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### Let's trim higher education budget

By RONALD L. TROWBRIDGE  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE  
April 25, 2010, 8:36PM

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Texas House Speaker Joe Straus wrote in the April 15 Houston Chronicle that the state's budget shortfall will be "between \$10 billion and \$15 billion" and that the state is "going to have to find billions of dollars in cuts, savings and greater efficiencies." One such place for these cuts could and should be higher education.

"Today," says Straus, "more than 60 percent of our state's general revenue goes to public and higher education."

Many of Texas' professors today teach only two classes per semester, or six hours a week. Their salaries run in the vicinity of \$100,000 for two semesters, not counting some 30 percent in

lucrative fringe benefits. If class size is generally 25 students, these professors are teaching 100 students a year, which at a salary of \$100,000 amounts to \$1,000 per student.

I am an adjunct professor of English with a Ph.D. at Lone Star College-Montgomery. My salary per semester for one class with 25 students is \$1,814, with no fringe benefits. This amounts to \$72.56 per student versus \$1,000 for tenured counterparts at universities. They are not worth that much in either relative or absolute terms.

Trustees and legislators, who foot much of the bill, should require that these professors teach four classes per semester, not two. This class load of 12 hours per semester was the standard for most of the 20th century.

Salary and benefits make up between 60 percent and 75 percent of today's university costs. Restoring teaching loads to the 20th-century norm could substantially reduce these costs.

Many of these professors will of course protest that they teach only two classes so that they might have time for research and publication. Not so, says former Harvard President Derek Bok in his book *Our Underachieving Colleges*, in which he writes that "fewer than 50 percent of all professors publish as much as one article per year."

University professors generally teach 30 weeks a year, with the other 22 weeks off. With good pay, light class loads, some or little publication and 22 weeks off, no wonder teaching at a university is one of the most coveted vocations in America. I know; I used to be a full-time tenured professor at a large university.

There is another area in higher education where Texas could save appreciable money. Colleges now are in an "arms race," the constant effort to refurbish and build new physical facilities.

Bok confirms this, reporting from the inside that universities are like "compulsive gamblers and exiled royalty: there is never enough money to satisfy their desires." They expand divisions, departments, faculty, staff, buildings, athletic facilities, maintenance and services — which become unfunded liabilities that later drive up costs for students, parents and taxpayers. The more they spend, the more they need.

Why don't political leaders and legislators take on these abuses? In the past, taking on the academic establishment was like taking on a sleeping giant, armed with extraordinary speaking and writing abilities.

But to borrow a phrase from our president's chief of staff, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." The mood of the electorate has shifted mightily toward fiscal restraint, and the state's financial situation opens a window of opportunity to reset our university priorities and return Texas higher education to a fiscally responsible path.

Now more than ever, legislators and trustees need to make tough, courageous decisions. As C.S. Lewis observed, "Courage is the most difficult virtue because it is the testing point of all virtues."

*Trowbridge is a resident of The Woodlands and a senior fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a nonprofit, free-market research institute based in Austin. He formerly served as vice president of Hillsdale College in Michigan.*

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**Bad\_Man\_Behind\_Blue\_Eyes** wrote:

Tenure is the opiate of the professors. A six hour work week, good pay and benefits, and lifetime job security. It's no wonder so many of them are commies.

4/26/2010 6:15:42 AM

(103)

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**Bad\_Man\_Behind\_Blue\_Eyes** wrote:

jwwestiii wrote:

From the article: "Today," says Straus, "more than 60 percent of our state's general revenue goes to public and higher education."

=====

And we still rank 49th nationally, and you want to CUT educational spending. The noise I hear is Mississippi celebrating the fact that they soon won't rank dead last in education, there will be a new king of that molehill - Texas. Wait, let me guess, this is the same group that advocated elimination of property taxes, the main source of funding for education in Texas, and is a darling of the Tea Party Groups. That figures. Reading most of the comments from those who are members of the group its easy to see why they lack support for education and the effects thereof. Now it all makes sense.

++++++

Our low ranking wouldn't have anything to do with all the uninvited exchange students in our public schools, would it?

\$100,000.00 for six hours a week? DAMN! Sign me up!

4/26/2010 5:17:35 AM

(103)

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**TexKB** wrote:

Mr. Trowbridge, you are an appreciated exception to my beliefs about the corrupt "academic class" idiots. What I want to know is how much in taxpayer funding does the "academic class" siphon off our budget for grants to build their ostentatious halls to honor themselves, funding of racist or irrelevant chairs and study everything from AGW, gay behavior in Brazilian bars, liberal policies and their destruction of productive society (oops, strike that one) and other BS subjects? Obviously enough for UC to donate 150 MILLION DOLLARS to the Obama campaign.

