

ANGIE CHEN BUTTON



The State of Texas
House of Representatives



May 29, 2015

Friends,

The legislative session will end on Monday. After five very productive months, I'm looking forward to spending more time in House District 112.

In the next couple of days, the House and Senate will put the finishing touches on some issues that matter a great deal to our community and our state. I'm very confident that, when Monday arrives, we will bring this session to a successful close.

Responsible Budgeting

Earlier today, the House gave final approval to HB 1, a balanced and disciplined state budget for the next two years. The budget now heads to Governor Greg Abbott's desk.

The \$209 billion budget represents growth of 3.6 percent in All Funds, or less than 2 percent per year, and it stays beneath the spending limit in the state Constitution. While restraining overall spending, it prioritizes education, transportation and border security. It also reflects the House's considerable efforts to increase transparency and accountability in state spending.

Highlights of HB 1:

Education: The bill pays for an increase of roughly 80,000 students per year in the state's overall public school enrollment. On top of that investment, it provides an additional \$1.5 billion for public education. The budget also provides more resources for higher education.

Transportation: Reversing a decades-old practice, the budget uses all of the money in the State Highway Fund for transportation instead of using some of those dollars for other programs.

Transparency: In addition to using all of the State Highway Fund revenue for transportation, the budget takes a number of other steps to use taxes and fees for their intended purpose. Using more

revenue as intended allows HB 1 to provide additional resources for hospital trauma care, state parks and other priorities.

Border Security: HB 1 provides \$840 million in All Funds for border security. That investment will allow for the hiring of 250 new Department of Public Safety troopers and allow a 50-hour work week for all troopers. It will also fund the implementation of HB 11, which will bring consistency to the state's border security strategy.

Long-Term Obligations: The budget provides funding to address a shortfall in retired teachers' health care and to address the solvency of the state employee pension system.

Mental Health: The budget increases funding for behavioral health and substance abuse services by \$151 million, providing additional resources for both inpatient and outpatient services.

House Passes Campus Carry

Earlier this week, the House passed SB 11, which authorizes a concealed handgun license holder to carry a concealed handgun while on a college campus. SB 11 allows for universities to establish rules, regulations, or other provisions concerning the storage of handguns in dorms or other residential facilities owned or operated by the university. To be eligible for a concealed handgun license in the state of Texas, citizens must pass state and federal background checks, pass both an educational course and shooting proficiency test, and be over the age of 21.

Supporting our Veterans

The Hazlewood Act was instituted in 2009 and it allows Texas veterans to apply their college tuition hours to their children at public Texas universities. I am proud to say that the House replaced the version of SB 1735 that would have removed this ability, and in its place, has added a stipulation that veterans have to be residents in Texas for at least 8 years before accessing that benefit. The legislation is currently in a conference committee ironing out the differences between the House and Senate versions and will head back to each respective chamber for final approval.



Speaking with my Richardson colleague, Rep. Linda Koop

Merging State Health Agencies

This week, the House also passed SB 200 which starts the gradual process of merging three of our five state health agencies into one. This merger will greatly improve efficiency and communication while also reducing the division of labor within those agencies and providing a clear chain of leadership for our state health agency. The bill has passed the Senate with corrections, and will now head to the Governor's desk for his signature.

Limiting the Growth of State Spending

SB 9 would establish additional statutory spending limits to help ensure fiscally responsible spending by the legislature. While overall state spending currently is limited by a provision in the state Constitution, that limit is only one measure that should be used to craft the state's budget. The bill would not replace the current limit, only supplement it with a more detailed way of limiting state spending. Both measures would work together to make state budgeting more transparent.

Under the current constitutional cap, state spending not constitutionally dedicated to particular purposes cannot increase from one biennium to the next beyond the growth rate in statewide personal income adopted by the Legislative Budget Board unless the cap is waived by a majority vote of both chambers of the legislature. However, the current spending cap can result in a restriction that does not indicate what limits should be used for individual budget categories; therefore, setting a limit that may not be appropriate. Further spending limits based on a larger portion of state revenue and individual categories of spending should be applied to the budget process, which will be accomplished with the passage of this bill.

Although the current overall cap is based on income growth, it will be helpful to have supplemental caps based on other measures. The bill would provide this type of information by

basing the caps in individual categories on population growth and inflation for goods and services in that specific category.

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.