



JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
Minutes / December 7, 2010 / Chamber Board Room

Attendance: Jody Anderson, Trent Ashby, Susie Cardwell, David Collier, Mark Dunn, Robert Floyd, Dawn Glover, J.D. Hale, Gail Husband, Kelly Holcomb, Cheri Huddleston, Jerry Huffman, Codie Jenkins, Melinda Kartye, Roy Knight, Paul Parker, Joe Penick, Larry Phillips, David Pore, Stephen Raley, Joe Rich, Wes Suiter, Jim Watkins, Van Watson, Jim Wehmeier, and Dorothy Wilson with special guests Senator Robert Nichols and Representative-Elect James White.

Chairman Ashby called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m. and thanked all attendees for their time and attendance. He recognized State Senator Robert Nichols and State Representative-Elect James White.

2011 LUFKIN/ANGFELINA COUNTY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Chairman Ashby asked for brief comments on each of the Legislative priorities for Angelina County for the upcoming Legislative session.

PROTECTION OF WATER RESOURCES:

Kelly Holcomb reported the following:

- Daniel Ash is a new U.S. Director of Fish and Wildlife.
- Concern for the upcoming change in definition of water on bill HR 5088 on the Clean Water Act on the federal level.
- Concern regarding the basin permitting on waste water.
- Protection of water rights in general is a major concern

LUFKIN STATE SUPPORTED LIVING CENTER:

Gale Husband and Joe Penick representing the Lufkin State Supported Living Center discussed the following concerns about possible budget cuts or closure:

- With 1190 employees, additional positions were required to reach the settlement agreement. This means more funds/expenditure for payroll, etc. to accommodate the additional employees.
- 600 of the 1190 employees are in the lower pay range and budget cuts would be devastating to them.
- The population of clients/residents is 398 with an average age of 49, the Center is considered one of the larger facilities. A cut in budget and size would mean sending more clients into the community and the community is not set up for this at this time. They are currently housing 4 clients per bedroom and would like to eventually have 3 to a bedroom, but the funds are not available for expansion.
- The Center has recently been designated for children, so they will be receiving more clients as younger ones are directed to this location. Again, this will be difficult with budget cuts.
- The Center is a major employer for our County and it would be devastating to close the Center.

MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY CARE

Judge Wes Suiter expressed the following concerns:

- We need to keep our State funding for our new mental crisis facility and increase the funding.
- In 2010, 1003 people came to this facility for treatment. This created a total savings of \$3.4 million including dollars saved by (1) not having to use the Emergency Room facilities, (2) lowering transportation costs by being able to treat patients locally, and (3) not using police force as manpower to manage and transport patients to out of town facilities for treatment.
- Quality of life is much better by keeping patients in their home town.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

Dr. Larry Phillips gave the following issues as major concerns for community college funding and unfunded mandates:

- Angelina College is funded at about 50% less than universities. To accommodate a budget cut would mean a tuition increase of \$5-\$10 per hour.
- There are about 150,000 community colleges. Our own Angelina College has an increase of 1,000 students this year and 20% growth in the past two years. This includes additional services provided such as (1) absorbing displaced workers to retrain, (2) providing college-credited courses to students that cannot afford to go to college, (3) provide concurrent classes for 11th and 12th graders, and (4) assisting with pilot programs for high school seniors such as the nursing lab at Hudson High School where students can graduate from high school with an LVN degree. .
- Beware of unfunded mandates for colleges and universities that sweep community colleges, such as textbooks, etc.

SCHOOL DISTRICT PRIORITIES:

Lufkin ISD Superintendant Roy Knight presented the distribution of school funding as a major concern in the upcoming year. The State representatives are already on board on this issue.

- Lufkin is currently receiving about \$5,000 per child. Budget cuts should be done in higher paid schools.
- Budget cuts would create safety issues such as using 20-year old buses for transportation.
- Early childhood programs are a must and should not be cut.
- Charter schools are receiving about \$400/child more than LISD. There is a special place for charter schools such as providing education to our special needs children, but school districts should not have to compete for the funding.

UNFUNDED MANDATES:

- Judge Wes Suiter expressed concern about unfunded mandates since the County operates off of ad valorem taxes. Unfunded mandates such as indigent care could be devastating.
- City Manager, Paul Parker, expressed concern that the City operates off of sales tax and is self sufficient and competent in managing their own funding. They do not need any unfunded mandates from the State.

MUNICIPAL AND COUNTY REVENUE CAPS:

- Judge Wes Suiter commented that Angelina County already has the second lowest tax rate.
- City Manager, Paul Parker, expressed concern in general on Revenue Caps. The City does not need them.

ENHANCEMENTS THROUGH TXDOT PROJECTS

There is much concern do to the minimal funding provided to TxDot for transportation projects.

- Whitehouse Extension – Jim Wehmeier explained that this is an evacuation route that is needed to route some of the evacuation traffic around the City in order to move more people.
- 59 North Project – Jim Wehmeier explained that this project is already funded but we need to be sure that it remains funded. This is a needed reworking of a section of the East Loop 287 and 59 North and service roads. This also feeds a 150-acre industrial park and is critical to another 1000 acres that is to be developed later.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN LUFKIN

Jim Wehmeier and Judge Wes Suiter expressed concern for funding to be able to maintain the D.E.M. distribution warehouse and inventory that is designated for emergency preparedness in case of hurricanes, tornados, fire, etc. There is cost involved in keeping this facility here—one of two in Texas. What funds have been taken away need to be replaced.

REDISTRICTING

Redistricting needs to remain a priority for our area to assure we get as fair a treatment as possible and protect rural representation.

Senator Nichols responded to the concerns and assured the group he would help support those issues. He complimented Angelina County on having their act together on getting these type of agenda items to him in advance so he could be aware of our needs and concerns.

State Representative-Elect White talked about what was on his agenda for the upcoming session.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 a.m.