4/26/2010 6:17:06 AM

(4)

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**renehebert** wrote:

Finally there is someone at the Chron that is not an idiot. Anyone that knows the system knows that we need to cut college professors by at least half and the cost of college would be cut in half.

4/26/2010 6:52:46 AM

(0)

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4/26/2010 5:03:45 AM

(91)

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**jwwestiii** wrote:

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Pink schools are underfunded now, and there is no way you can approximate the amount of revenues with the grossly regressive 21% sales tax that would be required to replace it. Furthermore, what you are advocating is the most socialist idea that has been presented this year. Do you really think that parents who worked and sacrificed to buy homes in Katy and Fort Bend and Barker Cypress should not be allowed to have the value of their property be a part of the school funding for their kids? And do you think that the sales taxes they pay should be spread equally over the entire state? Funny how you conservatives can switch to socialist at the drop of a hat. The idea would just increase taxes and would do nothing to address the fundamental problems in school. And as a single parent who has paid more than his share of property taxes while sending his own son to private schools, a private university and a private graduate school, I fully understand that there is a benefit to the community that there be schools for all of those who wish to learn. And as such, I have no problem with the payment of my taxes for that purpose. I had to pay taxes for the Iraq War, to Halliburton for unbid contracts and the right to lose billions in Iraq, tax cuts for the wealthy, and Medicare Drug bills that benefited drug companies. Why then should I all of a sudden become so cryptic in my feelings toward public education. And the question is why did you support all the former things I mentioned, yet feel that you need to draw the line at educating children?

4/26/2010 7:43:34 AM

Recommend: (1) (1)

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**jwestiii** wrote:

renehebert wrote: Finally there is someone at the Chron that is not an idiot. Anyone that knows the system knows that we need to cut college professors by at least half and the cost of college would be cut in half.

+++++

I don't even know where to start with this one.... lets see, this is not a editorial from the Chronicle editorial board, and the clue is the last line where the gentleman gives his own name and affiliation. Just thought you would want to know. And are you using that new math, since if as the gentleman indicated, salaries make up between 60 and 70% of the cost of UNIVERSITY costs, would a reduction of half of that mean that you would get MORE than a reduction of 50%? Based on some of these comments, I really don't think we need to cut funding for education in Texas, in fact we perhaps need a few more dollars since there seems to be a lot of people in need of remedial help.

4/26/2010 7:30:46 AM

Recommend: (1) (1)

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**PinkAnderson\_FloydCouncil** wrote:

jw do you write a check at the end of the year for your property taxes or is it buried in your monthly rent where hidden from your sight? The way Texas funds its cities, counties and schools is grossly unfair to property owners especially home owners. My taxes have gone up between 8% and 10% annually for the last ten years and will do so for years to come while I'm lucky if my take home pay increases at the rate of 3% annually (last raise Feb 2008). I do not use 10% more government services every year. Schools aren't getting 10% better year after year. Texas simply must find a fairer way to spread the burden to a larger cross section of the citizens of the state. By the time I pay off my mortgage my property tax bill will come close to what my mortgage payment is. While you can pay off the bank you will never pay off the tax man. The current situation is horribly unfair.

4/26/2010 7:27:33 AM

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**renehebert** wrote:

Finally there is someone at the Chron that is not an idiot. Anyone that knows the system knows that we need to cut college professors by at least half and the cost of college would be cut in half.

4/26/2010 6:52:46 AM

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**jwestiii** wrote:

Blue Man wrote: Our low ranking wouldn't have anything to do with all the uninvited exchange students in our public schools, would it?

No it would not, as most illegals do NOT take the SAT test, and that is an indicator that we rank 49th as well. And gee, teacher pay is 49th, guess the illegals are responsible for that as well. And AP testing has little to do with illegals as well, so while you and your peers, as part of the Anti-All Things Illegal campaign, continue to find new and interesting ways to blame everything on illegals, you perhaps should consider that even without illegals in the picture, things are not as perfect as you would like to pretend that they are, you think? And since there are very few illegals in college, I don't think you can blame that on them as well. As far as teaching goes, well we spent hundreds of millions in taxpayer dollars to watch athletes run up and down the field, and don't complain about that, now do we. And hey, if you put in the time and effort, and long hours of study required to teach at a major univeristy, then perhaps you need to examine your career choices and work ethic and not demean that of others. And as the author indicated, not ALL college level instructors make that kind of money. I would prefer that we allow our university teachers the time to write and research and add to the general knowledge base. Evidently some of your don't fee that way about education, but have no problem with another overburdened, overpriced, defense system that will never be used. Or in tank batallions that sit and rust in central Europe waiting for a 50's style conventional war that will never happen. The irony is not what you don't wish to fund, the irony is in the type of things that you think need funding.

4/26/2010 6:35:39 AM

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