

## The Flynn Report: March 30th 2007

Greetings Friends, Constitutes and Supporters: This week after nearly 18 hours of debate the Texas House of Representatives passed House Bill 1, the Appropriations Bill for the 2009-2010 biennium. The budget totals just over \$150 billion and I believe it presents a fiscally conservative and responsible budget that funds the state's responsibilities while saving revenue for future appropriations. This is an increase of approximately 5.4 percent from the previous biennium. When you consider the state's population growth and the rate of inflation since that time, this increase represents solid fiscally conservative use of taxpayers' money.

The budget includes increased funding for education, the Teachers' Retirement System, and meets the needs of the Children's Health Insurance Plan. The budget, allocates \$100 million to the state's homeland security department to fight terrorism and help secure our border. It also recognizes that some criminals need treatment, not just incarceration, and it includes \$61.5 million so some inmates may receive those treatment programs. In the area of healthcare, the budget commits \$4 million to fighting breast cancer, \$1.3 billion for projected Medicaid and CHIP caseload growth, a \$93.8 million boost for the state's struggling trauma care hospitals, \$35.6 million for a mental health crisis stabilization program, and nearly \$700 million for rate increases to medical providers serving Texans who need it most including those in nursing homes. In addition it leaves \$4.2 billion unappropriated, which will be carried forward to the following biennium. This is in addition to the state's Rainy Day fund, which is expected to accumulate \$4.3 billion by the end of the 2009 fiscal year. This totaled together gives the state \$8.5 billion and ensures that homeowners will continue to receive the property tax reductions enacted during the 79th Legislature. The House budget keeps the state living within its means just like all Texas taxpayers are required to do when they set down to meet their own household budget needs. The Senate Finance Committee passed their version of the budget this week and their amendments could change the House bill dramatically as well as the direction of the budget. A conference committee will meet to work out any differences. I will urge House members to be careful as they review all amendments in the Conference Committee. The Legislature must continue to promote greater degrees of fiscal discipline in the budget process, and responsible stewardship of the people's hard earned tax dollars. I do want to thank the House Appropriations Committee, and especially Chairman Warren Chisum, for his diligence in preparing a budget that exercises prudence and restraint. The Texas Youth Commission (TYC) continues to be much in the news and on the minds and hearts of every legislator. Special Master Jay Kimbrough was moved to serve as the Conservator of the state agency. This position grants him more statutory authority to make changes and remove and replace personnel within the TYC. He has said he will be dismissing many TYC employees and require all superintendents and assistant superintendents to re-apply for their current jobs within the next few days. Many changes are needed and will be expected as the Legislature continues to monitor this agency. Texas Health and Human Services Commission will be required to collect and report the cost of services and benefits provided to illegal immigrants. It is believed this is needed because there is evidence that indicates there has been substantial cost to several state health care programs through usage by illegal immigrants. This amendment simply collects and reports the statistics and will provide Texas and the federal government with better knowledge of the scope of this issue. The House passed legislation requiring school districts to implement a feasibility study on any project in which they plan to condemn private land through eminent domain. Because private property rights are sacred in Texas, the House wants to ensure that the power of eminent domain is not abused. This bill protects those rights by requiring a preliminary engineering study on all eminent domain projects conducted by school districts. Presently schools only have to conduct an appraisal of land before condemning it under eminent domain. This is the only due diligence required under current law. This law will require a study up-front to promote fiscal responsibility and careful consideration of the use of the power of eminent domain by governments at all levels.

I participated in a very interesting joint hearing this week as the Committee on State Affairs and the Committee on Border and International Affairs carried out a joint hearing to hear and discuss testimony on illegal immigration issues. I heard a wide variety of perspectives, but the one that resonated the loudest was the testimony taken from the Department of Public Safety, who, in an unbiased manner, discussed border safety issues. The drug trafficking that takes place here in Texas directly from Mexico is alarming. It appears abundantly clear that the Mexican drug cartels have hijacked much of South Texas and are using our state to deliver methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin and other illegal drugs throughout Texas and the United States. These hearings reaffirmed my commitment for a need for strong border security. Within the next several weeks we will be hearing bills concerning border security and just what we can do in our state without fear of federal government preemption.

This week our office was honored to host Rains County Days. We enjoyed having many of our elected officials as well as the many individuals and students that were able to attend. I trust it was as enjoyable to them as it was for me and my staff.

We continue to welcome your input and your questions. Contact our office located in the Capitol extension: E1.302.  
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Toll Free number 1-800-734-9515. May God bless you and our great state of Texas, Dan Flynn State Representative,  
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