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# Paper 'n Ink... and the losers are...

by Lynn Brisendine

Printed just below this item is a compilation of news taking place, mostly, in our state capital.

The main focus of today's State Capital Highlights concerns the appointment of a special legislative committee by the Texas House Speaker Joe Straus.

It is a few words which describe some real problems with our present state government. The Speaker has charged this special committee with the task of explaining how general funds on the Texas budget are obtained and spent. Many of our taxes are collected from specific areas and were originally meant to address spending concerns in those related areas.

As with many of the once dedicated funds finding their way to Austin, the politicians, over many years, have taken monies meant to address expenses in those areas where those monies came from and should be spent within, and used them in the general funds to offset over-budget items.

It will be interesting to follow what this committee decides knowing that the 2011 legislature, as a whole, deferred billions of dollars owed to the next fiscal period. The deal was payments due in the 2011 budget were moved into the 2013 ledger by one day.

The action was a "smart" political move at the time to extricate our elected representatives from a budget crisis of their own making. Everyone in both chambers breathed a sigh of relief, they had balanced the budget and could go home sans special sessions to address and fix the real problem. This also allowed our Governor to run for President and tout his management talents at preserving a balanced budget.

Debts, personal, business and even governmental, have a way of coming due. And no matter how, or whom, tries to delay their repayment, it never works out well.

This coming political biannual season in Texas sees the same problems looming as more money needs to be spent than anyone can see coming into state coffers.

The next bill due which outstrips funds available is pegged at \$15 billion. While that is bad news, again, the possibility of a growing state economy is seeing a better return on sales tax revenue. Should these increases be maintained into the new year then the estimated overage of needed funds will be lessened.

But, nothing I have read seems to point to the increased funds washing out the anticipated shortfall, especially when much of that money is due immediately due to the bookkeeping maneuver to see a balance, kind of, achieved.

All of that is bad enough. But reading the report, things did get worse. At least for us West Texans, because the appointment of members to

this special committee included only one representative in the western districts.

State Reps. Drew Darby, R-San Angelo, and John Otto, R-Dayton will co-chair the committee. Straus also appointed to the committee state Reps. Rafael Anchia, D-Dallas; Larry Gonzales, R-Round Rock; Patricia Harless, R-Spring; Donna Howard, D-Austin; Jose Menendez, D-San Antonio; Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie; and Sylvester Turner, D-Houston.

I am not sure what this special gathering will accomplish and perhaps the lack of West Texans involved means little, but still it points out a gaping problem we face way out here on the High Plains of Texas.

We, as far as I can recall, are in the weakest political position we have ever faced in Austin.

Our one major voice, Sen. Robert Duncan was the architect of moving those funds discussed earlier. It was a bookkeeping trick which will need to be addressed. State Sen. Kel Stiegler also has some standing among his colleagues, but when it comes to the House seniority scheme we are as weak as we have been in decades.

This condition is happening as our area of Texas is on the grow. Just watching the traffic flow through our cities and along all of our highways would indicate a rapidly growing economy and with it the population growth.

So, we will see a cash broke government whacking resources at a time when they are needed the most.

This government shuffling debt and offering special deals to too few is nothing new at nearly every level we care to study.

Texas is bad enough, but it pales when looking D.C. way. And now national leaders are trying to manipulate the entitlements, Social Security and Medicare. Many government retirement funds are in jeopardy with unique accounting taking funds needed in following decades and spending them now.

While things aren't looking too rosy for Texas fiscal policy, they are downright phenomenal when compared to our federal condition. We owe trillions of dollars, billions on interest payments alone. All of this while our highways, bridges, rail facilities, you name the infrastructure and it's crumbling around us.

Is it any wonder that apathy is rampant. Our governments expect us to pay our bills, save some money and tow lines of their making at all times in all ways. They however can get by with the sloppiest form of doing business, all the time pointing fingers of blame across aisles which seem to have lost any semblance of taking care of business.

What a mess.



## Thinking in Type:

By Dustin Wright  
Sentinel Managing Editor

When it comes to covering/watching sports, I thought I have just about seen it all.

Saturday, I was proved wrong. He came barreling out of the southeastern portion of Jones AT&T Stadium.

It was late in the fourth quarter of play and my beloved Texas Tech Red Raiders were easily -- and surprisingly -- to most in attendance and across the nation -- ahead of the fifth-ranked West Virginia Mountaineers 42-7 at that point of the contest.

Brent Smith, 20, made his way through the 22 players assembled on the south end of the stadium, and by the time I saw him from my north-western corner bleacher perch at the Jones, he had already lost his shirt.

What we had on our hands was a potential streaking incident, made famous across the globe in a wide array of sporting events, ranging from soccer to golf, and everything in between.

As Smith made his way downfield, covering more rushing ground than WVU Heisman trophy hopeful Geno Smith did that day against the Red Raider defense, he began his quest of a slow-paced striptease for the 57,000-plus fans in attendance.

Some booed his interruption while others laughed and cheered.

I, along with my Dad, oldest brother, his girlfriend and one of my closest friends, were laughing at the action taking place before us.

Stopped near the 30-yr line, on Tech's home sideline, Smith began his "Full Monty" quest by ripping off his belt and tossing it aside as if he was auditioning for the Chippendales.

I began to shake my head in utter disbelief at the scene unfolding in front of me. "I, along with 57,000 other people, are going to see this dude strip down to his butt-nakedness before anyone is going to stop him."

After his belt toss, off came his boots.

