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# Session '11: Wohlgemuth and McCown

## Panelists discuss the Senate's budget

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Josh Hinkle

KNOW, A CUT OF ABOUT 7% IN CURRENT SPENDING, BUT IT'S REALLY MORE LIKE 16% CUT BASED ON WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO SERVE THE GROWING POPULATION AND FACTORING IN INFLATION. I THINK THE HOUSE IS WILLING TO COME UP ON EDUCATION, BUT PROBABLY NOT ON OTHER THINGS NEEDED TO KEEP NURSING HOMES OPEN. THAT'S MY GUESS. I THINK THE COMPLICATION IS NOT JUST GETTING A BUDGET, BUT IT'S ALL THESE OTHER BILLS THAT THEY NEED TO UNDERGIRD THE AMOUNT THAT THEY'RE DOING, SOME OF IT 12 SMOKE AND MIRRORS.

>> ONE THING I FIND INTERESTING THIS SESSION IS HOW OFF-LIMITS THE RAINY DAY FUND HAS BECOME. WE ALL KNOW THAT IT HAS NOT BEEN THAT WAY IN THE PAST, THAT IT'S BEEN SPENT FOR ANY NUMBER OF THINGS. I TALKED TO RICK PERRY THIS WEEK ABOUT THAT. HE IN FACT DIPPED INTO IT, ASKED LAWMAKERS TO FUND THE TEXAS ENTERPRISE FUND. IT'S KIND OF INTERESTING THAT IT'S BECOME AN OFF-LIMITS SAVINGS ACCOUNT. IT'S GOT \$9 BILLION IN IT. IT'S TAX MONEY THAT'S ALREADY BEEN COLLECTED SITTING THERE. FOR SOME REASON, MOSTLY BECAUSE OUTSIDE CONSERVATIVE GROUPS HAVE DEEMED IT TO BE OFF-LIMITS, IT'S BEEN TAKEN OUT OF THE -- IT'S NO LONGER A FACTOR IN BALANCING OUR BUDGET, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS SET UP TO DO EXACTLY THAT, TO HELP CUSHION DOWNTURNS IN THE ECONOMY. I THINK IT'S KIND OF FASCINATING THAT SOMEHOW, WE'RE NOT ABLE TO TALK ABOUT USING THE RAINY DAY FUND THIS YEAR.

>> IT WAS, AS SCOTT MCCLELLAN WAS POINTING OUT, AN ECONOMIC STABILIZATION FUND WHEN IT WAS CREATED IN THE LAST HORRIBLE BUDGET TIMES IN THE 1980'S IN TEXAS, BUT NOW IT'S THE CLIMATE STABILIZATION FUND, BECAUSE THE GOVERNOR ANNUAL TALKS ABOUT HURRICANES AND TSUNAMIS THAT WE'RE SUPPOSED TO SAVE IT FOR. AND WILDFIRES.

>> IT WAS FOUND THAT THE STATE OF TEXAS EXPENSES FOR CLEANING UP AFTER RITA AND IKE WERE \$9 BILLION. THE GOVERNOR SAYS WE NEED TO

