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## Rainy day fund may be needed more in next session

### Hart column misconstrues conservative values.

By Talmadge Heflin, Brooke Rollins, Michael Quinn Sullivan, and Peggy Venable / Special to the Express-News  
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On Sunday, the San Antonio Express-News' Patricia Kilday Hart declared that conservatives believe in a remarkable set of principles: that abused children should find no help; that no new doctors should be trained; and that elderly Texans should receive no nursing care. It's a reprehensible hodgepodge of beliefs that ought to shame anyone holding them — if they do.

We are conservatives. We believe none of these things.

In constructing her straw men, Hart seeks to illustrate her critique of one of our emphatic and longstanding policy recommendations: that the Legislature refrain from using the Economic Stabilization Fund, better known as the rainy day fund, in balancing the state's 2012-2013 budget.

We believe the rainy day fund should be left untouched for

two major reasons. Reliance on the fund in the past decade, together with reliance on other unsustainable, one-time sources of revenue — most famously, the federal stimulus money — has played a major role in leading Texas into the present straits. Until the state starts creating sustainable budgets that do not count on billions in nonrenewable revenue sources, the budget crisis we face this session will be succeeded by another crisis in the next.

The second major reason we believe in preserving the rainy day fund is the probabilities of the next several years of federal policies — and their effect not only on our state budget, but on the national economy. The sad truth is that federal programs such as Medicaid are placing unsustainable burdens upon our state budget. Legislators dealing with the demands of federal law in the next session may look back on this one as the good old days.

Furthermore, though Texas has done remarkably well in the present recession relative to the rest of the country — a testament, we believe, to the state's conservative governance — our state is not simply immune from the nation's woes. There's no guarantee that the bad economic assumptions that undergird much federal policy now will be a thing of the past by the next biennium. Today's federal policies and aspirations will still be deeply affecting the national economy when the next Legislature convenes.

In other words, if you think the state is in difficult fiscal straits now, just wait until 2013.

It is in these lights — the lights of history, prudence and principle — that we strongly believe the rainy day fund should go untouched.

We regret that Hart did not engage with any of these arguments in her attack against us. Instead, she engaged an old liberal trope: equate a policy preference with individual virtue and declare all those against it the enemies of virtue.

We won't go down that road ourselves. We will, though, note that the best friend of children, the elderly, physicians and every other class of Texan is a thriving state, an expanding economy and general prosperity. We have those things relative to the rest of America not because of state-government spending or an ever-expanding budget but because of the conservative principles, enacted in governance, of men and women just like us.



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That is, because of the Texan majority.

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