



ROBERT DUNCAN  
STATE SENATOR  
DISTRICT 28

**The Texas State Budget**  
Senator Robert Duncan  
April 30, 2009

Last Friday, the lieutenant governor appointed the conference committee for the budget bill this legislative session.

I have served on that conference committee, and it has been a very great experience for me. I have learned a lot about the state budget and the intricacies of different political issues that arise when you are trying to balance all of the needs of the state with limited amounts of money.

Because of that experience, I continue to be intricately involved in the process. I have served on the conference committee since 1999, which is longer than any other member of the Senate currently sitting.

To balance the process, the lieutenant governor decided to rotate me off this session and allow other members an opportunity to serve on the committee. However, that does not mean that I am not going to be involved directly in the budget compromises that will be occurring. I attend all the meetings and I have direct input into the decisions that will be made. In fact, I have several different assignments to negotiate certain parts of the bill.

The conference committee consists of five members from the House and five members from the Senate. There is only a limited number of spots available for people to participate formally in the process. However, in the past and this year, other members who serve on the Finance Committee and have expertise in different areas of the budget, are involved in negotiations for the final product.

Because I have been involved in the negotiation of nearly every article in the budget, I will be intricately involved in the negotiations in many of the areas that affect people in west Texas, like health and human services, public and higher education and natural resources, which are the three areas that impact West Texas most.

Just because my name does not appear as a member of the conference committee, does not mean I am not a member of the conference committee. I am working very closely with the lieutenant governor's office and the chairman of the committee to help achieve a very good budget for the state of Texas.

The goal of both the House and Senate bill - if one reads them carefully - one can see that both the House and the Senate have tried diligently to maintain a conservative philosophy in spending the taxpayer's dollars.

One of the more complex issues this session is: How will the stimulus money impact the states budget, not just this year but also in the upcoming biennium?

In these negotiations, we are being very careful to wisely use the stimulus money available to us, so as not to commit us in the future. There are issues out there that have political disagreement, but I believe our job is to properly manage the state budget and take advantage of opportunities to reduce the load on the taxpayer not only now but in the future. The decisions I will make will be with that objective in mind. Some people may disagree. Some people may agree. That is just the nature of politics, but my pledge is to do the best I can to help manage the state budget in a fiscally responsible way.

These are very tough times and hard decisions will have to be made as we go through. We are not only writing a budget for today, but we are also writing a budget for tomorrow. The decisions we make in this budget will impact the next session in how we are able to balance our budget at that time.