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SAVE IT FOR FUTURE HURRICANES,  
 BUT OUR LAST TWO WOULD BE A DROP 13  
 IN THE BUCKET FOR THAT.  
 >> THE TEXAS FOREST SERVICE  
 TELLS US IT'S A MILLION DOLLARS  
 A DAY.  
 IF IT GOES ON FOR A YEAR, IT'S  
 \$365 MILLION.  
 >> WHEN WE USED TO USE IT, IT  
 WAS A SMALL COUPLE OF BILLION  
 DOLLARS AVAILABLE EACH SESSION,  
 AND ONE OF THE REASONS IT'S A  
 BIG DEAL NOW IS THE FACT THAT WE  
 CUT PROPERTY TAXES IN 2006 AND  
 DIDN'T FULLY FINANCE THAT, AND  
 THAT WAS A BATTLE BETWEEN  
 GOVERNOR PERRY AND HE WANTED TO  
 GET RID OF THE RAINY DAY  
 BALANCE.  
 WE SAID WE ARE NOT SURE WE CAN  
 PAY FOR THESE PROPERTY TAX CUTS.  
 THAT'S WHY IT'S AMOUNTED TO MORE  
 AND MORE MONEY AND IT'S A BIGGER  
 DEAL.  
 IT'S MORE AN IDEOLOGICAL ISSUE  
 THAN IT'S A REAL MONEY  
 PRACTICALITY.  
 >> ONE THING PEOPLE ARE TALKING  
 ABOUT ON CHAT, THEY THOUGHT WHAT  
 THE REPUBLICANS DID, PUSHING THE  
 BUDGET THROUGH, AND YESTERDAY  
 WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE TORT  
 REFORM BILL, DO YOU THINK  
 REPUBLICANS ARE GOING TO BE LIKE  
 THAT FOR THE REST OF THE  
 SESSION?  
 >> I THINK THE REPUBLICAN HOUSE  
 LEADERSHIP PROBABLY WISHES THEY  
 HADN'T COME IN YESTERDAY.  
 I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE GOING  
 TO DO.  
 THE DEMOCRATIC TACTICS ON THE  
 OTHER HAND SEEM TO BE SORT OF IN  
 DIS--INDISCRIMINATELY TRYING TO  
 STOP ANYTHING.  
 THEY MAY COME BACK SWEETENED  
 AFTER MOTHER'S DAY, OR IT MAY BE  
 THIS WAY FOR THE REST OF THE  
 SESSION.  
 >> THE TRIAL LAWYERS.  
 >> TEACHERS GROUPS.  
 >> WHERE DO YOU SEE IT GOING? 14  
 >> I DON'T KNOW, BECAUSE ALL OF  
 THOSE BILLS OR A LOT OF THEM ARE  
 BILLS THAT THE GOVERNOR HAS  
 PUSHED FORWARD AS EMERGENCIES  
 AND THINGS WHEN THE BILLS THEY  
 REALLY NEED TO PASS, BACK TO THE  
 THING I WAS TALKING ABOUT, IS IT  
 REALLY AT RISK RIGHT NOW ARE  
 THESE LITTLE BILLS THAT GO ALONG  
 WITH THE BUDGET THAT MAKE IT  
 WORK AND KEEP US OUT OF SPECIAL  
 SESSION, THESE BILLS CAN'T COME  
 UP UNTIL WE GET THROUGH THIS  
 AGENDA.  
 >> ONE OF THE THEMES OF THIS  
 SESSION IS HOW DO THE DEMOCRATS  
 WHEN THEY ARE SO POWERLESS,  
 THEIR NUMBERS SO LOW COMPARED TO  
 THE NUMBERS OF REPUBLICANS, HOW  
 DO THEY LAUNCH AN EFFECTIVE  
 OPPOSITION.  
 I DON'T THINK THEY HAVE FOUND  
 THAT YET.  
 I THINK JUST BLOWING THINGS UP  
 MAKES THEM LOOK REALLY BAD.  
 THEY'RE GETTING IN THE WAY OF  
 PASSING THINGS.  
 AT THE END OF THE DAY, THEY ARE  
 GOING TO LOSE LEGISLATION THAT  
 THEY WANT PASSED.  
 I DON'T THINK I'VE SEEN A SMART  
 STRATEGY SO FAR EMERGING.  
 >> DO YOU THINK WE'RE HEADING  
 FOR A SPECIAL SESSION?  
 >> LIKE I SAY, I THINK THEY CAN  
 AVOID IT.  
 I DON'T THINK THEY'RE THAT FAR



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APART TO GET A DEAL ON THE BUDGET, BUT I THINK THERE ARE SO MANY BALLS IN THE AIR THAT WE COULD HAVE A QUICK SPECIAL SESSION TO EVEN FINISH THOSE. I'M MORE OPTIMISTIC NOW. >> I THINK SO.

Thanks for joining us. Session 11 is back after the break.

Arlene Wohlgemuth: "So are we going to spend our Rainy Day Fund now and have absolutely nothing should the state be hit with a bad hurricane?"

Scott McCown: "You've got a life jacket, but when the boat goes down, you don't keep the life jacket on the boat."

The Rainy Day Fund, definitely hot topic for our newsmakers. Online now at kxan.com, you can watch their entire interview with Robert. While you're there,

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