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# Don't shortchange state workers when they retire

By Dan Maxwell

For the past three months, lawmakers in Austin have come together across party lines and regional differences and agreed to use part of the state's \$33 billion surplus to help Texans who need — and deserve — assistance as we grapple with record inflation.

The budget working its way through the House and Senate includes property tax cuts for homeowners. It includes pay raises for state workers who keep our state up and running and haven't had a general raise since 2014.

And it includes more money for the current and retired teachers who have taught gener-

ations of children.

But there is an important group of Texans who are struggling financially and are not yet recognized in the state budget: retired state employees like me.

I am one of around 123,000 Texans who receive a monthly pension check through the Employees Retirement System, to which we contributed throughout our careers.

Those checks have been flat since 2001 — the first year that Rick Perry was governor, and George W. Bush was president.

In those 22 years, the Texas Legislature has not approved a single cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, for retirees. The Social Security Administration has done so virtually every year

under both Republican and Democratic presidents.

During that time, the Legislature also has not provided a 13th annual check to supplement our yearly income, such as the one retired teachers have deserved and received the last two legislative sessions and are slated to get again this year.

The Legislature still has the time to provide the 13th check — though it is running out, with just five weeks left before the Legislature adjourns on May 29.

I started working for the state two days after I graduated high school when I took a job in the print shop at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. I went on to manage Stephen F. Austin Uni-

versity's television production facility and radio station in Nacogdoches after earning my bachelor's degree there. Then I worked for the Lufkin State School and Lufkin Supported Living Center for 34 years before retiring in 2010.

My career choices reflect my commitment to giving back to others and serving my community, even if it meant earning less than in the private sector.

I am not alone. Tens of thousands of other retirees protected public safety, served vulnerable children and the elderly, and built and maintained the roads, parks and infrastructure that allowed our state to grow and prosper.

These former state employees

are not just clustered in Austin. I worked with dedicated colleagues throughout East Texas, and retirees live in literally every Texas House and Senate district. That means each of our 181 legislators represents retirees, just like they represent homeowners, public employees and current and former teachers.

Our lawmakers are wisely supporting those other groups. It's time for them also to support the former state workers who made Texas the great state it is.

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*John "Dan" Maxwell is a retired state worker, president of the statewide retirees' chapter of the Texas Public Employees Association, and chairman of the Employees Political Action Council of Texas.*