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News

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Texas Budget Battle: Conservative Group Launches Ads

on the air

Ben Philpott - KUT News



BBC World Service
10 p.m. to 4 a.m.



The Texas Senate is expected to vote on its version of the state budget this week. Their plan spends about \$12 billion more than the House budget, including increased spending in education and health care. A raucous House/Senate conference committee is expected, as the two sides try to work out the differences. For KUT News and the *Texas Tribune*, Ben Philpott reports as that showdown draws closer, outside groups are turning up the heat to make each side hold its ground.

April 26, 2011 · Those groups have been pushing their budget ideas since before the legislative session began. Now with the House budget already passed — and a Senate version set for debate — the battle over which budget is right for Texas has intensified, and, in one case, taken to the air waves.

"It's time for us to wake up and remind them who they work for. Texans want a fiscally responsible conservative budget. Texas works because freedom works. And defending Texas is defending freedom."

That TV commercial is courtesy the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative state policy think tank. The group is part of a coalition called Texans for a Conservative Budget. While the group does not explicitly say it wants the House version to reach the Governor's desk, the lower chamber's bill certainly mirrors the groups' budget principles.

"We don't think that the state's savings, in the form of the Economic Stabilization Fund or Rainy Day Fund, should be spent. We don't think that taxes should be raised, and we think the state should live within available revenues. Live within its means," said Joshua Treviño of the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

There are other groups countering this message by supporting the Senate's bill. Last week, when a committee gave initial approval to the Senate budget, Lt. Governor David Dewhurst's office was flooded with emails, many saying thanks for spending more money on healthcare and education.

Although some, like one from Texas Medical Association president Dr. Susan Bailey, gave support to the Senate

because it wasn't nearly as bad as the House version of the budget.

"It's a very difficult budget climate and we know that there are going to be cuts throughout the state budget. But if you have to have one or the other we prefer the Senate bill," Bailey said.

Bailey says her group will continue to push for the Senate bill, and even for improvements as the House and Senate meet to reconcile their bills. The Texas Public Policy Foundation isn't going anywhere either. The group is already shooting another commercial with former Senator Phil Gramm to push for less spending.