



UP Legislative UPDATE

A Publication of the TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION
5113 Southwest Parkway, Suite 185—Austin, Texas 78735

Susan Hult Edwards
President

Jeff Edwards
Chair, Legislative Committee

Richard Moore
Executive Director

August 2002

BUDGET FORECAST GRIM AS 2003 SESSION NEARS

Ominous conditions are colliding to make the next legislative session, according to some, the most difficult in recent memory. Even before the September 11 tragedy—which had an immediate effect upon tax revenues nationwide—the state's economy was cooling considerably from the rapid growth of the '90s.

Couple this trend with the tax cut of the last session, burgeoning Medicaid rolls, and a prior commitment to further subsidize health insurance for public school teachers, and it will be rough going for all proposals that involve additional spending. Finally, redistricting (which is required every ten years) has driven off many experienced incumbents, who will be replaced to a large degree by freshmen promising "no new taxes," and with less understanding of the state budget.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's ambitious "Closing the Gaps" plan to add 500,000 students to college and university rolls by 2015 will run headlong into these realities. Legislators will also be reluctant to consider proposals for enhancing state retirement contributions or health insurance benefits, due to the budgetary implications of even "minor" adjustments to these particular programs.

So far, most discussion of raising new revenues has centered upon closing "loopholes" in the franchise tax, and raising a host of fees in the service sector. There is little sentiment among the leadership for drastic changes in the tax system.

If the economy improves dramatically prior to the 2003 regular session, legislative leaders may be more sanguine about the future.

Candidates Offer Programs

The grim budget outlook has not prevented candidates from advancing new initiatives for higher education. Most are programs to encourage first generation students to pursue degrees and certificates. Each proposal would have a formi-

dable price tag, with little or no mention of new taxes to pay for it. Indeed, Lieutenant Governor Bill Ratliff recently criticized candidates who assert that new programs can be funded by increased efficiency. "Scrubbing the budget produces pennies," he told the Associated Press, predicting "draconian" cuts if new sources of revenue are not found.

At least four candidates have published specific proposals that could have significant ramifications for community and technical colleges in Texas. Following is a sample from press releases.

Governor Rick Perry favors competitive grants to assist first generation students. Money would be directed to colleges to recruit, counsel, and prepare new enrollees. Funding would be provided through the Coordinating Board, using \$20 million in federal Workforce Investment Act funds. Governor Perry would also revamp the Hinson-Hazlewood college loan program, using \$150 million in "currently unused" general obligation bond authority to make loans to students from low and middle income families of up to \$5,000 per year at no interest. He would also expand the use of "middle colleges," which enable students to get a high school diploma and associate degree while attending a two-year college.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Tony Sanchez recommends developing a network of "laboratory schools" linked to all university and community college systems. He would "redirect to these laboratory schools some of the \$150 million spent on remediation of incoming freshmen each year by our colleges and universities." Mr. Sanchez says the first of these schools should be located in districts where students face the most difficulties, then subsequently expanded, "developing new educational techniques for all kinds of students."

John Sharp, the former Comptroller of Public Accounts and current Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor, would

permit any Texas student who earns a "B" average in high school to receive a scholarship for tuition, fees, and books. The scholarship would last as long as he or she maintains a "B" average in college.

Republican Comptroller of Public Accounts (and candidate for re-election) Carole Keeton Rylander would provide every Texas high school graduate with an opportunity to attend a public community or technical college for two years free of charge. She estimates that the implementation of this plan would cost approximately \$150 million, and proposes using lottery proceeds that would be earmarked by law for the program.

Capitol observers stress caution in expecting these and other proposals to become reality, given the financial straits the Legislature will face in January.

Study on Economic Impact of Community Colleges Released

A study released June 18 on the economic impact of Texas community colleges illustrates statistically the value of these schools to the economy of Texas and its local communities. Policy makers and advocates can find ample evidence in the report to bolster support for state appropriations.

The study, called "The Socioeconomic Benefits Generated by 50 Community College Districts in Texas," was conducted by CCBenefits, Inc., and funded by Houston Endowment Inc. and the 50 community college districts. It was released officially by the Texas Association of Community Colleges, and includes tabular data and narrative summaries that can be shared conveniently with local representatives and senators.

An overview of the study will be provided in the September issue of the TCCTA *Messenger*. The entire document is now available at the TCCTA Web site at www.tccta.org.

