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AG: Perry must release zero-based budget draft

By Connie Mabin THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott's office ruled Tuesday that Gov. Rick Perry must release to the public drafts of the state budget his office was working on before he came up with his zero-based budget.

Assistant Attorney General June Harden wrote in a four-page opinion that Texas law requires that the documents be disclosed.

Responding to requests from The Associated Press, the San Antonio Express-News and the Austin American-Statesman, the governor's office stated in a February letter that draft budget copies and other related materials should be kept private because of exceptions in the Texas Public Information Act.

Disclosing the documents would discourage the "frank exchange of information among government staff and agencies," Perry's office contended in asking for an attorney general's opinion on the matter.

Perry spokeswoman Kathy Walt said the office was in the process of retrieving the documents and would make them available to reporters by April 22. The opinion said Perry had 10 days to notify the news organizations of his intent to release the material. Perry could have sued to challenge the ruling.

The records comprise "literally tens of thousands of pages," Walt said. "That's what we're starting to pull together." The ruling by Abbott's office was applauded by open government advocates.

"That's good news. It would seem that the law's very clear on this subject and I'm sure the governor will want to follow the law and release the records promptly," said Donnis Baggett, publisher and editor of the Bryan-College Station Eagle.

"The public has a definite right to know and a need to know how he arrived at his numbers," said Baggett, who's also vice president of the Texas Daily Newspaper Association.

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— Donnis Baggett Bryan-College Station Eagle

The three news organizations made their requests separately over a nine-day span in January after Perry proposed on Jan. 17 that Texas spend nothing in the next two fiscal years.

Perry's proposal listed amounts spent in previous budget years in each category, such as education and public safety, and then recommended zero be spent on that item for

NEWS IN BRIEF

the coming two-year cycle. Perry, a Republican, desmi the proposal as historic and using zero as a starting p allows legislators to judge a dollar ultimately spent by agency against every fund request. Republicans Lt. (d David Dewhurst and Ha Speaker Tom Craddick agreat Royce Poinsett, the govern

assistant general counsel, and that the budget work docume should be exempted from rebecause they were papers would be used in evaluating lation for approval or veo because they were memory within government agencies are part of a deliberative proc

The AP in its written ap Jan. 23 asked for the most ap pleted work product or draft sion of the governor's but that was not the zero-based posal, including any docume detailing recommended si budget cuts.

In an interview on Jan.81 the AP and the Amena Statesman, Perry spoke of budget recommendation by working on.

"I will give a good su point budget," he said. "I wi out a budget for the Legislan work with, work with us." Perry said his budget pro

would be based on available enue, or the amount of more comptroller says state lawn have to spend in fiscal 2004-05. He did not rule out but would not be specific. Perry was adamant that be "no new taxes."

> Editor in Managing Opinion News

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American Air could bankrupt 'Now if workers don't approve plan The

DALLAS (AP) — Labor leaders at American Airlines warn that workers could reject concessions designed to save the world's largest carrier from bankruptcy, but the company has declined to renegotiate the deals.

Results of the voting by employees are expected by April 15, and a company spokesman said Tuesday that American would file for bankruptcy "very soon" if any of the unions reject concessions, which total more than \$1.6 billion a year.

Leaders of unions representing pilots, flight attendants and mechanics struck last-minute deals March 31 as American executives warned that the company's lawyers were minutes from marching into bankruptcy court.

Now, the deadline deals are running into criticism.

The deal would result in layoffs for 250 American's 12,000 pilots. Those remaining take a pay cut of 23 percent the first year slightly smaller 17 percent cut the remaining years. They would get stock options and small es in later years of the contract.

"Bankruptcy is not a pretty option, but it be a worse deal that what we're voting on now," Greg Shayman, a Fort Worth-based pilot and ber of a group opposed to the the concess agreement.

Even if the unions ratify the wage and be cuts — part of American's plan to cut overalls ing by \$4 billion a year — the company could wind up in bankruptcy, "and then those options would be worthless," Shayman said.

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- * Volleyball/ Golf

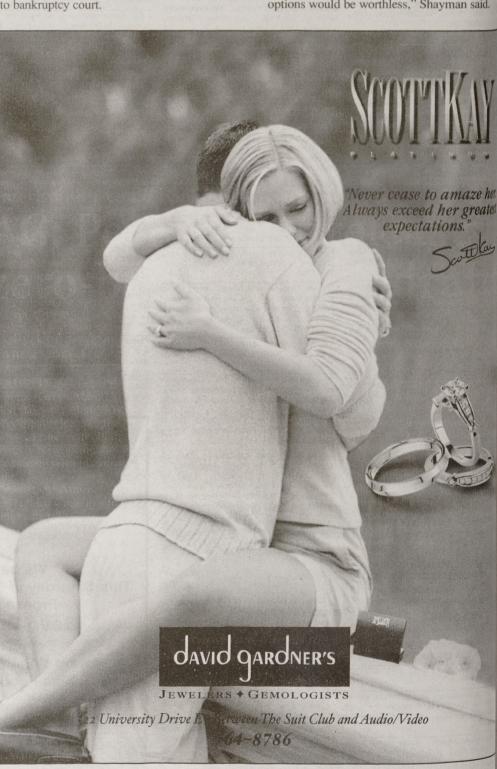
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Questions? Contact the Student Foundation office at 846-8193 or you can e-mail us at student@12thmanfoundation.com



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