
Getting By on a Little Less

Tight economic times mean a fiscal challenge for Texas Lawmakers.

By KTRH's Bill O'Neal

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Chances are you and your family are doing everything possible to get the most out of your money these days-and that's just what State Lawmakers can look forward to as they get back in to session in the coming weeks and months.

"Fiscal '09, and the first part of 2010 especially are likely to underperform what we've become used to" said Texas State Comptroller Susan Combs. At some \$9 billion - that drop off in revenue is a lot more than simply spare change.

Combs said that means Legislators will need to be careful with how they choose to spend their cash.

"With special consideration toward making sure the decisions of today will fit within our means of funding them tomorrow," Combs said Monday in Austin.

While the numbers are eye-opening-and certainly cause for concern-there are plenty of other states in a lot worse shape than Texas right now.

"We're still one of the most dynamic states in the nation as far as growth-they just need to be sure to prepare for the education needs-but they need to call on the school districts to tighten their belts as well," said former State Representative Talmadge Heflin, now with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, adding it will take a total team effort to get it done.

"From the Governor's Office, Attorney General, Land Commissioner-right on down the line... cut back on spending where they can," Heflin said, citing some examples.

"We all love our parks, but they put a slug of money in there last time, that might be an area they can cut back on. There's certain areas of education they can call on the local districts to be more frugal," Heflin said.

But not everyone sees making cuts as the right way to go. Some say even an unchanged, flat budget will be felt in some negative ways.

"Statewide, we have 80-thousand new students every year. Of course, things cost more every year than they did in the past," said Dick Lavine with the Center for Public Policy Priorities. With each choice on spending come consequences he said.

"Which sick child is not going to get medical attention, or which high school graduate isn't going to be able to go on to college because they can't afford to, or which commuter is going to have to spend another ten minutes a day stuck in traffic?" Lavine said.

To Lavine, this is exactly what an energy-fueled, nearly seven-billion dollar Rainy Day Fund is for.

"We were lucky because of the high oil prices. It's working out great for us as long as we're willing to dip in to it," Lavine said.

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