REMINDERS TO LEGISLATORS

Sources: Texas Association of Community Colleges, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Texas Community College Teachers Association

- Community colleges are the largest sector of higher education in Texas. Fall 2001 enrollment in semester length classes was 461,236 students.
- Enrollment figures more than double when non-semester courses are considered and student enrollment is reported for the entire academic year. During the 1999-2000 academic year, 1.06 million students (unduplicated headcount) were enrolled in community and technical colleges.
- The average age for a community college student is 26.
- Female students comprise 57% of the enrollment at community colleges.
- 70% of the freshmen and sophomores in Texas public higher education enroll in community colleges; 75% of the minority freshmen and sophomores attend a Texas public community college.
- Community college students closely reflect the ethnic diversity of Texas.
- For every state dollar appropriated to community colleges, Texas will see social savings of \$0.21 per year in reduced expenditures on such items as incarceration, health care, unemployment, and welfare.
- A recent Coordinating Board study confirmed that transfer students from community colleges are as successful as those who begin their studies at universities.
- Despite enrollment increases, the proportion of Texans enrolled in higher education is declining.
- Average local community college property tax levies have gone up 187% since 1983.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

1. Write as an individual. Remember, you do not and cannot speak for the Texas Community College Teachers Association or your college. Do **not** use college stationery, E-mail address, or the college postage meter.
2. Know your legislator's committee assignments, interests, and areas of expertise.
3. Include your full name and return address on the **letter**; envelopes are often discarded.
4. Be brief; a short, well-organized message is best.
5. Come to the point within the first sentence or two; mention bills or resolutions by number if possible.
6. Confine your letter to a single issue, bill, resolution, or area of concern.
7. Make your specific request as clear as possible and explain exactly what you want your legislator to do.
8. Be reasonable. State your position or request, and always give reasons.
9. Be constructive, and avoid insults.
10. Use your own words. Use personal pronouns like "I" and "you." Your message should **not** read like a newspaper editorial.
11. Do not use form letters or forwarded messages. Petitions generally have minimal impact.
12. Proofread for errors.
13. A note of sincere appreciation is always appropriate.
14. Allow a reasonable time for a reply.
15. Send a copy of your legislator's response to the TCCTA state office if you think will be helpful to the Association.

ONLINE DISCUSSIONS NOW AVAILABLE ON TCCTA WEB SITE

Current legislative issues and other topics can be discussed "virtually" via a new "FORUM" feature on the TCCTA Web site (at www.tccta.org).

From this site members can also access Texas Legislature Online, by far the most comprehensive source of valuable material regarding the legislative process. Committee schedules, bill texts, witness lists, and specific information about incumbent representatives and senators are all available from this official site.

Those without access to the World Wide Web are encouraged to call or write the TCCTA state office.

The state office would also be happy to provide members with a copy of the most recent edition of the "Guide to Political Participation."

Plan Now to Attend

TCCTA Conference for Faculty Leaders
October 11-12
Austin



Annual Convention
February 20-22, 2003
Austin Convention Center

TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION Membership Enrollment Form

Dr.
 Mr.
 Mrs.
 Miss
 Ms.

First Name Middle Name or Initial Last Name

College _____
(If more than one campus, indicate your campus.)

Preferred Mailing Address
 for TCCTA publications (if
 other than to college): _____
Street Address or Post Office Box

City State ZIP Code

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY:

- Instructional
 (Subject taught: _____)
- Student Services
 (Position: _____)
- Learning Resources/Library/Media
 (Position: _____)
- Administrative
 (Position: _____)
- Other (Specify: _____)
- Retired (Previous Position: _____)

CHECK HERE IF YOU DESIRE COVERAGE UNDER THE OPTIONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE PROGRAM, AND ADD \$40 TO THE AMOUNT OF YOUR CHECK.

CHECK ONE:

- PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP (Full-time educator at a Texas community or technical college)—Dues \$35
- ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP (Classified employee or retired or part-time educator at a Texas community or technical college)—Dues \$25 (Retiree may join as Professional or Associate Member.)
- STUDENT MEMBERSHIP (Enrolled for graduate credit in community college education)—Dues \$20
- UNAFFILIATED MEMBERSHIP (Friend of the Association not eligible for one of the foregoing types of membership)—Dues \$25
- CHECK HERE if you wish to receive the *TCCTA Messenger*. Annual dues **include** \$5 for subscription; there is **no additional charge** for the *Messenger*.

Membership Period: September 1, 2002–August 31, 2003.

If paying by credit card: Visa MasterCard

Account Number _____

Expires ____/____

You may renew or activate your membership and enroll in the liability insurance program using your *VISA* or *MasterCard*. No need to write a check. No bothersome bank drafts. Simply provide your credit card number and expiration date at the places indicated above.



If paying by check: Make checks payable to TCCTA. Give enrollment form and check to your campus membership representative or mail to: TCCTA, 5113 Southwest Parkway, Suite 185, Austin, Texas 78735.