

## Texas Lobby Group Update

May 9, 2010

This Session has always been all about the money. In the final three weeks – yes there are only three weeks left in this Session – the budget must be finalized to avoid a special session of the Legislature. The Senate just appointed their conferees and now the real work begins!

The Senate had a tough time getting the votes to get **House Bill 1** – the state's proposed budget - moving on their end. Finally last week Senator Ogden, who had been struggling to get enough votes to get the budget heard, was able to use a rarely-used rule called "**House Bill Wednesday**" to bring the budget bill up for second reading and third reading. By doing this, he avoided the two-thirds rule required to bring a bill up for consideration to the full Senate, something he had tried to do the day before and failed. By utilizing the rule, he only needed a majority of the Senate to pass the bill. He substituted in a version of the bill that didn't use **Rainy Day funds**, which was enough to get him a 19-12 vote.

The **Senate** budget would spend \$176.5 billion in the next biennium, about \$8 billion more than the House appropriated in its budget plan. It represents a cut of \$11 billion to current funding levels. In the area of health and human services, it preserves eligibility in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), keeps money for assistive and rehabilitative services and maintains reimbursement rates for providers. The Senate budget assumes the passage of **SB 22** by **Senator Florence Shapiro (R-Plano)** which is a school finance bill that would move away from the current system which promises schools the same level of funding they received in the 2005-2006 school year and moves gradually to a formula funding system. (So far, the Senate has not had the votes to bring up SB 22.)

The budget bill now heads to conference committee, which is where the final bill will be written.

On Friday the House appointed conference committee members- **Chairman Jim Pitts, Sylvester Turner, John Zerwas, John Otto, and Myra Crownover.**

Today the Senate appointed **Chairman Steve Ogden, Jane Nelson, Tommy Williams, Robert Duncan and Senator Chuy Hinojosa.** Both the House and Senate have four Republicans and one Democrat on their conference committees.

Let the real fun begin!