

State/Local

Bullock proposes issuing school construction bonds

AUSTIN (AP) — Comptroller Bob Bullock proposed Tuesday that the state issue some \$750 million in bonds to help finance construction of additional school classrooms in Texas.

Such a plan, which would require approval of the Legislature, could allow school districts to spend additional money on improved programs or property tax relief instead of construction, Bullock said.

"Where our kids are educated is just as important as textbooks and lesson plans," he said, adding that Texas is one of just 10 states that don't give financial assistance to local districts to build classrooms.

Bullock, a Democrat who is running for lieutenant governor in 1990, unveiled the plan in a letter to lawmakers who gather next week for the 71st regular legislative session.

The plan is similar to an idea

Bullock offered last year as part of a larger proposal to help the state deal with a district judge's ruling that the school finance system was unconstitutional.

That ruling by Judge Harley Clark would have required the system to be overhauled by Sept. 1, at an estimated cost of \$1 billion to \$2 billion. However, his ruling was overturned last month by the 3rd Court of Appeals. The case is being appealed to the Texas Supreme Court.

Concerns have been voiced by some lawmakers and others that momentum to reform the school finance system might stall because of the appeals court ruling.

Tony Proffitt, a spokesman for Bullock, said the comptroller decided to offer the classroom construction plan in case other school funding issues aren't addressed.

"He's not sure the big education plan will go," Proffitt said. "This is something they (legis-

lators) can do that's not going to cost the state a lot of money."

Bullock said high property tax rates "are killing education, and it's time for the state to help."

"We need to give these schools some relief on expensive, big-ticket items like classrooms, Texas needs classrooms, laboratories and libraries. I'm not talking about building football stadiums, gymnasiums or swimming pools."

He said the bond money also could be used to refund any costly outstanding school bond debts, with savings applied to a district's educational programs.

According to the comptroller, the state's approximately 1,100 school districts paid nearly \$900 million in 1988 on more than \$6.5 billion in interest and principal. The state has the highest public school bond debt in the nation, he said.

Congress will hear bill on workplace drug abuse

AUSTIN (AP) — A bill requiring efforts to guard against workplace drug abuse by some construction businesses and other safety-sensitive industries was introduced Tuesday with support from business, labor and the Texas Civil Liberties Union.

The measure by Rep. Lloyd Criss, D-La Marque, also would require licensing of medical laboratories conducting drug tests and establishing standards for rehabilitation programs. It sets up procedures to safeguard workers' rights.

"Right now, there are no rules," Criss said. "Although there are legitimate drug testing laboratories 'scams' also exist because of a lack of state regulation."

Joined at a news conference by representatives of the Texas Association of Business, the International Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, and the Texas Building and Construction Trades Council, Criss said his bill would protect rights of both workers and employers.

"Drug abuse on the work site is damaging to the business community because it causes losses in production, accidents, higher workers compensation (insurance) premiums and overall lower morale on the worksite," Criss said.

"It also is damaging to the worker, especially the worker who has to work alongside the drug abuser," he said. "That worker certainly has to work on an unsafe worksite, and generally he has to pick up the rest of the load that the drug abuser is failing to do."

The Texas Civil Liberties Union sued an Austin computer chip-maker that administered drug tests to workers, and a state district judge decided for the employer in the case, which is on appeal. But Jim Harrington, TCLU legal director, said the group supports Criss's bill.

"This makes it very clear what everybody's rights are in the situation," Harrington said.

The bill would require all businesses that employ 15 or more people and engage in hazardous work to adopt a policy to eliminate drug abuse, although drug testing would not be required. Hazardous employment includes jobs in construction,

manufacturing, petrochemicals and public utilities.

Specific guidelines are included for drug policies, and employers would be required to give workers written copies of their policies.

Drug testing would be allowed only under reasonable suspicion of policy violation or an injury caused by an employee. Initial tests couldn't be used to deny employment or discipline a worker.

An employee who tested positive would have the right to explain the results and/or participate in a drug rehabilitation program.

