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## Odd alliance -- boy! -- supports more transparency on state finances



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Senate Finance Committee Chairman Steve Ogden read names off cards Thursday morning of people supporting Sen. Kirk Watson's bill that would cast a stronger public spotlight on Texas finances.

Moments earlier, former Rep. Sherri Greenberg, D-Austin, testified the bill is needed so the public can easily go online and obtain meaningful, digestible information about the state budget and agencies' spending.

"The day of just slapping up a PDF is over," said Greenberg (left, 1999 AP photo), now a lecturer on public finance at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. "We do need more."

Ogden recited names of officials of groups -- United Way, civil liberties union, Texas Daily Newspaper Association -- that support the bill.

Then his eyebrow shot up.

"Talmadge Heflin, research, uh, with Texas Public Policy Foundation is for the bill," Ogden said, referring to Heflin, R-Houston, former chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. Heflin (below right, 2005 AP photo) is now with a conservative think tank in Austin.

"Let the record note that Sherri Greenberg and Talmadge Heflin are on the same side," said Ogden, who served with both in the House in the early and mid 1990s.

Watson, D-Austin, didn't miss a beat.

"That ought to tell you how good this bill is, Mr. Chairman," he said.

Ogden: "It's a kumbaya bill?"

Watson: "Right. I worked very hard to get it to that point."

Let the record also note that Watson, who'd been scolded publicly by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst last fall for criticizing pre-election secrecy about the state's huge budget shortfall, praised Dewhurst Thursday for helping craft compromises on the bill. Watson said it will help the public get more information about interim budget cuts, use of fee money, agencies' spending and cash-flow management -- with no additional cost to the state.



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