez (D-El Paso)</p>	<p>Veteran’s Affairs & Border Security: Sen. Donna Campbell (R-New Braunfels) Chair Sen. Don Huffines (R-Dallas) Vice Chair Sen. Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway) Sen. Bob Hall (R-Canton) Sen. Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville) Sen. José Rodríguez (D-El Paso) Sen. Carlos Uresti (D-San Antonio)</p>	

We will provide House committee assignments once Speaker Straus announces them.