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Session '11: Wohlgemuth and McCown

Panelists discuss the Senate's budget

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Josh Hinkle

AUSTIN (KXAN) - On this edition of Session '11, Arlene Wohlgemuth of the Texas Public Policy Foundation and Scott McCown of the Center for Public Policy Priorities discuss the Senate's passing of the budget. Also, Robert Garrett of the Dallas Morning News and Patti Kilday Hart of the Houston Chronicle participate in the onpolitix Panel.

TRANSCRIPT BELOW:

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst: "This isn't about the Rainy Day Fund. This is about 12 Senators wanted more money when I felt, our Republicans felt we had stretched to the limit."

Sen. Royce West: "So does this budget represent the best interest of the state of Texas? Or does this budget represent what the Republican party wants to do?"

The Texas Senate has passed a budget. And there's still an ounce of hope left for Texans who want lawmakers to dip into the rainy day fund. A majority could sway a conference committee to make that move. But it would require a majority vote in the House or the Senate. Very unlikely, since both chambers already said "no" once. With just 21 days left, we're set for what could be a vicious battle ahead, here on Session 11.

Announcer: "From KXAN Austin News, this is Session 11. Live interactive breakdowns, insights, interviews, and our weekly roundtable discussion. You're watching Session 11 on KXAN Austin News."

Good morning. I'm Robert Hadlock. Thanks for joining us on Session 11. The Texas House has just selected conference committee members, only days after the Senate passed its version of the budget. It slashes 11 billion in state funding, with education and Medicaid taking the hardest blows. In a first for a budget bill, members bypassed the two-thirds rule to bring the heavily debated measure to the floor. And - to the dismay of Democrats - it passed without using any of the Rainy Day Fund.

Sen. John Whitmire: "It ain't a happy face. It can only be a bitter face that the poison network hands out that you put on solvents that your kids need to stay away from. I would put a bitter face on this, because you can't take \$11 billion out of current services and not have harm and pain."

But the Senate's 176.5 billion dollar budget is still less severe than the House, spending about twelve billion more than the lower chamber. But how will that affect you? Right now, our political reporter, "Josh Hinkle", tells you how to interact with us this morning on our program. Josh?

Thanks, Robert. First, we've got a great onpolitix Panel lined up today with Robert Garrett from the Dallas Morning News and Patti Kilday Hart from the Houston Chronicle. You can take part in our budget round table this morning by logging onto kxan.com. While you're there, click on the onpolitix tab at the top. You'll go straight to our special political site, where you can check out my latest blog posts. Plus, click the blue bar at the top to chat with us. Our panel will field your questions later in the program. Robert?

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Thanks, Josh. Our Newsmakers are leaders of two of the state's largest political advocacy groups. One has just launched a series of TV commercials calling on Texans to take charge of the budget. The other wrote a letter to Senators this week urging them directly to vote no on the budget bill. Arlene Wohlgemuth is executive director of the conservative research institute - the Texas Public Policy Foundation. And Scott McCown is executive director of the liberal think-tank - the Center for Public Policy Priorities. I spoke with them in the fallout of the Senate's budget decision.

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WHAT THE GOVERNOR AND HOUSE ARE SAYING, THEY'RE SAYING IN THE GREATEST ECONOMIC DOWNTURN, WE'RE NOT GOING TO USE OUR ECONOMIC STABILIZATION FUND, WHICH THE VOTERS CREATED FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE, NOT TO COVER MERELY A DEFICIT IN THE CURRENT YEAR.

IF YOU LOOK AT THE CONSTITUTION, IT COVERS A CURRENT YEAR DEFICIT, WHEN YOU HAVE LESS REVENUE THIS TIME THAN LAST TIME OR WITH A TWO THIRDS VOTE FOR ANY PURPOSE.

NOT DESIGNED FOR HURRICANES, DESIGNED FOR A SEVERE DOWNTURN CAUSING REVENUE TO COLLAPSE, MEANING WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE SERIOUS STEPS THAT ARE GOING TO HURT TEXAS FAMILIES.

>> WE'VE ALREADY SPENT \$3 BILLION WITH WHICH WE GREED IN THE CURRENT DEFICIT. THE BUDGET THAT IS ADVOCATED, SPENDING ANOTHER 20 FEBRUARY \$000 MILLION WOULD BE AN 18% INCREASE OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS AND \$8 BILLION MORE THAN THE CONSTITUTION ALLOWS TO 4 BE SPENT.

THAT NUMBER OF TRYING TO ADD IN \$27 BILLION IS NOT SUPPORTABLE.

>> WE'VE NEVER ARGUED FOR \$27 BILLION.

WE'VE SAID THAT CURRENT SERVICES, TO DO THE SAME THING NEXT TIME THAT WE'RE DOING THIS TIME WOULD COST \$27 BILLION. THAT'S THE NUMBER OF WHAT YOU WOULD NEED TO MAINTAIN CURRENT SERVICES.

NEVER A THOUGHT THAT WE COULD DO THAT.

THE THOUGHT WAS WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO HAVE TO BALANCED APPROACH, THAT HAS SOME CUTS, SOME SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT FROM THE RAINY DAY FUND AND SOME NEW REVENUE, AND THAT'S WHAT WITH HE DON'T HAVE.

>> I'DING EAGER TO HEAR WHAT CUTS YOU WOULD ADVOCATE, BECAUSE YOU SAID

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