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Taxing Issue Really A Spending Problem

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Texans overwhelmingly oppose tax increases, that much is clear. Poll after poll, including the most important one on Election Day, 2002, demonstrate that we, as a people, generally understand the economic importance of setting taxes low.

But to keep more of our money, each of us has a responsibility to stop asking our legislators to spend it. We already have one of the most fiscally efficient state governments in the nation.

When the governor recently addressed the state, he clearly and eloquently drew a line in the sand on tax increases. The people of our state "don't want, don't need and don't deserve new taxes," he said.

Governor Perry also makes it abundantly clear that the state's government must economize, and even downsize in tough times: "Texans elected us to set priorities, not to raise the price of government."

As citizens, though, we must recognize that Texas' fundamental budget problem is not with legislators, but over-selves. The state's budget exceeds \$100 billion. Contrary to popular belief, that cost is not driven by a handful of pet projects promoted by a few entrenched special-interests getting legislation passed in the dead of night.

There is no budgetary boogie-man. The problem isn't them, it's us. It's the letters, phone calls and gas-station chats with constituents that set spending priorities for legislators, not dinners in Austin

with corporate lobbyists.

Every project, every line item, does have value. A few tax dollars for economic development? Of course. A little more to promote fine arts? Why not. Maybe expanded health care coverage for all teachers? Repaving a road here...New computers for a school there. A few more employees in that agency...a couple more vehicles for this one.

Regardless of one's perspective, every line of spending in the state's budget—from economically justified and morally important to politically frivolous and hopelessly wasteful—shares one important characteristic with every other: it adds up to a bill that must be presented to the taxpayer.

Fundamentally, the tax issue is not about taxes, it's about spending, so we can't have it both ways. We cannot one moment ask government to pay for our projects and the next tell legislators to cut our taxes.