

From the office of  
Texas State Representative - Dan Flynn

## **THE FLYNN REPORT**

*Legislative Newsletter*

*June 10, 2003*

Greetings Constituents, Supporters and Friends:

With the end of the 78th Regular Session, I think it is appropriate to recount just a few of the many successes the Texas Legislature was able to accomplish. For many years conservatives have maintained through sound research and principled economic analysis that substantial savings can result from simply demanding greater efficiency from state government and by cutting excessive spending.

Governor Perry set the tone early by requiring a zero-based budget. House Appropriations Chairman Heflin meticulously shepherded the process in conjunction with Senate Finance Chairman Bivins. In the end, Speaker Craddick and Lt. Gov. Dewhurst coached the budget across the finish line. I believe this team has shown Texans can expect high standards without high costs.

In a series of moves that stunned the tax-and-spend liberal elite, those of us entrusted by the public with balancing the budget without raising taxes answered the call for fiscal responsibility. A record \$10 billion deficit greeted legislators during the opening weeks of the session and as some succumbed to hand-wringing about the need to further burden Texas taxpayers, there were many who saw the dilemma as a chance to take a much needed look at the expenditures of state government. Throughout the budget writing process special interest groups demanded increased spending with less legislative scrutiny. At the end, conservative budget writers erased the \$10 billion shortfall without eliminating critical social services and in fact increased funding for much needed programs in education and health care.

The results were for the first time Texas has overcome a budget shortfall without raising taxes. It was the first time government has not grown bigger since World War II and it was the first time members kept the promises they made during the campaign season on issues like medical malpractice reform and homeowners' insurance. Also, as promised the Defense of Marriage Act was passed and what looked impossible has now been done the child before birth will be recognized as a person in Texas law.

Feeling emboldened by our success, we proceeded further with our pro-family, pro-economy agenda and enacted solutions for the homeowner's insurance problems, which should lead to lower prices for insurance and more competition in the market. We are committed to addressing the "recapture" method of public school finance known as Robin Hood and have set in motion the process which will lead to a new funding mechanism in

a special session within the next few months. We also deregulated tuition rates at the major university systems in Texas and provided more coverage for school district employees for liability from lawsuits.

In keeping with our call for less government and more accountability, we completely reorganized the Department of Health and Human Services and implemented many changes in our welfare programs to make them fairer and more efficient. We made sweeping changes in the tort laws for the state of Texas that will make lawsuits less likely and will protect many of our citizens from costly litigation where they are not the offending party. And we passed legislation that will set about preserving the natural Texas beauty that we all have come to know and love, we even provided funding for the air quality needs of our state to meet federal EPA requirements.

As you can see, it's been a session filled with activity and hard won victories. While at times the session seemed more contentious than collegial, in the final analysis we were able to come together as a body and adopt legislation that benefits all Texans.

Since this Historic Session of the 78<sup>th</sup> Legislature produced Historic results the Texas House specifically, enjoyed stunning success in 2003. I want to share with you a Top 10 list of laws passed that, I believe, merit recognition: Even with a few bumps in the road along the way, the end result speaks for itself:

**1. Budget Reform (HB 1)** -- The budget bill overcame a \$9.9 billion deficit and did it without raising taxes and without hurting the truly needy. Starting with a zero-based budget and spending \$2.6 billion fewer state dollars than in the current biennium, the House Appropriations Committee managed to access \$2.2 billion more in federal money.

**2. Medical Malpractice and Lawsuit Reform (HB 4)** -- By capping non-economic damages, the so-called tort reform bill should curtail lawsuit abuse and keep Texas physicians where they belong: in Texas and practicing medicine.

**3. Insurance Reform (SB 14)** -- Major legislation that should reduce homeowners' insurance rates by expanding the marketplace, SB 14 also gives the insurance commissioner the clout to roll back rates and penalize bad actors in the insurance business.

**4. HHS Reform (HB 2292)** -- Major reforms and consolidation of health and human services agencies; expected to save \$1 billion and streamline service to clients.

**5. Public Education Reform (HB 3459)** -- Provided an additional \$1.2 billion for public schools, set a deadline of Sept. 1, 2004 for reforming Robin Hood, and formed a select committee that is determining the cost of an excellent public school education and how to restructure Texas' tax system in an upcoming special session.

**6. Transportation/Trauma Reform (HB 3588)** --Major dollars to fund transportation and trauma centers.

**7. Ethics Reform (HB 1606)** -- The first ethics reforms in a dozen years will require more disclosure by state and local candidates, and also requires disclosure of the much-criticized practice of legislative continuances.

**8. Higher Education Reform (HB 3015)** -- Deregulates tuition rates for state universities, allowing institutions of higher education to raise needed dollars AND sets aside 20 percent of new dollars for grants to needy students.

**9. Economic Development (HB 1771 and SB 275)** -- Provides \$295 million for the Texas Enterprise Fund to be used at governor's discretion to attract new business to Texas and merged the Department of Economic Development into the Governor's Office.

**10. TERP (HB 1365)** -- The Texas Emissions Reduction Plan will help clean the air in Texas cities out of compliance or near noncompliant with federal clean-air standards.

It has been the unique pleasure of mine to serve you in the Texas House. As the events of the months ahead begin to take shape, I know that my colleagues in the Legislature will be well prepared to represent their constituents. Special sessions are seldom called, but they can serve an important purpose. At the present time it looks certain that there will indeed be a special session called to settle the questions surrounding public school finance. We also, have a responsibility to consider congressional re-districting since the courts ruling is temporary and suggest the Legislature draw the congressional lines.

Until that moment in time, I pledge to diligently prepare for the work that lies ahead. My focus is clear and my priorities are set. As a member of the House General Investigation Committee, the Committee on Financial Institutions and the Committee on County Affairs I promise to do my absolute best to represent you and in securing the best possible educational future for our children, the next generation of Texas leaders.

My staff and I welcome your input and your questions. You can reach us in our office located in the Capitol extension: **E1.324**. Mailing address: **P. O. Box 2910, Austin, TX, 78768** and our phone number is **512/463-0880**. Email **dan.flynn@house.state.tx.us**.

God bless you all and God bless Texas.