

## **Texas Update – January 2008**

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### **Comptroller Estimates The Legislature will have \$9.1 Billion Less to Spend this Biennium**

Comptroller Susan Combs issued her biennial state revenue estimate this month. Due to the economic downturn, Texas will have \$9.1 billion less to spend during the 2010-2011 biennium than it did during the previous biennium. According to the recently released budget recommendations by the Legislative Budget Board, simply funding current state services will leave the state \$2.5 billion in the red. The news isn't all bad, however. The state's Rainy Day Fund is expected to reach between \$6 and \$9 billion due to high oil prices last year. These important reserves can give the state a needed cushion and help fund important state services like enrollment growth in health and human services and education, if the Legislature chooses to draw on it. Ultimately, however, this Legislative session will prove tight in terms of available revenue.

### **The TACHC Policy and Issues Forum Is HERE: Come Armed With Stories and Examples from Your Health Center**

The [TACHC Policy and Issues Forum](#) will convene next week, February 2 and 3 in Austin, and health center members will be visiting the Capitol to discuss the primary care provider shortage, state investment in Texas health centers, Medicaid reform, and other issues important to your communities. Our agenda is packed with critical information about this year's state legislative climate, priority policy areas, and other key information you will need to make your visits a success. A truly successful legislative visit, however, will be illustrated with stories from home, from the district – your health center, that can drive home the policy requests. On your way to the P&I, be thinking of the following stories:

- The number and type of provider vacancies your center is experiencing. What more could your center do for your communities if that position were filled?
- Stories about waiting lists for your services
- Other stories about what your clinic needs to serve more uninsured

Personal stories that highlight the need in your communities are often the most powerful tool we have to gain support from our legislators. Come prepared to offer those stories!

### **Jose Straus of San Antonio Elected Speaker of the House of Representatives**

Representative Joe Straus, Republican from San Antonio, will take the helm as Speaker of the Texas House this session. Straus assumes this leadership role now during only his second full term as a state representative. He was elected during the 2005 legislative session to fill the seat of Elizabeth Ames Jones who resigned for a post on the Texas Railroad Commission. During his acceptance speech after being elected unanimously by fellow House members, Straus spoke of the need for bipartisan collaboration in a House narrowly divided between 76 Republicans and 74 Democrats. Straus takes over for former Speaker Tom Craddick of Midland, who withdrew his bid for a fourth term as Speaker before the session began.

### **House Rules Approved – Including Changes to Committee Structure**

Under Straus's new leadership, changes are taking shape in the structure of House committees. Five committees, Government Reform, Judiciary, Local Government Ways and Means, Pensions and Investments, and Regulated Industries, were either subsumed or had their duties distributed into other committees. One new committee was created called Technology and Workforce Training. The new House rules also open up the powerful Appropriations committee to seniority appointments, rather than allowing the Speaker to appoint every member. These changes to the House rules, and the spirit of collaboration in debating them some news reports suggest, mark some of the first changes the House is experience under its new leadership.

### **Frew Settlement Update: New Loan Repayment Program Announced to Benefit Medicaid Children**

Texas health centers aren't the only organization working to implement loan repayment for health professionals as a way to address the provider shortage in the state. A new loan repayment program aims to help Texas increase the number of doctors, dentists and specialists who provide care for children with Medicaid coverage. The new program, which will begin in March, is among the initiatives funded from \$150 million set aside by the 2007 Texas Legislature to make it easier for children with Medicaid coverage to get medical and dental services. The funding is part of the Legislature's \$1.8 billion plan to increase Medicaid rates and the availability of services in response to the Frew v. Hawkins lawsuit over utilization of preventive services in children's Medicaid. Once the program is fully implemented, it will provide loan repayments for up to 1,200 physicians and dentists a year. Each doctor will be eligible for up to \$140,000 in loan repayments over four years if they meet targets for services provided to children on Medicaid.

***Important to note, however, is that the Frew loan repayment program is NOT the same as the loan repayment program health centers are championing.*** Our program is different in several key ways:

1. The Frew loan repayment program targets only doctors and dentists. Our proposal targets all providers eligible for National Health Service Corps loan repayment (doctors,

dentists, advanced practice nurses, physician assistants, dental hygienists, psychologists, social workers, and others).

2. In our proposal, eligibility for loan repayment is tied to service in a health professional shortage area, not simply on the number of visits to Medicaid children.

This new loan repayment program will be important for increasing access to care for Medicaid children, and may significantly benefit your health centers as you recruit doctors and dentists. TACHC is working to coordinate the health center proposal with the Frew program to maximize access to care all around the state. You can learn more about both proposals at next week's Policy and Issues Forum.

### **Federal Economic Stimulus Package Contains Funding for Health Centers – How Will This Impact our State Policy Requests?**

In its current form, the House Stimulus package contains \$1.5 billion for community health centers over a two year period. Specifically, \$1 billion in funding is designated for funding health center renovation, repair and acquisition of health information technology with the remaining \$500 million designated to fund expanded access to new health center patients. In addition to direct health center funding, the bill also contains \$600 million to fund primary care workforce over two years, including funding for Health Professions Training and National Health Service Corps. Of course, this Federal support is great news for communities hurting under the economic downturn. Assuming this package is approved by the Senate, however, Texas health centers will still need significant state support to meet the staggering need for primary health care services in your communities and in communities where we do not yet reach. We will need both Federal and State support to work hand in hand to significantly impact health access in our state.

**Encourage your colleagues to join us as health center advocates. [CLICK HERE](#) to sign up!**