



TSTA Legislative Session Update, February 11, 2013

House members question House leaders about Education Funding Appropriations Committee approves Emergency Medicaid Funding, Committee Chair says restoring education funds may have to wait for Special Session

The House Appropriations Committee on Monday approved a \$4.8 billion supplemental spending bill to cover a Medicaid shortfall left over from the 2011 legislative session. In 2011, Medicaid was only funded for 18 months of the two year budget, and the bill was necessary to prevent the denial of health care for millions of Texans.

However, as we have noted, the state has sufficient funds to cover both Medicaid and public education needs. On the House floor Monday, Appropriations Chairman Jim Pitts offered no assurances when education friendly legislators inquired about the possibility of a supplemental appropriation to restore the \$5.4 billion slashed from public school budgets two years ago.

Pitts suggested that the state leadership was inclined to wait until after the Texas Supreme Court issues a final ruling on the state's anticipated appeal of last week's school finance decision, and suggested that adding money to a system that might not be legal was a concern. In that decision, State District Judge John Dietz said the state was underfunding the schools and distributing funds in an unfair, inequitable manner among school districts. Ironically, Attorney General Abbott will appeal that the school finance system is legal.

Although Pitts did acknowledge that the legislature could act now, "wait for an appeal" while possibly restoring a little of the funding cuts was the clear message. Clearly, the Legislature doesn't have to wait on the appeal to do the right thing for Texas school children and educators instead of forcing them to wait another year in overcrowded classes. The Legislature has an \$8.8 billion general revenue surplus and a Rainy Day Fund balance of \$11.8 billion, enough to repay the schools, plug the Medicaid hole and take care of other important public needs.

The Medicaid bill probably will be up for debate by the full House later this week. There was no word yet on when House budget-writers would act on another supplemental spending bill. But, through their questioning of Pitts on Monday, Reps. Trey Martinez Fisher, Donna Howard, Sylvester Turner and Chris Turner indicated they will mount a strong fight to restore the education cuts.