

SPENDING CUTS: Rough year ahead

Written by Editorial Staff

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If there is one thing members of the Texas Legislature are asking Santa for this Christmas, it is probably extra money — or a frozen calendar. Because without one or the other, it is going to be a chilly winter in Austin.

The 82nd Texas Legislature is scheduled to convene Jan. 11, 2011, and is expected to face one of the toughest budget crunches in state history. You can bet this won't be a fun session.

According to reports, the Legislature will apparently have to cut some \$20 billion or more out of a two-year state budget that started out at \$182.3 billion. On the surface, that sounds rather simple. But with all the pressures in Austin, those cuts won't be easy.

State officials thought they were off to a good start last January, having shaved spending by 5 percent. But with the recession lingering, more action was needed. In May, Gov. Rick Perry ordered state agency heads to plan for another 10 percent cut in general revenue-related spending in their 2012-2013 budget requests.

According to a story in the San Antonio Express-News, the Texas Education Agency, the state's biggest agency in terms of dollars spent, started cutting fast and furious. For the 5 percent rollback last January, the TEA had to cut \$126 million, including a \$25 million science lab grant program, \$16.6 million from a teacher mentoring program and \$10 million from planned textbook purchases. Then in May, the Legislative Budget Board ordered the TEA to find another \$260 million to cut. Some \$48 million more came from textbook spending; \$42 million from a program to fight dropout problems; and \$13 million was slashed from education programs in Texas prisons.

But they aren't done yet. This month, Gov. Perry said the state needs to find another 2.5 percent in spending cuts before the Legislature takes over in January. Ouch.

Texas has a budget shortfall and sacrifices have to be made. These sacrifices aren't fun and they aren't easy, but they can be found.

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