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Senator Lucio Statement on Passage of the Senate Budget

AUSTIN - Today, Senator Lucio offered the following statement to his colleagues on the floor of the Senate regarding passage of [Senate Bill 1](#), the Senate's version of the State budget for the next biennium:

"Members, I want to take the opportunity to thank Senator Williams.* He's been a fair, inclusive, and efficient chairman, and I feel honored to have had the chance to serve as a member of Finance Committee.**

"Moreover, I'm happy to have served on the Public Education Workgroup. We made some great progress and were able to add almost \$1.4 billion to the Foundation School Program, a great step in the right direction. I voted for the Committee Substitute to SB 1 because I believe this bill is moving truly in the right direction.

"However, members, this budget is just that: a first step. We need to continue working toward restoring last session's cuts and eventually making our way toward a better budget. We need a truly "pro-lifetime budget," a budget that affirms our state's commitment to safeguarding its most vulnerable citizens, starting with all of our children.

"My constituents really felt the effects of last Session's cuts to public education. When a school district is a community's principal employer, losing hundreds of school district jobs really makes a negative impact. In Hidalgo County, it was estimated that the 2011 budget defunded nearly 1,000 school district jobs, and nearly 500 school district jobs were cut in Cameron County. That's why I didn't support the budget last session; it simply meant too much to the people I represent.

"Unfortunately, members, under the current political climate, it is regrettable that Medicaid expansion cannot be appropriately addressed. So what's the alternative? More people without insurance show up at the front steps of our emergency rooms, and the rest of us who are insured continue to pick up the check for their incredibly expensive emergency room visits?

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"Unfortunately many working, low-income Texans aren't offered healthcare coverage through their jobs, and regrettably many more simply don't get paid enough to purchase it. This doesn't include the individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, and self-employed. These are crisis situations: people put off doctor visits because they cannot afford them; they go to emergency rooms when their health takes a turn for the worse.

"This issue is vitally important in my Senate district. The Valley population is growing, yet the region has substantially higher poverty rates than Texas or the United States as a whole. If Texas opts out of the Medicaid expansion, these uninsured adults will have no medical assistance available in 2014. Choosing not expanding Medicaid is essentially choosing not to provide any safety net for our neediest Texans; even though the obligation is with the federal government, and even though this is an opportunity for Texas to recover our money from the United States. Ultimately, people will be falling through the cracks.

"So, what alternatives would succeed in fixing Medicaid, while also helping more individuals get insured? Chairman Williams, I've seen your comments regarding co-pays. Senator Deuell, you have a proposal to use block grants. Those are great starting points. Let's have a meaningful conversation about those options and others. Let's put our constituents first by expanding Medicaid and reducing the number of unhealthy Texans.

"Whether we do it like Florida, New Jersey, Arkansas, or wherever; we need to do it, or at least have a valid conversation about doing it. I think we owe it to our constituents to do our job, debate the issue, and come together for the greater good.

"But I must stress: Millions of Texans can't afford for this issue to be kicked down the road. Right now, millions of Texans desperately need access to care.

"Nevertheless, members, I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that with this session's budget we have laid the foundation for a better Texas, provided we don't lose sight of what we believe in: helping the citizens who elected us to represent them today."

* Senator Tommy Williams (R-The Woodlands) is Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, the committee charged each Legislative Session with drafting the state's budget.

** Senator Lucio is a member of the Senate Finance Committee, as well as its subcommittees on Fiscal Matters, Public Education, and Community Colleges.

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