

Greetings!!

The number of things going on in Baton Rouge is staggering. As the session winds to an end, the amount of things that have yet to be done and the time left to do them don't seem to be compatible. Hundreds of bills still must be heard, each must be reconciled and perhaps even go to conference committee, the budget must be finalized and all by June 23, 2008. WOW!

When a bill passes one house and is amended in the other house it faces an uncertain fate. When the amended bill returns to the originating house it must be either accepted or rejected. If it is rejected, as amended, it then is referred to a conference committee where the differences between the house and senate are worked out. If no compromise is reached the bill dies. If a compromise is reached then it goes back to both houses for an up or down vote.

At the Finance Committee budget hearings yesterday we had public testimony by anyone and everyone who needs money from the state. Many of the people appearing are desperate for help and are deserving of every consideration. The senate, however, cannot restore the money cut by the house and still remain under the spending cap. In previous updates I told you that over the next two years we would see the spending cap and the budget collide – well it has already started.

One of the groups that appeared before us was people who, for the most part, are dealing with kids who are severely handicapped and are trying to get state and federal help to keep their heads above water while helping their kids. The help they are seeking is in the form of a New Opportunity Waiver slot. To get one of the NOW slots you have to add your name to the bottom of the list of other needy folks and wait your turn. The waiting list is now 10 yrs long and there are over 10,000 names on that list. Federal funds are available on a 70/30 match for the state. I am going to work with these folks and see if we can find a better way to help. HB 1273 by representative Tucker authorizes the forming of a group, which will include parents, to come up with recommendations to control cost and improve service.

This is a time to be very careful in the senate. A senator whose bill was deferred in committee may now try to add the same failed language as an amendment to a bill coming over from the house. I suppose that is okay and has always been part of the process but sometimes self serving language is slipped in and no one notices. I try to stay at my desk and watch these bills very carefully particularly for amendments that would not be good for us.

The Shaw bill is being returned to the senate with the amendment that gets rid of all income tax in the state stripped off of it. I think the senate will concur and the bill will be off to the Governor's desk for signature. The bill as amended will return us to pre Stelly tax rates.

We heard this week that there may well indeed be another special session this year to deal with healthcare. If the session is called it will more than likely be in December. This could well be a December to remember!

Let me know if I can help you.

*Jack Donahue*

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SENATE DISTRICT 11