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### Senate's first budget attempt spreads painful cuts around

**Border security would get more; education hit hard in initial proposal**

By PEGGY FIKAC  
AUSTIN BUREAU

Jan. 25, 2011, 12:26AM



Jay Janner Austin American-Statesman

Bikers pause for the national anthem at the Texas Confederation of Clubs and Independents Legislative Day on Monday. Hundreds of bikers from around the state rallied for bikers' rights and met their legislators.

AUSTIN — Border security funding would get a slight boost, but public schools, higher education, criminal justice and health care for poor Texans would be cut under Senate leaders' first crack at a bare-bones budget.

The \$158.7 billion, two-year starting-point measure filed Monday by **Senate Finance Committee** Chairman **Steve Ogden** would slash \$28.8 billion, or 15.4 percent, compared to the current budget, looking at both state and federal funds.

It is more generous than House leaders' first draft, in large part because it assumes a larger federal **Medicaid** match than the House version.

However, generous is a relative term when lawmakers are facing a budget shortfall estimated at \$15 billion to more than \$27 billion in discretionary state general-revenue funds.

Ogden said there is a lot of work to be done to get the two-thirds support necessary for a budget in the Senate.

#### Bill wouldn't pass as is

"This is a starting point. I don't have — and never will have — 21 votes for this bill," said Ogden, R-Bryan. "So, what we've got to do starting on Monday is to start working with the senators to see what it is we need to do."

Lt. Gov. **David Dewhurst** has yet to name other Senate committees for the legislative session, but he appointed the Finance Committee on Monday so it could begin working on the measure.

Ogden said he hopes senators will suspend rules to allow him to begin hearing the bill next Monday.

Neither the House nor Senate's initial measures would raise taxes or dip into the state's rainy-day fund savings account, which will have a projected \$9.4 billion.

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Senate leaders' budget draft would keep funding to four community colleges, including Brazosport College, as would the House's first draft. It would cut higher-education formula funding, although by less than the House version for general academic and health-related institutions.

#### Financial aid a target

The Senate measure generally would restrict college financial aid to students already receiving it, just like the House. The Senate version holds out hope for some additional financial aid funding.

The Senate draft would put more money into public education than the House but still fall \$9.3 billion short of current school funding formulas that pay for items, such as projected student enrollment growth and projected decreases in school district property values. It would include some funding for other education programs slashed in the House draft.

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It would include some funding for other education programs slashed in the House draft.

"We haven't funded what current law anticipates we would fund for the Foundation School Program, so we're going to have to sit down there and work on that," Ogden said. "Either we're going to have to add some money or change the law."

The measure would not cover the number of people expected to enroll in Medicaid through the next two years, and it would slash Medicaid reimbursement rates to health care providers.

#### Border a priority



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The bill filed by Ogden would cut public safety and criminal justice, including community supervision and parole programs, though less than the House proposal.

Ogden emphasized that the Senate's starting-point measure puts a priority on border security. House leaders also emphasized border security, but Ogden's bill would increase funding for it.

"That was a conscious decision that the first responsibility of government is to provide for the security of the people," Ogden said.

Sen. **John Whitmire**, D-Houston, said even the Senate's starting-point budget "would impact every Texan with significant cuts." He said it is crucial in legislative hearings that "everyone in charge of an agency or state institution come in and paint a true and accurate picture of what the cuts will do."

"The culture in this town is people kind of giving political answers, or maybe a soft approach to what proposed cuts will do," Whitmire added, saying it's up to lawmakers to ask the right questions.

Sen. **Carlos Uresti**, D-San Antonio, said, "The Senate's starting point budget doesn't come close to addressing the needs of **Texas**, particularly its schoolchildren. How can we possibly start building a new century for Texas with a budget that turns its back on the future?"

### Moves called devastating

F. Scott McCown, of the **Center for Public Policy Priorities**, which focuses on low- and moderate-income Texans, said both the House and Senate measures show the need to use the rainy-day fund and come up with new revenue.

He said the Senate measure "just assumes somehow the state will come up with \$1 billion more than the House. Unless Lt. Gov. Dewhurst is covering that personally, we don't see where the state will get it. Like the House, the Senate cuts to education and health and human services are devastating."

**Talmadge Heflin**, a former Appropriations Chairman who is with the limited-government **Texas Public Policy Foundation**, said that even though the outlined cuts would be significant, growth in the state budget also has been significant.

"It is encouraging to see that the budget writers in both chambers have come to the conclusion that there are no sacred cows this session," he said. "Every agency and program must be on the table if the Legislature is to balance the budget within available revenue."

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**drumb47** 12:56 AM on January 25, 2011

Most Texans want to roll with the punches and face up to what we have to do to fix this mess we find ourselves in. It is what it is. Paying more to benefit the common good is the right thing to do. Republicans can't keep this crazy practice of "NO NEW TAXES" up forever. In actuality, raising fees here and there is raising taxes for all. Just tell Texans the truth and spread the pain around fairly and we can deal with it. Frankly, we have a bunch of agenda biased elected officials who place more importance on re-election than doing what's right by the Texans who voted them into office.

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**gem65x3** 12:56 PM on January 25, 2011

STOP building palaces instead of school houses.  
 STOP building sports stadiums to rival those found in pro sports.  
 STOP trying to fund bilingual education--if those students need it, then their parents can pay for it.  
 STOP providing FREE summer school. If those students need it, their parents can pay for it. If they can't, then the kid can REPEAT A GRADE, it will NOT kill them.  
 STOP running the a/c full blast for those kids in summer school. They failed...they shouldn't be pampered for their failure. They can suffer through a higher temperature.  
 STOP the free lunch, breakfast, esp during the summer months.  
 Those that breed 'em can feed 'em. Besides, going by the physical condition of most of the kids today, they are NOT going hungry.

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