

ANGIE CHEN BUTTON



The State of Texas
House of Representatives



May 24, 2013

Friends,

On Monday, the House will adjourn Sine Die. This session's budget negotiations have been particularly tumultuous, but after many long hours and a great deal of hard work, the conference committee responsible for reconciling the differences between the House and Senate versions of the budget reached an agreement. This delicate agreement that was reached in SB 1, is largely contingent on the passage of three other pieces of legislation: SB 7, HB 1025, and SJR 1.

SB 1 - The Budget Bill

The budget that the conference committee has signed off on appropriates approximately \$94.6 billion from available resources within General Revenue and budgets for \$1 billion in tax relief for Texans. I am very pleased to say that this budget reduces the amount of GR-Dedicated funds diverted for certification by more than \$800 million.

SB 1 makes great strides in funding public education by fully funding enrollment growth and appropriating an additional \$3.4 billion increase for the Foundation School Program. The Teacher Retirement System was strengthened with \$530 million. Because of new Medicaid cost-containment initiatives, this budget reflects a \$400 million savings and allocates needed revenue for the Inspector General to increase identification of waste, fraud, and abuse in the Medicaid program.

The budget should make its way back to the House floor tomorrow where the House will debate the budget prior to voting on the committee report.

HB 1025 - Supplemental Appropriations Bill

Wednesday, the Senate passed HB 1025, a supplemental appropriations bill that the Senate amended to include accessing the Rainy Day Fund for \$2 billion for water infrastructure projects and \$185 million to cover costs related to the 2011 wildfires. Additionally, the bill uses \$1.75 billion from the fund to balance out some of the methods we had to use during last session's budget shortfall. Based on current projections, this will leave approximately \$8 billion in the

Rainy Day Fund in the next biennium. Although most of the items in HB 1025 were agreed to by both chambers, there are still points of contention, and the House rejected the Senate's version and is now in conference committee.

SJR 1-The Water Fund

Also on Wednesday, the House passed SJR 1. This legislation proposes a constitutional amendment establishing the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT) and State Water Implementation Revenue Fund for Texas (SWIRFT) as constitutionally dedicated funds inside the state treasury but outside of General Revenue.

SJR 1 does not appropriate money from the Rainy Day Fund, nor does it allow unlimited appropriations of Rainy Day Fund dollars. The actual appropriation from the Rainy Day Fund to fund the water plan has been proposed in HB 1025. Additionally, SJR 1 dedicates Rainy Day Funds placed in the SWIFT for purposes of the constitutional spending limit.

Voters will have the opportunity to approve or reject this proposal in November. If it is approved and HB 1025 passes, \$2 billion from the Rainy Day Fund will be moved to fund the State Water Plan.

SB 7 - Medicaid Reform

Senate Bill 7 was heard on the floor of the House on Tuesday. SB 7 seeks to reform Texas' Medicaid system to increase efficiency. It allows for the creation of pilot programs to test different strategies aiming to coordinate long term and acute care services. Some of these programs include emphasizing the usage of private providers to lead the reforms. Long-term care service for intellectually and developmentally disabled patients will also be redesigned. Among the bill's many provisions that seek to increase the efficiency of our Medicaid system, SB 7 requires the Health and Human Services Commission to help design a quality based payment system for Medicaid that will save taxpayers \$6 million through 2015 by making the system more effective and economical. Since Medicaid is already pulling a quarter of the state's budget, reforming this system is a top priority for our state. Through its usage of pilot programs and efficiency standards, SB 7 helps move us in the right direction. In the House, we added an amendment to the bill preventing the state from ever expanding Medicaid without legislative approval. SB 7 passed the House on Tuesday and is now in conference committee so that amendment differences between the House and the Senate versions can be reconciled.



Discussing legislation with Representative Dwayne Bohac of Houston.

HB 2414 - Updating the Open Meetings Act

Yesterday, the Texas House gave its final approval for HB 2414 which I authored to update the Open Meetings Act to reflect advancements in technology. This bill allows members of a governmental body to participate in open meetings via videoconference. This provision stands to save taxpayer dollars as boards and commissions that have members across the state will not have to spend money for every member to travel to every meeting. This bill is strictly permissive and if entities choose to incorporate videoconferencing, they must broadcast the call at the meeting so that the public may participate. The bill includes provisions to expand the Texas Open Meetings Act by allowing governmental bodies to use a publicly viewable electronic communications board through which board members can communicate with each other, thereby facilitating electronic communications between board members while still protecting the public's interest in open and transparent government. This bill is on its way to the Governor's desk.

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 Angie.Button@house.state.tx.us.