Two years ago, we stood at the brink of a particularly challenging legislative session.

Like any business owner or family anywhere in Texas, in tougher times, we had to make some difficult decisions.

The choices we made, however, helped stabilize our economy, and kept industries hiring in the Lone Star State far faster than anywhere else in the country.

As a result, we are the envy of the nation, and we’re building on that success, with Texas adding more jobs last month than any other state.

Our unemployment rate remains well below the national average, even as we continue to attract job-seekers from all across the United States.

Our economic success has also meant sales tax collections are up, steadily posting gains over the past two years.

It’s important, however, that we don’t interpret higher sales tax collections as a license to spend freely, when it’s actually an opportunity to make our budget more sound.

Even if more money is being collected, we have to treat each dollar as respectfully, and carefully, as we ever have.

We have to remember there is no such thing as "extra" money, not when it’s coming out of the pockets of taxpayers.

That’s why, earlier this year, I proposed the Texas Budget Compact, five effective principles that will lead to an even stronger Texas in the years to come.

Here’s the short version: practice truth-in-budgeting, support a stricter constitutional limit on spending, oppose any new taxes or tax increases, preserve a strong Rainy Day Fund, and cut wasteful and redundant government programs and agencies.

Today, I’d like to focus specifically on the need for truth in budgeting, and making our budgeting process more honest and transparent.

Simply put, that means requiring the legislature, and all state agencies, to present the public with an accurate accounting of the money coming in, and the money going out.

This is not unlike the process when any family or individual pays the bills every month, you make the payment you owe and you make it on time.

Truth in budgeting means just that. It can also mean making some tough decisions, and not writing IOUs to the next budget.

The techniques I’m talking about are as old as government, and have been in practice in Texas and throughout the country for generations.

However, that doesn’t make it the best way to do business.

Largely because of our economic vigor, Texas is presented with an opportunity
to hit the reset button, to rewrite our budgets without deferrals, and without all manner of accounting maneuvers that can make a budget look better than it is.

This will produce a more accurate budget, both for the state and for individual agencies that more closely align with our vision and our values.

And fees collected for a specific purpose should be used only for that purpose, or they shouldn't be collected anymore. That's not only a principle, it's just common sense.

We can't afford to rest on our laurels, and we can't take our success for granted.

We are approaching a 2013 Legislative Session that offers a very clear choice in the direction we'll be going as a state in the years, and decades to come.

It is imperative we remain committed to the sound conservative values that have brought us to where we are today, and take steps to advance us even further.