

ANGIE CHEN BUTTON



The State of Texas
House of Representatives



March 18, 2011

Voter I.D. Legislation

I am a proud co-sponsor of S.B. 14 which would require Photo I.D. in order to cast a vote in Texas. On Monday, the House is expected to take up this legislation. You can take a look at the version that passed out of the Senate earlier this session by visiting <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/MnuSearch.aspx>.

Public Education

This week, the Public Education Committee discussed H.B. 400 by Chairman Eissler. This bill attempts to give local school districts additional flexibility and tools to improve efficiency and better serve Texas students by allowing teacher contract non-renewal notice to occur on the last day of school instead of 45 days prior to the last day of instruction. Additionally, it allows for reductions in force for budgetary reasons to be conducted through the less costly non-renewal process instead of the very costly termination process. Although this legislation maintains the 180 instructional day requirement, it allows flexibility so that professional development days are negotiated locally in teacher contracts.

H.B. 400 would repeal the state mandated teacher salary schedule and require school districts to adopt a local strategic compensation plan, with teacher input, designed to recruit, reward, and retain effective teachers. The bill proposes other cost saving measures by allowing certain required newspaper hearing notices to be posted electronically and to allow school districts conducting a November election to pay only a proportionate share of the associated costs. Another aspect of Chairman Eissler's bill would allow districts to maintain a district-wide average of 22:1 with a cap of 25 students per class in Kindergarten-Grade 4. Currently, classroom sizes are capped at 22.

I would appreciate parents, teachers, students, and all tax payers contacting me with ways this proposed legislation would impact you.

Budget Recap

This week, the Governor, State Comptroller, and House Speaker announced a plan to withdraw up to \$3.2 billion from the state's Economic Stabilization Fund (Rainy Day Fund) to help cover the approximately \$4.3 billion deficit Texas faces this current biennium. I, and many of my

colleagues, have been working around the clock to identify cuts that we can make now to close as much of the gap as possible. We have already identified ways to reduce spending for the remaining biennium by approximately \$1 billion. As of now, the state basically has to come up with an additional \$3.2 billion before August 31, 2011.

For those of you who are not familiar with the Rainy Day Fund, in 1988 voters approved its creation by amending the Texas Constitution. Severance tax revenue from natural gas and oil production, as well as surpluses in general revenue, supply the fund. According to the Texas Constitution, this money may be used to "prevent or eliminate a temporary cash deficiency in general revenue." Many believe that is exactly what we are facing now. If the fund is to be used it will have to be approved by two-thirds of the members of the Texas House. This happened in 2003, as well as in 2005, when the Legislature passed and the governor signed bills that authorized spending billions from the fund.

In August, Texas will owe nearly \$3 billion in state employee salaries and payments for Medicaid-type assistance, and \$1.5 billion to the Foundation School Program, which is the main program for funding local schools. Although we are working to get as close as possible, no amount of budget cuts will generate this much money in five months without major negative long-term impacts. Either we access part of the \$9.4 billion in already-collected revenue that is in the Rainy Day Fund, or we do not pay our bills on time.

This year's budget deficit was the result of an economic downturn in which the state did not generate as much revenue as expected. As a result, we do not have enough money to pay the bills that will be due in August. However, this is NOT the case for the \$13 billion shortfall projected over the next two years. I do not believe we should deplete the Rainy Day Fund just to keep spending as the state has in the past. Balancing the budget for the next biennium should be achieved by reducing spending. These are your tax dollars. I would love to hear from you on how you would like them spent.

Friendly Faces from Home



Elizabeth and Rita Sheldon, both students in Richardson, served as Honorary Pages of the Day at the Capitol on Tuesday. As pages, they were able to witness their state government at work from the floor of the House. Also pictured is their mother Charlotte.



This week was the University of Texas at Dallas' spring break. I had the pleasure of meeting with this group of UTD students that opted for an "alternative spring break," in which they traveled to Austin to learn about and advocate on poverty issues.

It is an honor to serve as your State Representative. Please continue to communicate your views on issues that are important to you.

Sincerely,

Angie Chen Button

If you would like to be added or removed from this mailing, please e-mail District112.Button@house.state.tx.us.