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The Senate of The State of Texas



Senator Carlos Hresti District 19

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April 21, 2010

Honorable Rick Perry
Governor of Texas
State Capitol
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711-2428

Honorable David Dewhurst
Lieutenant Governor of Texas
State Capitol
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711-2068

Honorable Joe Straus
Speaker, Texas House
State Capitol
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768-2910

Dear Gov. Perry, Lt. Gov. Dewhurst and Speaker Straus,

The budget shortfalls looming before us — both now and in the coming biennium — present an imminent threat not only to the health and well-being of our children, working families and senior citizens, but to the dedicated state employees who toil daily on their behalf.

In times of budgetary crisis, the first reaction is always to reduce or cut programs and benefits. Certainly, some cuts are in order, although I believe the Legislature last year crafted a budget that contained very little if any unnecessary spending. The Texas Constitution wisely requires us to live within our means, and we have consistently done so.

State agencies are working to fulfill the governor's directive to reduce their budgets by 5 percent, and next year the Legislature will take on the daunting task of writing a new budget with \$10 billion to \$16 billion less to spend. We must realize that neither can be accomplished without risk or pain.

For example, we are facing the prospect of fewer beds for mental patients, fewer guards in state prisons, less money for Medicaid and other vital health care programs, no expansion of child abuse treatment and prevention programs and postponing facility upgrades at our colleges and universities.

I am particularly concerned about the growing demands on the Employee Retirement System and the prospect that state workers will be forced to shoulder an undue share of any budget reductions. State employees are government's greatest resource, and we must act now and in the next session to avert nothing short of a crisis for these loyal workers.



CARLOS URESTI
TEXAS STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 19

Please consider that due mainly to previous cuts by the Legislature, the ERS health plan will run short by \$143 million unless something is done. One proposal to meet that shortfall is increasing the costs paid by employees and retirees. That option, for me, is unacceptable. It would lead to higher deductibles and co-pays for visits to primary physicians and specialists, inpatient hospital stays, outpatient procedures, emergency room visits and prescription drugs.

Even if this approach is taken — the ERS Board will consider it next month — the long-term problem will not be solved, and I fear that lawmakers will again look to state employees for additional budget-cutting measures when we meet next year.

Treating state employees in such a way is not only unfair, it is not in the best interest of the state. The retraining and other costs associated with high rates of turnover tend to mitigate any savings accomplished by forcing state workers to pay more. We should focus instead on retaining qualified state workers, many of whom could obtain greater pay and benefits in the private sector.

Between now and the end of the next session, your leadership on this issue will be crucial for the Legislature to make the best decisions not just for state employees but for all Texans who depend on their hard work and dedication. Please know that I am willing to work with you and stand beside you when those tough decisions are made. And I will do all I can to see that my colleagues stand with you as well.

Thank you for your efforts and for your service to Texas.

Sincerely,



CARLOS I. URESTI

CIU/ml

