

How we propose to cut state government

Raul Torres is the state representative for District 33 in Corpus Christi.

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CORPUS CHRISTI — Controlling the growth of state spending is one of the most important challenges we are facing during the 82nd Legislative Session and it will have a big impact on the outlook of Texas' future economy.

During this legislative session, Texas is confronted with an economic hardship that has brought much pain to many families throughout the state. Businesses all over the state have closed up and cast workers into unemployment, causing human misery and personal indignity. These tough economic times have temporarily shattered the lives of our fellow Texans, but it has not crushed their hopes for a better future.

How can we as a state best govern in a manner that will allow us shelter in such hard economic times in the future? The answer lies in our ability to limit our spending to levels that make financial and economic sense. You and I, as individuals, live within our means by reducing our spending to the level of our income. Why then should our state not be bound by that same limitation? Let us not forget that budgets are about setting real priorities. Regardless of whether it is a household or an entire state, a sensible budget helps prioritize spending and set reasonable limits.

Therefore, Texas legislators must act with clarity and courage to balance the budget by cutting spending rather than by increasing taxes and fees. In this present crisis, as in previous ones, government is not the solution. It is the problem. All of us together, in and out of government, must bear the burden of what lies ahead. The solutions we choose must be equitable, with no one group singled out to pay a higher price.

In 1978, 84 percent of Texas voters overwhelmingly approved the Texas Tax Relief Act, (TEL) a constitutional amendment they thought would restrain the growth of public sector spending. However, several built-in loopholes have prevented the TEL from being effective. Left as is, TEL is critically flawed and leaves taxpayers with little more than superficial protections, but help is on the way.

A couple of weeks ago a piece of legislation known as House Joint Resolution (HJR) 70, was filed by Rep. Ken Paxton, R-McKinney. It provides for another standard of measurement that will help in restraining the growth of spending in Texas. Once we add a necessary amendment to HJR 70 that directs the Legislature to use the lower of the two spending benchmarks, either HJR 70 or TEL, it should be exactly what we need to reign in the growth of government in Texas. This would place a constitutional amendment on the ballot for Texas voters to ratify. Once approved by the voters it would limit state spending by keeping it in line with growth in our state's economy (TEL) or by restricting spending to the rate of population growth plus inflation (HJR 70),

whichever is less.

Consider for a moment the following fact. Had our state government spending been limited to population growth plus inflation increases from 1990 to 2010, the cost of operating Texas state government in fiscal year 2010 would have been \$42.5 billion less than what we actually spent. Instead of spending \$92.7 billion in FY 2010, taxpayers would have spent only \$50.2 billion.

In other words, according to a report recently released by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, on a per-capita basis, Texas state government spending increased from \$1,365 per person in 1990 to \$3,648 per person in 2010. (Editor's Note: Torres' figures are not adjusted for inflation, though his point that spending has increased is still valid. The 1990 amount would be \$2,277 in 2010 dollars.)

The Legislature can do little to reverse the excessive spending of the past, but it can protect taxpayers moving forward. It is what you elected us to do. To accomplish this goal, I pledge to support HJR 70, along with an amendment to use the lower of either HJR 70 or TEL. I invite you to join me as we begin the fight to diminish the rising cost of government. Applying sound financial principles to state government would result in thousands of new jobs while spurring innovation in the private sector and protecting future generations of Texans. This, I believe, is truly good and responsible government.



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