



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
ED THOMPSON

DISTRICT 29
BRAZORIA COUNTY (PART)

May 14, 2015

Mrs. Sheri Edwards
[REDACTED]

Pearland, TX [REDACTED]

Dear Mrs. Edwards:

Thank you for your correspondence that outlined your frustrations with the Texas Legislature this session. I appreciate hearing your opinion on these items, and received the information that you and Mrs. Fussell left for me; I received the sheet you left for my review at the Capitol Office.

As you know, the Texas Legislature is constitutionally required to pass a biennial budget. The House presents their version of the budget, and the Senate presents their version. The two versions are reconciled in a conference committee, voted on in both chambers, and then sent to Governor Abbott for his signature. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you some details on the House budget that we passed on April 1st.

The House passed a \$209.8 billion two-year budget by a vote of 141-5. The budget provides additional General Revenue in transportation, invests into our public schools, and increases border security. Democratic critics have complained that the budget does not spend enough money. However, as a conservative, I agree that we should exercise budgetary caution so that the House does not exceed the constitutional spending limit. According to the Texas Constitution, government growth cannot exceed growth in the state economy, which led to the creation of a spending cap. A simple majority vote in the House and Senate is needed to exceed the cap. The current spending cap is calculated according to the estimated growth in the personal income of Texans. Ten House-Senate negotiators will hash out differences in the budgets before both chambers pass a final version before June 1.

In 2011, before I was elected, lawmakers cut \$5.4 billion from public education funding. As a result, more than 600 Texas school districts sued the state, claiming that the current school finance system violates the Texas Constitution. The Texas Supreme Court is expected to hear arguments in the case this year. State District Judge John Dietz of Austin previously stated that the school finance system is unconstitutional due to inadequate funding, flaws in the distribution of money to districts, and the de facto imposition of a state property tax. The lawsuit has split lawmakers over which course of action to pursue on addressing the school finance system. Some prefer to wait for the Supreme Court ruling before considering changes to the current system, while others wish to boost funding this session in anticipation of the Supreme Court's ruling.

Legislation to boost the quality of prekindergarten classes in Texas, financed with an additional \$130 million over the next two years, has passed in both the House and the Senate. The measure tracks a plan by Gov. Abbott to establish a high quality prekindergarten program that offers additional funding for

school districts that adopt new standards such as hiring only certified teachers for the classes, implementing curriculum that aligns with the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines, and establishing a plan for parental and family engagement. HB 4 also requires school districts to implement the approved State Board of Education (SBOE) TEKS and prohibits the use of common core curriculum.

Republicans in the Texas House continue to pass strong conservative legislation that reflects our values and honors our commitments. Here are just a few examples of key conservative legislation that we have adopted over the last two weeks:

- **HB 416:** Requires personnel of abortion facilities and certain other facilities performing abortions to complete training on identifying victims of human trafficking.
- **HB 996:** Project labor agreements are increasingly being used across the nation as a means of forcing governmental entities to award contracts to unionized companies. HB 996 seeks to stop the national movement toward mandating project labor agreements (unionized labor) for state funded contracts.
- **HB 861:** Strengthens law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute persons who solicit minors online.
- **HB 1123:** Increases the punishment for individuals in possession or promoting child pornography, and changes the eligibility for parole.
- **HB 15:** Gives the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) the ability to have more oversight of state contracts.
- **HB 1294:** Requires personal financial statements to disclose information related to certain contracts or subcontracts with governmental entities.
- **HB 1096:** Provides a post-registration check system for verification of a residence address when a voter residence is challenged or a discrepancy is found.
- **HB 20:** Seeks to provide a framework to ensure that funds for transportation are administered in an objective and transparent manner with accountability for every dollar spent.
- **HB 966:** Health Savings Accounts have long been championed as a conservative health care solution. This bill creates an optional consumer-directed health plan for certain individuals eligible to participate in the group benefits program provided under the Texas Employees Group Benefits Act and their qualified dependents.
- **HB 3994:** Over time the intent of judicial bypass regarding abortion has been eroded and stretched in order to grant judicial bypasses in circumstances that were never intended. This bill seeks to strengthen Texas's judicial bypass law by making improvements necessary to protect the original intent of the landmark 1999 legislation.

As we are entering the final days of the 84th Legislature, I will be spending the majority of my time until June 1st in Austin. I would be happy to visit with you during the interim, after June 1st. Constituents are always more than welcome to contact my District Office in Pearland. You can contact my District Director, Amy Hill, at your convenience to work out a time and date that is convenient for you. Amy may be reached at (281) 485-6565 and at Amy.Hill@house.state.tx.us.

Sincerely,



Representative Ed Thompson
District 29