"This is not good," I was thinking, wanting to put my head down in shame for the kid but wanting to watch the train wreck unfold. "This isn't going to end good, one way or the other."

The one way being Smith's completed birthday suit surprise to those at the Jones, and "the other"

being a forceful removal by the slowly responding law enforcement officials inching his way.

Off come the jeans.

"This is not good," I believed I muttered to my buddy. "This idiot is going to get butt naked."

Smith started reaching for his undergarment, which looked like a pair of athletic shorts.

I ducked my head.

"This is not good, at all!" I remember expressing.

However, much to my delight, and those of the 57,000-plus in attendance, Smith's attempt was foiled by the hastened pace of security officials who were closing in on the 20-year-old. Smith, who had one hand on his shorts, in an attempt to pull down his apparent last article of clothing, was tackled to the ground by law enforcement officials.

"Whew, man that was close," I know I mumbled. "That could have

been bad. Real Bad."

In the position I have been in, I have had the fortunate opportunities to see a lot of things happen in the sports world. Upset wins, come-from-behind wins, blow outs, nail biters and questionable plays that happen once in a blue moon.

I've been at the Jones when Tech Hall-of-Fame linebacker Zach Thomas had his game winning pick-6 interception against nationally ranked Texas A&M in the 1990s. I was there when Michael Crabtree tightroped down the sideline to beat No. 2 Texas a few years ago.

I thought I had seen it all at a sporting event, until Saturday's incident. And even though we didn't "see it all" from Smith (and thank the good Lord we didn't) I again find myself saying this about my sports coverage/watching experience -- "I've just about seen it all."

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# State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



### House panel to review what state does with revenue...

AUSTIN — Money paid in state taxes and fees doesn't necessarily fund exactly what Texans think it will fund.

So, Texas House Speaker Joe Straus last week appointed an Interim Committee on General Revenue Dedicated Accounts as part of an effort, he said, "to make our state budget more transparent and accountable to taxpayers." The committee will report its findings and recommendations to the House in early January.

Straus explained that for more than 20 years, the state has allowed money that sits in general revenue-dedicated funds -- nearly \$5 billion in the current fiscal biennium -- to be used to certify the rest of the state budget.

"The practice of 'funds consolidation' has evolved from a one-time accommodation and turned into a decades-long bad habit in our state's budget process, and now is the time to move toward a fairer, simpler and more straightforward approach for Texas taxpayers," Straus said Oct. 9.

State Reps. Drew Darby, R-San Angelo, and John Otto, R-Dayton will co-chair the committee. Darby said the state "should provide the services people and businesses expect on those taxes and fees dedicated for a specific purpose. Truth in taxation also requires that we bring these revenues in line with fiscally responsible appropriations."

Straus also appointed to the committee state Reps. Rafael Anchia, D-Dallas; Larry Gonzales, R-Round Rock; Patricia Harless, R-Spring; Donna Howard, D-Austin; Jose Menendez, D-San Antonio; Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie; and Sylvester Turner, D-Houston.

**Sales tax revenue grows**  
Texas Comptroller Susan

Combs announced Oct. 10 that state sales tax revenue in September was \$1.96 billion, up 11.6 percent compared to September 2011, and that state sales tax revenue has increased for the 30th month in a row.

She said continued strength in the manufacturing and oil and natural gas sectors led to the sales tax revenue increase, while collections improved thanks to consumer spending at restaurants and retail stores.

**Voting 'application' debuts**  
Secretary of State Hope Andrade on Oct. 3 announced the launch of SmartTXVoter, an English and Spanish language smartphone application "to help Texans stay informed about statewide voting information like registration deadlines, early voting dates and candidates or amendments on the upcoming ballot."

SmartTXVoter, viewable in English or Spanish, is formatted to be accessible for Texans with visual impairments. The app is part of the "Make Your Mark on Texas" program meant to educate Texans about voting pursuant to the federal Help America Vote Act.

**Drought disaster continues**  
Gov. Rick Perry on Oct. 5 renewed -- for yet another month -- the emergency Disaster Proclamation he originally signed on July 5, 2011.

The proclamation certifies that exceptional drought conditions pose a threat of imminent disaster in specified counties in Texas. Some 138 of the state's 254 counties are named in the current proclamation.

### Court hears Fisher case

The U.S. Supreme Court on Oct. 10 heard oral arguments in Fisher v. University of Texas, a case contesting the university's admissions policy, which allows

the institution to consider an applicant's race as a factor in choosing which students to admit.

Counsel for the plaintiff maintained the policy unfairly discriminated against Abigail Fisher, a white female student from Sugar Land, who scored higher on tests and other factors than some black and Hispanic students that gained admission.

Counsel for UT defended the university's policy of "holistic individualized consideration" of each student application and asserted that race "doesn't invariably make a difference with respect to every minority applicant."

Some court watchers predict that if the court rules in favor of the plaintiff, it could spell the end of affirmative action policies now in place across the country. Others have expressed that a ruling in favor of the university is critical for continuation of efforts to promote racial and ethnic diversity.

A ruling in the case could take any length of time from a few days to many weeks, or months.

### Meningitis case confirmed

The Texas Department of State Health Services on Oct. 12 announced it had linked one case of meningitis to steroid injections produced by the New England Compounding Center.

The patient, an adult female from Central Texas, was evaluated after experiencing meningitis symptoms. Symptoms of meningitis include fever, nausea, vomiting, photophobia, neck stiffness and headache. The patient was hospitalized and is being treated with antifungal drugs. Additional details about the patient are not being released to protect her identity, the state health department stated in a news release.

