

School finance implications

Businessmen say bill's defeat leaves tax picture uncertain

DALLAS (AP) — The House's rejection of a school finance plan adds more confusion to the prospect of tax reform in Texas, business leaders said Wednesday.

□ Texas House defeats finance bill/Page 1

"It leaves a great air of uncertainty as to what's going on and what's going to go on," said Bill Allaway, executive vice president of the business-supported Texas Association of Taxpayers. "I don't know how you even assess what's going to happen next."

The Texas Supreme Court ordered a school finance reform plan from the Legislature by April 1. The Senate approved a \$13.9 billion plan Tuesday night but it was rejected 87-63 in the House Wednesday, throwing into question the state's ability to meet the court-ordered deadline.

Texas businesses have been bracing for a new tax bill to meet the costs of equitable access to public education and a projected \$5 billion deficit in the state budget.

Some view a tax bill as an opportunity to push for changes in the size of business' tax burden and range of businesses who shoulder it.

Texas' property, franchise and sales taxes do not reach the fast-growing service part of the state's economy. They rely instead on capital-intensive industries such as energy.

In addition, Texas businesses pay more than 60 percent of the state tax burden, twice the national average.

"Any relief that business can get from that kind of intensity I think would be welcome," said Sander Shapiro, an Austin attorney who specializes in state tax law.

"We have called for a complete tax restructuring," Allaway said. The association's board will meet Thursday to consider a committee's recommendation to support income taxes.

Tax reform and the state budget are likely to be the chief topics during a special session of the Legislature expected in July.

In addition to the outcome of school finance reform, two reports due in July will shape much of the debate.

One is from Comptroller John Sharp on audits of state agencies and recommended spending cuts. The other, from the Select Committee on Tax Equity, sizes up Texas' tax structure.

"It's in business' best interest, and therefore in people's best interest, to be pro-active in this whole restructuring area," said Dan Cook, a Dallas businessman who is a member of the Select Committee on Tax Equity and chaired it from 1987 to 1989.

Businesses pass tax costs to consumers in the form of higher prices, creating "hidden taxes" for most Texans, Cook said.

"People ought to know what

taxes they're paying and why they're paying them," he said.

Business leaders said they want to see the Legislature control spending before raising taxes.

"The debate on an income tax is important but it is not timely until we first address the critical issue of controlling the rate of growth in government spending," said Brad Gahm, vice president for government affairs of the Texas Association of Business.

"What we have is a spending problem," said Scott McLaughlin, president of Saunders Co., a plumbing wholesaler in Big Spring. "We've got to get people in Austin to realize they're under a budget."

"They are also fully aware that in the process there will be some trade-offs involved," Kennedy said.

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We believe the time has come for us, as students, to reject the rampant pursuit of career and money and instead to pursue the urgent call of the eternal welfare of men and women worldwide.

We believe the time has come for us, as students, to demand that leaders in government, media, religion, business and education give proper thanks and honor to God and be men and women of integrity.

We believe the time has come for us, as students, to consider the Great Commission of Jesus Christ as our personal and primary responsibility before God and to get on with the job of reaching and discipling the nations on earth before Christ's return.

Finally, we believe that Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat will not ask us what grades we made, what honors we won, what career positions we held, what our bank balance was, what fashions we chose, what denominations we belonged to, or the salary we earned. We do believe that He will ask us what we accomplished in this life for eternity and for the souls of men and women.

Therefore, we give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him to go where He tells us, to do what He commands, and to do what He says, empowered by His Spirit as long as we shall live on this earth.

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