

State and Local

House committee continues work on Texas budget cuts

AUSTIN (AP) — The House Appropriations Committee worked Monday toward finding the "magic number" that would help balance the state budget but not cut too much to win legislative approval.

"I don't know where that magic number is," said committee chairman Jim Rudd, D-Brownfield. "It's somewhere above \$1.3 billion and probably somewhere less than \$3 billion."

The panel worked for a second day on proposed spending cuts, but took no votes.

Gov. Mark White has called a special legislative session for next month to make sufficient cuts to put a dent in, or erase, the projected deficit.

Comptroller Bob Bullock has predicted the shortfall would be \$2.3 billion by Aug. 31, 1987. He is expected to raise the deficit prediction to at least \$3 billion.

The appropriations committee is going agency by agency to find places to cut current spending. The Legislative Budget Board staff has produced two sets of cuts. Reducing most agency spending by about 14 percent would save \$2.3 billion. Cutting spending by about 34 percent would save \$3 billion.

But the budget board director

cautioned the committee that such steep cuts might not be feasible.

"The staff is not going to be able to speak very positively about any of these reductions," Jim Oliver told the committee.

For example, the committee Monday looked at numbers that would cut Department of Public Safety spending by \$5.8 million this year.

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Those cuts would include cancelling two trooper recruit training programs, at a cost of 180 new troopers. The cut also includes less frequent replacement of DPS "pursuit vehicles" and equipment.

The committee could begin voting on cuts today.

Some agencies probably will be immune to cuts because of federal court orders, said Rudd, who mentioned the Texas Department of Corrections and the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

"It's not off limits," he said of TDC, which is under a court order from U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice, "but I don't want to get William Wayne any more mad at us than he already is."

Rudd met with White early Monday to discuss the committee's progress. White indicated he thought the committee should come up with cuts of more than \$1.3 billion, according to the chairman.

"\$1.3 billion is just the floor," Rudd said. "We can go to \$2 billion. It doesn't bother me. Every little bit hurts. I don't know how much hurt is hurt. What I'm afraid of is you're going to get it so high that you may start losing votes and may not pass the bill in the House."

"That's what we have to be concerned with. We have to cut just enough to get our 76 votes" in the 150-member House, he said.

Legal drinking age change to encompass several laws

AUSTIN (AP) — The legal age for drinking alcoholic beverages in Texas will go from 19 to 21 on Sept. 1, and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission on Monday reminded Texans that the change will cover several laws.

Possession or consumption of alcohol in the state of Texas by people under 21 will be a crime.

Also illegal in this state will be the selling of alcohol to those under 21, the department said.

The change also applies to the age when people can enter liquor stores.

Beginning at 12:01 a.m. Sept. 1, possession of an alcoholic beverage by a person under 21 will be a misdemeanor with a possible fine of \$25 to \$200.

Sale of alcoholic beverages to underage people is the most serious offense, the commission noted.

The penalty for a first violation is a \$100 to \$500 fine and a year in jail. A second violation can lead to the same jail term and a fine of up to \$1,000.

W.S. McBeath, administrator of the alcoholic beverage commission, said a common misconception is that all these drinking age violations only apply to public places, and not to private parties or automobiles.

But "that's not true," McBeath said. "It will be just as illegal in a party barn, a fraternity house or a car parked on private property."

Ag commissioner calls for united front

By Mary Frances Scott
Staff Writer

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower met with the Board of Regents Monday in an attempt to rally the state agricultural institutions into a united front against the state's crumbling budget.

Hightower said the meeting didn't specifically address budget cuts, but did address the need for agricultural institutions such as Texas A&M, Prairie View A&M University and the Texas Department of Agriculture to team up in addressing the Texas Legislature, both during the general session and the upcoming August 6 special session called by Governor Mark White.

"What we've got to do is go in together, not as rivals fighting for the same thin slice of pie," he said.

"The message we will take to the special session is that we should not, in our eagerness to save \$100 here and \$1,000 there, cut our programs of economic development," Hightower said.

"Now is not the time to cut research and extension programs."

"It's a question of do we want to be a backwater state or do we want to be a front line, progressive, enterprising, national leader on the level of New York, California and Massachusetts," he said.



Jim Hightower

Despite the gloom over the budget, Hightower saw the budget crunch as an historic opportunity to redirect the agriculture economy of the state by moving into production of non-traditional Texas crops such as blueberries, wine grapes, pinto beans and Christmas trees.

Currently, many products are shipped out of state after harvest, processed into an array of packaged foods, and then shipped back to Texas for retail sale.

Hightower wants to put a stop to this by building a food processing industry within Texas, which he said will help not only farmers, but the entire sagging economy.

Local school budgets up \$2.7 billion in last 2 years

AUSTIN (AP) — Local school budgets have grown by \$2.7 billion in the two years since the Legislature passed HB72, the sweeping school reform law, the Texas Research League reported Monday.

The higher spending was funded as much by local property taxes as by record-setting increases in state taxes, said the non-profit educational corporation. "Over the past two years, an added \$1 billion in state aid was matched by a \$1 billion increase

in local school property taxes," the group reported.

"Last year, trustees in the 1,063 local school districts levied the largest school property tax increase in history — \$551 million."

The remaining \$700 million in increases was funded by bond sales, federal aid, school fees and other revenue sources, the study said.

The group also said school district tax levies in Texas increased an average of 13.3 percent last year.

Texas may find profits in rubber crop

RIO GRANDE CITY (AP) — Scientists report that pilot projects on natural rubber plots have been successful, indicating Texas farmers may be able to produce the new crop at a profit.

But Texas-produced natural rubber probably would have a tough fight against imported rubber, government and state scientists say. The United States now is dependent on imported natural rubber.

Pilot programs have monitored the growth of guayule, a bushy shrub native to the Trans-Pecos area of West Texas and the Chihuahu Desert in northern Mexico.

Test plots are being observed near Rio Grande City, Pecos and Fort Stockton, as well as in parts of Arizona, New Mexico and California.

"We found out that we can establish the plant, and it produces pretty well," said C.L. Gonzalez, a U.S. Department of Agriculture researcher.

The U.S. has had to import about 800,000 metric tons of natural rubber each year from Indonesia and other parts of the Far East at a cost of about 40 cents. Synthetic rubber is produced domestically, but that is unacceptable for use in tires and some defense applications.

Guayule could be produced

cheaper in South Texas than at any other location because of adequate rainfall coupled with low-cost land, Gonzalez said.

The crop could fill in as a substitute for cotton seed farming, said John P. Wagner, associated director and principal investigator of a guayule project conducted by Texas A&M scientists at Pecos and Fort Stockton.

"I'm saying it has potential to be a new crop," Wagner said. "I am not saying it could revolutionize farming."

The guayule project at A&M began in September 1983 under the

auspices of the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Command, which provided an initial \$300,000 to build a pilot guayule processing plant at the Texas A&M Research Extension Annex in Bryan, Wagner said.

He said he didn't know how much it would cost to produce natural rubber or how much revenue the industry could provide. But the rubber production would have the advantage of being fully mechanized, he said.

Gonzalez said the cost of imported rubber must rise to at least \$1 a pound before locally produced rubber would be a viable option.

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