



NEWS RELEASE

LOUISIANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 13, 2013 • Contact: Glen Duncan (225) 342-9795

House Appropriations Committee questions pay raises in tight times

BATON ROUGE – During the second day of testimony regarding Governor Jindal’s proposed state budget, the House Appropriations Committee heard from more state departments and programs to learn spending needs. The hearings are to provide background to HB 1, pre-filed early last week, which provides for operating expenses of state government for Fiscal Year 2013-14. The House Appropriations Committee heard from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Treasury, the Department of Insurance, the Secretary of State’s Office, the Attorney General’s Office, the Department of Public Service, and the Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Representatives continued to question the breakdown of certain spending habits among state departments, and examine the budgets of all state agencies, their annual funding and expenditures. Pay raises within departments came under close scrutiny.

State Representative Simon Champagne, R-Erath, vice chair of the Committee, asked Secretary of State Tom Schedler to elaborate on the 7% pay increase, cited in their projected budget, based on training certification for employees within his agency. Rep. Champagne also requested a detailed report on the matter.

"You can count on me to ask all state departments for a report on these expenditures," Rep. Champagne said. "I am motivated by my commitment to responsible state spending during this time of fiscal challenge; we need to account for the money our state departments are spending, and insure all monies are going to the right place," Champagne said.

When the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry explained his budget request, Chairman of the Committee, Rep. James Fannin, D-Jonesboro, asked why the commissioner would designate money toward pay raises and away from soil and water conservation.

Fannin said, "I understand that employees are important, and that you have been working hard, but I feel it is more important to the environment and to the citizens of Louisiana to keep the budgetary money in soil and water, instead of merits. These are

hard times, and I believe we should all stay at the bottom together, and when the time comes we can rise together. I request that you give serious consideration to this when it is time to make your decision regarding merits.”

State Representative John Schroder, R-Covington, also probed the commissioner, after hearing his report of raises in spite of a smaller overall proposed budget.

“What bothers me,” Schroder said, “is we’re made out to be the villain when we ask to increase efficiency and ask ‘Can you find a dollar?’ And agencies shake their heads, and then we see pay raises. There’s something wrong here, the calculations don’t add up,”

“I agree that hardworking state employees deserve the raises that are available to them based on efficiencies,” Schroder said, “but it’s hard to tell the tax payers of Louisiana that the sky is falling, but we found room to give raises. I work for the people, and what’s fair is fair, but it’s hard making heads and tails of this.”

The committee is scheduled to continue tomorrow, March 14, at 9 AM, in House Committee room 5. The committee will be hearing from the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, the Department of Economic Development, and the Louisiana Workforce Commission.



Photo Cutline: Rep. Champagne probes state agencies in today's House Appropriations Committee hearing.



Photo Cutline: Rep. Pope looks over documents from today's House Appropriations meeting regarding HB1.

###