



State Representative Lyle Larson
TX HD-122

03.01.2011

Weekly Recap #7

What's new in District 122

Last week was quite hectic here in E2.816 and around the Capitol. Both of the committees I serve on, Natural Resources and Culture, Recreation and Tourism, met for the first time last week. With issues ranging from BexarMet to groundwater ownership to addressing issues related to several of our parks and historic sites, we'll certainly have our hands full with committee work. Additionally, the redistricting process is already underway. Several public hearings are scheduled this month to discuss U.S. Congressional, SBOE and Texas House Districts.

Truth in Budgeting - Texas Parks and Wildlife

For the second installment of our Truth in Budgeting discussion, I'd like to share with you my thoughts on diversions from another dedicated revenue source, the Sporting Goods Sales Tax.

As we've discussed previously, when the Legislature decides to impose a new tax or fee, it's often sold to Texans based on what specific purpose it will be used for. Unfortunately, much of the revenue raised from these dedicated sources ends up being used to fund items that have nothing to do with the original purpose of the fee. The Legislature collects revenue from many different sources, from custom license plates to solid waste disposal fees, and almost every source is dedicated to a specific purpose. Currently, the state collects a tax from the sale of all sporting goods in Texas. The revenue is supposed to fund functions of the Texas Parks and Wildlife. Unfortunately, as you've probably guessed by now, a very small percentage of this money actually funds this agency and as a result, many of our state parks are in dire need of maintenance.

As an avid hunter and fisherman, I have always been passionate about the outdoors. Maintaining our parks system should be quite simple, as the state levies a tax on sporting

goods that was meant to support the function of the Texas Parks and Wildlife. Unfortunately, just as the Legislature has diverted money from the state highway fund (Fund 006) for decades, they've done the same with the Sporting Goods Sales Tax.

HB 1, the initial budget draft, provides a grim picture of the future for our state parks. Due to the budget shortfall, the following cuts are enumerated in the budget bill:

- Elimination of 20 parks law enforcement officers
- Transfer of 7 state parks to local governments
- Closure of 2 parks regional offices
- Elimination of all local parks grants
- Elimination of all new capital construction and repairs until 2013
- Deferral of programs including the Game Warden Training Academy, the Public Hunting Program and various outreach and education programs
- A 15 percent cut in Texas Parks and Wildlife administration, which amounts to \$4.2 million in cuts equaling 65 full time employees.

Continuing our quest to restore truth in budgeting, and in an attempt to halt the funding crisis our parks are facing, my fellow Texas House members John Kuempel and Four Price and I filed **HB 1628**, which would require that our state parks and historical sites receive the entire amount of revenue raised from the Sporting Goods Sales Tax. Specifically, the bill requires that Texas Parks and Wildlife Department receive 94 percent and the Texas Historical Commission receive the remaining 6 percent. We believe this legislation is the next step toward ensuring fiscal discipline and restoring truth in budgeting in the Texas Legislature.

Other legislative news

Last week, we met with constituents representing the Texas Commercial Real Estate Developers, Texas Hotel and Lodging Association, Girls Scouts of Southwest Texas, Texas Association of Builders, Baptist Health System, Northeast Independent School District and several others.



Members of the San Antonio Tourism Council.

Thank you for being part of our team. Please let us know how we can improve this newsletter. As always, if we may be of assistance to you, please feel free to contact our Capitol office at (512) 463-0646 or lyle.larson@house.state.tx.us. Please continue to let us hear from you!

Best,