



Senator Eliot Shapleigh

District 29

Press Release

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"WRONG DIRECTION"

"Borrowing from Obama to balance the budget on the backs of Texas' at risk kids is not the right or moral choice—that \$3.2 billion was meant to educate kids, not fund more tax cuts.

Budgets are moral documents—and Texas is better than this budget."

AUSTIN - Today, the Texas Senate passed SB 1, Texas' budget for the next two years. Below is the statement Senator Eliot Shapleigh (D-El Paso) released today to explain why he voted against the bill.

"The fair question to ask on this bill is the Reagan question—'are we better off than we were? Is Texas headed in the right direction--when we pass this bill?"

Do our students graduate ready to compete—not just here, but with students around the world? In clinics and hospitals, can Texans get access to a doctor? In business, can Texans move people and products to market in a world where time is money? Does this bill make it more possible for students in Texas to get a quality college education?

As financial markets melt down around the world, do we do what we need to do to keep our citizens safe from the abusive lending practices that have put this very budget at risk? Does this bill keep us safe—along our 1200 mile border—from violent, criminal cartels that now barbarize towns like Juarez, and operate along all major Texas trade corridors?

Let's start with health care. Today, [5.83 million Texans have no health insurance](#)—one in four— making Texas the least insured state in the nation. Not a single Texas city even reaches the national average in citizens with health insurance. From 2001 to 2005, Texas families saw their health insurance premiums soar 86 percent—six times faster than their Medicaid incomes increased. Does Texas health access improve under SB 1?

The answer is no. CHIP expansion to 300 percent is not funded; new Medicaid enrollment is not funded. In fact, Rider 60 on page 97 will cut as much as \$200 million in upper payment level funding from Texas hospitals. At Ben Taub alone, the cuts will total \$20 million.

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Not a single Texan will get more health access under this bill. And if the Federal Reserve is right—300,000 more Texans will be out of work, and may well lose the health care that come with it.

Further, the bill puts millions of dollars at risk in Texas stem cell research because the stem cell research ban was never even debated.

What about education? In education, we now rank 46th in SAT scores and 41st in graduation rates. Only 64 percent of ninth graders graduate from high school within four years, and only 35 percent enter college. Texas now has fewer adults with at least a high school education than any state in the U.S.

In Article 12, by supplanting \$3.2 billion in public education money plainly meant for Title One students, this bill takes from the Texas' Title One kids, those very kids most at risk.

In this budget, despite \$10.9 billion in appropriated stimulus money, you still have not paid for new textbooks; no teachers get a pay raise, no new adult education money is allocated to The Texas Workforce Commission. No money is set aside for bilingual education even though a Federal Judge has held that Texas is violating basic civil rights.

What happens to Texas schools when you can't borrow from Obama anymore?

By fall 2009, tuition and fees at places like the University of Texas at El Paso will have increased 73 percent, making college a distant dream for many Texans. At the University of Houston, that increase is 139 percent. How did this happen? In 2003, the Finance Chair, Teel Bivins quietly cut the inheritance tax—a tax that only millionaires pay—and then worked to 'deregulate' tuition.

Dollar for dollar, tax cuts on millionaires were paid by tuition hikes on students.

Even with the money SB 1 puts in college tuition, 83,000 students who are eligible for Texas Grants will not get Texas Grants—nearly half of all students who qualify.

What about Tier One?

Let's take a look at Tech and Iowa—two Midwest universities. Both have 30,000 students. Under this bill, what is the difference is between what Texas invests in your students versus what Iowa invests in them? Over ten years, the answer is \$1.8 billion. On average, our emerging research universities have \$6,700 less per year per student in state funding than peers like Buffalo or even Nebraska. The bill has no money for new Tier Ones—at all.

Let's look at highways. Today, there are nearly a dozen diversions—money intended for highways that is moved to other parts of the budget. DPS, the Arts Commission, even the Attorney General gets highway money. When it comes to state highways, 'Robbing Peter to pay Paul' is the now official state policy. In the last five sessions, more than \$11 billion has been diverted to pay for other items in this Budget.

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Now, that burden, along with costs for schools, and health care, and mental health—has been shifted to cities and counties—all because lawmakers here say ‘no new taxes,’ to send that tax burden there.

Despite the fact that Rick Perry and David Dewhurst both committed to ‘fixing diversions this year,’ they are not fixed.

In 2008 Rick Perry appointed a Business Blue Ribbon Committee to tour the State and tell us just exactly what Texas needs to build highways, fund fast transit to keep moving. TXDOT hired Cambridge Informatics, the best infrastructure expert in the U.S. Both commissions came back with the same conclusion—‘we are out of money. Just to keep even with current demand, the highway fund will need \$8 billion per year.’

So what is in this budget to keep Texas moving? Here’s what—\$2 billion to pay for bond debt in 2010. That’s it.

Interest rates on the streets are now 1,100 percent per annum on predatory loans all across Texas—in this case you didn’t cut regulators—because there are none. The loophole that lets them run wild in Texas is still there. They are unregulated by design.

At the Department of Family and Protective Services, the agency that protects children from neglect and abuse, [almost a third of CPS caseworkers quit](#) last year due to low pay and high caseloads. Texas ranks 48th in the nation for a CPS caseworker's average salary, and Texas CPS caseworkers now carry twice the number of cases as the national average. Just last month, Federal oversight agencies failed Texas on six of seven key measures on how we take care of our kids. Despite clear warnings CPS investigator money sits where it usually sits—pending in Article 11.

At the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the agency charged with care for our most vulnerable, the U.S. Department of Justice recently expanded its investigation of abuse, neglect, and even lack of basic care to include every single state school for the mentally retarded. In the Austin school alone, last year 70 percent of direct care staff quit due to low pay or were fired. Yet this bill will not substantially raise pay or training to fix this problem.

Texas is headed in the wrong direction. If we have a fundamental mission, it is educating Texans today to succeed tomorrow. In 2008, the Governor appointed a [Select Commission on Higher Education and Global Competitiveness](#) that came back after taking an objective look at Texas against our world peers. Here’s what they concluded:

'Texas is not globally competitive. The state faces a downward spiral in both quality of life and economic competitiveness if it fails to educate more of its growing population (both young and adults) to higher levels of attainment, knowledge and skills. The rate at which educational capital is currently being developed is woefully inadequate.'

Today, the answer to Ronald Reagan’s question in Texas is clear—we can do better.

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