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EDITORIAL COMMENT

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The budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome become bankrupt

—*Marcus Tullius Cicero (January 3, 106 BC – December 7, 43 BC) Roman philosopher, statesman, lawyer*

Everybody has a budget to balance. Balancing a budget usually comes down to either cutting back on what you spend or increasing the amount of money you take in (revenue) or both. This is true whether you are a National or State government, a business, a school or an individual.

Our state and local governments are currently faced with the task of deciding what to do about their budgets. Texas, in fact, is mandated by its constitution to balance the budget. The difficulty lies more in the fact that Texas is made up of many different individuals all with their own ideas of what is important to keep or cut. No one person or group wants to lose out. We might liken the situation to that of parents deciding how to help their older child get to college while still needing to pay daycare for the youngest. In which area do you cut back to meet your financial goals without compromising your children?

Texas Legislature is considering cuts in many areas, several of which will affect El Paso doctors directly. Programs likely to suffer cutbacks include those of Medicaid, graduate medical education, loan repayment, and mental health.

Physicians who accept patients with Medicaid will likely see a 10% drop in reimbursement. Many physicians in private practice and those employed by public or community health centers may not be able to withstand those cuts.

The current state Graduate Medical Education (GME) formula funding represents less than one half of estimated faculty costs for GME in Texas. The lack of adequate GME funding prevents the state from growing the needed numbers of GME training positions. This means that many Texas medical school graduates may be forced to leave Texas for GME.

Additionally, the Texas Loan repayment programs currently in existence may be eliminated, leaving many residency graduates without ways to pay their medical school loans and indirectly increas-

ing the shortage of physicians in underserved and rural areas of the state.

Lastly, mental health funding is already low in El Paso; cuts to programs like Early Childhood Intervention would be devastating to the children here with developmental delays and disabilities. To parents of these children, developmental programs are a crucial link to an improved quality of life.

When balancing a budget, sacrifices must be made, but hopefully, the Texas budget won't cause El Paso doctors and families undue hardship. We must continue to keep ourselves informed of changes and get involved whenever possible. This is an important part of medicine today.

Information on Current Texas Legislature from following sources:

1. Robert Gray, State cuts target Medicaid Local docs say drop will hurt more in El Paso, El Paso Inc. online, Feb. 24th, 2011 www.elpasoinc.com/readArticle.aspx?issueid=326&xrec=6183
2. Texas Medical Association website, section on Medical Education and Workforce. www.texmed.org/Template.aspx?id=18265
3. Texas Medical Association website, section on Medicaid and CHIP Advocacy. www.texmed.org/template.aspx?id=795
4. Texas Medical Association website, section on TMA Publications. www.texmed.org/Template.aspx?id=20162
5. www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/politics/entries/2011/02/21/more_balance_needed_in_texas_b.html

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