Although only hazardous businesses would be required to have drug policies, other companies that chose to adopt such a policy would be included under the proposed law.

Bob Sumpter, vice president of employee relations for the Texas Association of Business, said, "We certainly feel very strongly that with all of the evidence that exists, if we can get drugs out of the workplace, it will mean a much safer environment for the employees in Texas."

Criss, citing studies by the Construction Industry Institute, said a typical drug abuser uses three times the normal amount of sick leave benefits.

Teacher plans black Texans museum

AUSTIN (AP) — An Austin teacher, frustrated with the lack of information about blacks' role in the history and development of Texas, decided to take matters into his own hands.

McCallum High School history teacher David Williams and others began working on the Black Texans Cultural Museum and Hall of Fame 1½ years ago. The museum is to open by mid-June.

Williams has visited more than 22 Texas counties in search of the missing historical links connecting blacks to the state's chronological chain.

At best, such information is fragmented, Williams said. At worst, the historical data has never been documented and is absent from textbooks and classes.

Information about notable black figures, historical events, inventions, black communities and early settlements will be collected, housed and displayed at the cultural museum, which Williams said will be the

first of its kind in the state.

A computerized research center at the museum will provide information on black Texans and events on request, Williams told the *Austin American-Statesman*, and exhibits of statewide interest will be sent to museums throughout Texas.

University of Texas Professor John Warfield said the museum is "a good idea and represents something we should be doing to appreciate the heritage of Blacks in this state."

"But I am concerned that history not be defined solely by heroes or outstanding achievements. We must also take up the struggle of ordinary people and the masses to understand the whole picture," Warfield said, who teaches educational psychology and African-American studies.

Williams, who earned a doctorate in education from Baylor University, said he did not learn of the seven blacks who fought or served during

the Texas Revolution in history classes.

"I had to get it the hard way, mostly through lengthy research," he said.

Among those seven blacks, Williams said, is Samuel McCullough Jr. of Jackson County, one of the first soldiers to shed blood during Texas' struggle for independence from Mexico.

Even though McCullough received a life-crippling injury to his shoulder in 1835 while fighting for the Republic of Texas, he, like other free blacks, was ordered to leave the Republic five years later. It took an act of Congress for McCullough and his family to live in the state for which he risked his life.

The six other known blacks who fought or served in that war were Peter Allen of Huntsville, a blacksmith and soldier massacred at Goliad with Col. James Fannin in 1836; Greenberry Logan of Brazoria County, another blacksmith and sol-

dier who fought in the Battle of Concepcion in 1835; Hendrick Arnold of San Antonio, who served as a military guide at the Siege of Bexar in 1835.

Also "Dick the Drummer," a drummer in the final battle of the Texas Revolution at San Jacinto; Joe, a servant to Col. William Travis who is credited with giving the first eyewitness account of the fall of the Alamo; and William Goyens of Nacogdoches, a blacksmith who served as an Indian interpreter during the war.

Williams has put out a call to black residents for historical documents, photographs, research and oral histories.

Pointing to the faded, wood-frame structure that will house the museum and hall of fame, Williams said other help also is needed.

Volunteers are needed to renovate the house and perform museum-related duties.

Texas road deaths up after 3 year decline

Associated Press

A streak of decreasing deaths on Texas roadways has ended after three years, but officials say 1988 still should rate well below the staggering death counts recorded at the first of the decade.

The Texas Department of Public Safety said it anticipates final traffic fatality figures for 1988 to show about a 3 to 4 percent increase over 1987. DPS spokesman David Wells said. The final figures are not expected for at least two months, he said.

Traffic accidents killed 3,261 people in Texas in 1987.

Even with an increase of 4 percent, Texas traffic fatalities would still fall below 3,400, more than 1,000 deaths under the figures reported for the first two years of the 1980s.

There were 4,424 traffic deaths in Texas in 1980, and the count increased to an all-time high of 4,701 in 1981.

But Wells said a number of factors began pushing down the number of traffic fatalities, including more effective traffic enforcement and public pressure against drunken driving. "We're not trying to claim all the credit," the DPS spokesman said.

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