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## Senate bill decreases university funding



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BY [MIKAELA CANNIZZO](#)

The Texas Senate unanimously voted on Tuesday to pass the finance committee’s proposed budget, which decreases state funding for many colleges and universities by 6 percent to 10 percent.

Senate Bill 1, which determines the state’s budget for the next two years, passed with \$217.7 billion in total funding, up \$4 billion from the original amount proposed at the beginning of the session. Despite this slight increase, legislators still had to cut higher education funding in order to allocate money to other priorities.

According to the Texas Tribune, UT would lose almost \$48 million, about 10 percent of its current budget.

“Decreases are always unfortunate and we regret that, but please keep in mind this is a tough budget,” Sen. Kel Seliger, R-Amarillo, said during the Senate meeting. “We were told we only had so much money to work with.”

While institutions of higher education will suffer some loss of funds, SB 1 increases financial aid for college students by providing an additional \$45 million for the TEXAS Grant program.

Additionally, it changes the process of funding for special items such as research centers and startup projects.

The Senate's budget originally lowered funding reserved for these special items by approximately \$1 billion, which Seliger said would have potentially cut 46 percent to 51 percent of funding for some institutions.

Special items at UT such as the McDonald Observatory and the Bureau of Economic Geology were at risk of losing their funding through this original budget proposal.

The passed version of the budget ensures at least 90 percent of each institution's special items are funded. Seliger said this new system will be more efficient than the initial cut and preserve funding for initiatives that need it.

"This committee left no stone unturned looking for savings, examining our budget drivers and looking for ways to make smarter use of our limited resources," said Committee Chairwoman and Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound.

Sen. José Rodríguez, D-El Paso, said he is concerned about the estimated \$332 million institutions of higher education would lose across the state under SB 1. He said the cuts in financial aid and research proposed by the federal budget add to his worry about the future financial state of colleges and universities.

"Texas higher education, my friends, will take a double hit potentially down the line," Rodríguez said during the meeting.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said this budget plan has been a work in progress for about a year and said legislators still have a long way to go before confirming a financial plan for 2018-19. However, he commended senators for their hard work and unity in approving the committee's version of SB 1.

"On this day, in this body, on this budget, we are united and speaking with one voice," Patrick said in a statement. "This budget reflects Texans' priorities as conservatives and our commitment to meet the needs of this vast and rapidly growing state despite tough fiscal challenges."

HB 1, the budget filed in the House of Representatives, has yet to be approved. As the only piece of legislation required to pass this session, both chambers must reconcile their proposals before passing a budget for the next two years.

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