



TEXAS LAWMAKERS MADE TOUGH BUT RESPONSIBLE DECISION ON SCHOOL FUNDING

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By State Rep. Kelly Hancock

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*An Opinion-Editorial by State Representative Kelly Hancock
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The Sunday commentary by state Sen. Wendy Davis of Fort Worth about our state's education budget is a wonderful work of fiction and a textbook example of politicians who pander to the people and tell voters what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. (See: "Drowning out the voices of common sense")

Did you notice how she avoided any mention of our economic recession and called anyone who disagrees with her an "extremist"?

Throughout this legislative session, she and her Democratic colleagues have avoided confronting the unfortunate reality we are facing. The truth is that we don't have unlimited financial resources and we must live within our means. I have enough respect for voters to tell them this difficult truth.

Now that the Legislature has finished its special session, Texas can be proud that our state budget and legislation have prioritized schoolchildren. It is the right budget in these tough times.

In January, we faced a large gap between what agencies proposed to spend and what revenues were available. Some called for expanding state revenues to fit current state spending. Instead, we took the fiscally disciplined approach: We fit state spending into current revenues.

Anticipating that the nation's economy will continue to falter, while federal mandates on states continue to rise, we prudently left funds in our state savings account for the 2013 legislative session. Prudent care of our state revenue will help us weather the current storm. Raising taxes and driving away jobs will not.

Within the budget constraints, we listened to our residents and prioritized public education. We added \$1.6 billion, or 5.6 percent, more for public education in the upcoming two-year budget than the previous biennium. The budget increases public schools from \$27.6 billion in the current two-year budget cycle to \$29.2 billion for 2012-13 for the Foundation School Program.

We are covering the state's 170,000-student enrollment growth, albeit at reduced amounts. Overall, schools will be provided 3 percent less next school year and from 1 percent to 9 percent less the following year (depending on how school finance formulas affect different districts), compared with current spending levels. Like all of us, schools will be asked to do with less during these troubled economic times. When times get better -- and hopefully they will soon -- we will work to increase funding levels.



We also cut several large grant programs, which cut Texas Education Agency administration dramatically. We chose to prioritize the Foundation School Program and send funds directly to our local districts and schools rather than having grant decisions being made in Austin because we believe the folks closest to the students are best able to make decisions for the students.

The cuts to public schools were far less than in other budget areas. Overall, general revenue spending will decrease from \$82 billion in 2010-11 to \$80.6 billion in 2011-12. We made large cuts in other areas, such as general government operations, in order to spend more for priorities like public education.

We also are passing legislation to free school districts from state mandates, to ensure districts can retain and reward the best teachers. Our focus here, too, is on the schoolchildren and placing their needs first.

We value our state's children and their education. We value local control as the means to provide a quality education. We believe our work this session shows our strong commitment to both.

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